

PREFACE

Innovation Games are fun ways to collaborate with your customers to better understand their needs. You can use them to discover new business opportunities, drive strategy and product road map decisions, improve the effectiveness of sales and service organizations, fine-tune marketing messages, and create more intimate, durable relationships with your customers. You can also use them to better understand the people that you care about the most, from your family and friends to close business colleagues.

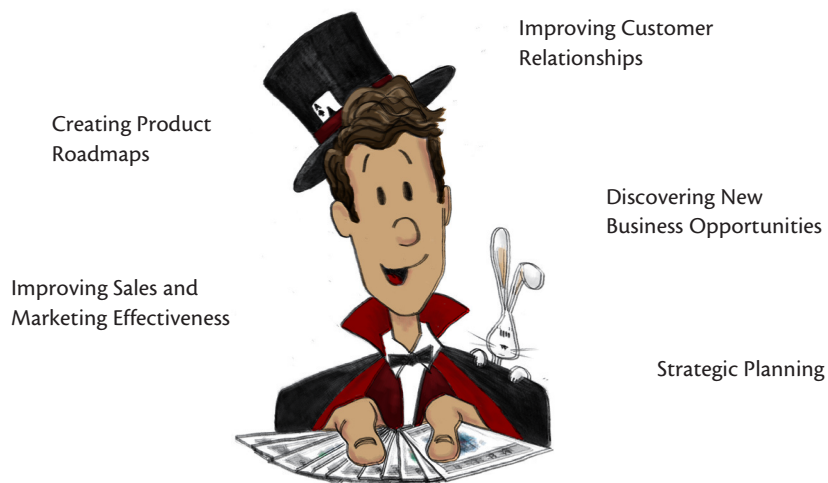


FIGURE 0.1 Innovation Games can be used to accomplish many kinds of goals.

Product Box



The aisles of supermarkets around the world are filled with colorful product boxes from all over the world. They tell us of products that are new. Improved. New *and* improved. They tell us how these products will make us thinner, smarter, sleeker, happier. In the process, the best boxes help move that box from the shelf and into our home.

Product Box lets you leverage your customers' collective retail consumer experiences by asking them to design a box for your product. Not just any box, but a box that represents the product that *they* want to buy. In the process, you'll learn what your customers think are the most important, exciting features of a given product or service.

THE GAME

Ask your customers to imagine that they're selling your product at a trade show, retail outlet, or public market. Give them a few cardboard boxes and ask them to design the product box that they would buy. The box can contain anything they want—marketing slogans that they find interesting, pictures, price points. They can build elaborate boxes through the materials you'll provide or just write down the phrases and slogans they find most interesting. When finished, ask your customer to use *their* box to sell *your product* to *you* and the other customers in the room.

WHY IT WORKS

Regardless of what you tell them, customers want to believe that the product or service that they're buying is going to solve their

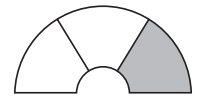
problems. Not just the problems that you told them they have during the sales process, but the real problems that are driving their purchase. In some cases, these may match. In others, customers, even during the sale, may not be able to fully understand, much less articulate, the problems that are driving their behavior. *Product Box* gives customers a way to tap into these deep needs and express them when they are selling *their* product back to you.

Although your customers are trying to sell you, they will also be selling to the other customers in the room. Watching the interaction among customers is often where you can identify the most important and useful information. Who nods in agreement? Who shakes their head? When? Who asks questions? About what? What messages resonate with other customers?

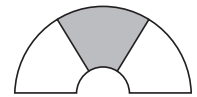
The reactions of other customers in the room help overcome one of the more common challenges faced by product teams: focusing on benefits instead of features. The advantage of *selling* the box is that, even if your customers have written a feature on their box, chances are good that they will *sell* it by promoting the benefits.

PREPARING FOR THE GAME

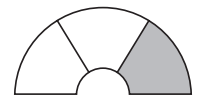
This game has a lot of physical preparation, so make certain you allocate enough time. You need to protect all the tables customers will be using; cover them with either butcher paper, plastic table cloth, or easel paper, because customers are going to be creating boxes using glue, markers, and other messy



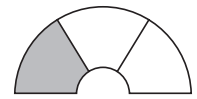
Open-Ended Exploration



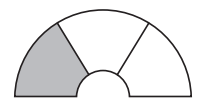
Time Frame of Action



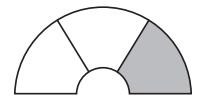
Scalability



Customer Preparation



Market Preparation



Physical Preparation

materials. Providing paper is recommended because it allows customers to sketch ideas before working on their product box. Save this paper—you can often obtain additional insights by looking at the “doodles” and sketches that customers create on the table as they create their boxes. Paper also contributes to an enjoyable experience because it clearly signals that they’re going to have fun.

Use relatively large plain white boxes; 12"×5"×13" or similar size works well. But

the size shouldn’t be much larger, because part of the magic is in constraining the amount of room that people have to create their boxes.

Bring enough blank boxes to allow everyone to create his or her own box and include a few extra to support experimentation. You won’t need all of them; some customers will spontaneously form small groups and work together to create their box. That is okay. Paradoxically, it doesn’t work the other

Product Box, Vision Box, and Extreme Data Sheets

Techniques that might appear at the surface to be similar to *Product Box* include Jim Highsmith’s *Vision Box* and Dean Leffingwell’s *Extreme Data Sheet*. In Jim’s *Vision Box*, development teams work together to design the box that contains their future product. Jim emphasizes the same kinds of design elements of a *Product Box*—the product name, key selling points, compelling features, and so forth. Dean recommends a similar approach, except that he uses a technical and marketing data sheet format instead of a box. Both approaches work well at the beginning of the project, when the internal development team needs to generate clarity on their goals. Like *Product Box*, they are fun and engaging, especially when internal teams are selling their box to each other.

Upon closer examination, however, there is a considerable difference between the *Product Box* Innovation Game and the *Vision Box* or *Extreme Data Sheet* exercise. In *Product Box*, the focus is external, on your customer. What do they want? How do they design the box? What images do

they use? In *Vision Box/Extreme Data Sheet*, the focus is internal, on the internal product team. What does the internal team want? How does the internal team design the box? What images does the internal team choose?

This difference in focus also results in a different process. In *Product Box*, we celebrate the many and varied boxes that customers generate during the game, because these create a rich source of information that we can mine for innovations. In *Vision Box* or *Extreme Data Sheet*, the goal is to create a unified consensus around what the team is going to do. Thus, although many boxes or data sheets are created, the team works together until one is selected.

When you’re looking to create the foundation of customer understanding that drives innovation, use the externally focused *Product Box*. When you’re looking for a fun way to help an internally focused project team gain clarity about what they want to build, especially at the beginning of a project, use *Vision Box/Extreme Data Sheet*.

way: if you try to force customers to work together, they'll resent it and ask for their own box!

Bring at least four to six sample product boxes to illustrate what you're looking for. Cereal boxes, old consumer-class, shrink-wrapped software boxes, and cartons of yogurt are all excellent choices. Cereal boxes are especially useful because they contain several design elements that you should review with your customers to help them get started, including

- The name of the manufacturer
- The name of the product
- A "data sheet" detailing nutritional information
- Colorful characters or symbols that are designed to appeal to specific market segments (such as cartoon characters for cereals focused at children)
- Target slogans ("Heart Healthy" or "Tastes Great")
- Coupons or points to encourage repeat purchases
- Offers for "free stuff" inside the box
- Ideas on how you can spend more money ("Send \$9.95 for a free watch!")

Packaging design can be as creative as product box design. If appropriate, bring product boxes that contained different products and let your customers observe how designers packaged the materials.

You might be worried that in a mixed group of customers some might be unwilling to participate because of a fear that they could give away secrets to their potential

competition. As described in Part One, your best bet is to carefully screen for this up front when selecting participants, and avoid inviting customers who are direct competitors where your product is the axis of competition.

A related problem occurs when you have many shy customers who may not be interested in participating. When this is a concern, consider creating some kind of game or prize for the "best" box. Because it is almost a certainty that at least *one* person will want to win the prize, general competitive human nature will kick in, and you should find yourself with several excellent entries into your competition. If you choose to conduct a contest, let the people who are participating in the exercises be the judges. Give each person one vote; the box with the most votes wins! If you're stuck on what makes a good prize, try movie tickets.

It is especially important to include a cross-functional team in this game. Marketing, sales, and support can all benefit from seeing how customers sell your product. We've seen clients create entire customer service programs based on a slogan written on one of their customer's product boxes; this might not have happened if the customer service representative was absent from the team.

Materials

- ❑ One blank bright white product box for each participant.
- ❑ Colored markers, crayons, pencils, pens for each table.
- ❑ Glitter glue for each table.

Have Fun at Arts and Crafts and Teacher Supply Stores

One of the fun aspects of preparing for a *Product Box* game is purchasing the supplies. You can just wander around an arts and crafts, party planning, or teachers' supply store and buy stuff. I've seen customers use plastic springs, smiley faces, pipe cleaners, and glitter glue. They've cut boxes apart, taped them together, and connected them with modeling clay. Buy just about anything you want. Give it to your customers and encourage them to have some fun using it—and they will.

- ❑ Plain white and colored paper for each table.
- ❑ Stickers (stars or words or images, like "New" or "Exciting"). Check out www.innovationgames.com for ideas.
- ❑ Two or three sample boxes for each table.
- ❑ Butcher paper or easel paper for covering each table.

PLAYING THE GAME

You can think of this game being played in two phases: creating the boxes and then selling them. Start the first phase by using the sample boxes that you brought with you to explain the game. On the sample cereal boxes, point out each of the design elements listed previously.

Next, encourage people to create their own boxes. In this phase you'll get a lot questions of the form "Is it OK if I _____?" For

Innovation Games and International Product Teams

Innovation Games have been played in the United States, Mexico, Taiwan, Germany, and Great Britain with great success. The likely reason for this is that the design of the games is based on near universal principles of human psychology and organizational behavior. For example, all cultures have some degree of bartering for goods and services, making *Buy a Feature* universally accessible to participants. The boat and controlled discussion of *Speed Boat* make it similarly universally accessible. Although I don't speak Spanish, the genuine fun that participants experience when designing and selling their product boxes is clearly evident in these photos from the 2005 Samana Nacional PyME held in Mexico City, Mexico.



FIGURE 2.10 Playing Product Box at the 2005 Samana Nacional PyME

example, “Is it OK if want to cut my box?” Yes. “Is it OK if we work in teams?” Yes. “Do we have to work in teams?” No. “Can I glue two boxes together?” Yes. “Can I add stickers and tape?” Yes.

Allow about 30 to 45 minutes to create boxes. When the boxes are completed, you start the next phase of the game, in which customers sell you their boxes. Try to make certain that your customers are standing up and that you’re sitting down when they are presenting their product box. This helps reinforce the different roles you’re assuming.

You’ll need to allow between 5 and 10 minutes for each box selling. Since you don’t know which customers will form box teams, it is safest to allocate 5 minutes for each

person and then adjust based on the number of boxes created. You’ll also have to keep the focus on the selling process. Some facilitators use an egg timer or even a gong, and turn this into a mini-game—Who can do the best job selling their box in less than 6 minutes?

Have some observers watch the persons selling their box. Have others focus on the audience’s reactions. Try to focus on the benefits expressed by the seller.

As the game progresses you’ll often find that many boxes have similar slogans. Although it is tempting to have only a handful of customers sell their boxes, the reality is that everyone who has created a box will want to sell it. Manage your time accordingly.

What Happened to the Boxes?

It is especially important to photograph the boxes before customers leave, because many customers will want to take their boxes home as a souvenir.

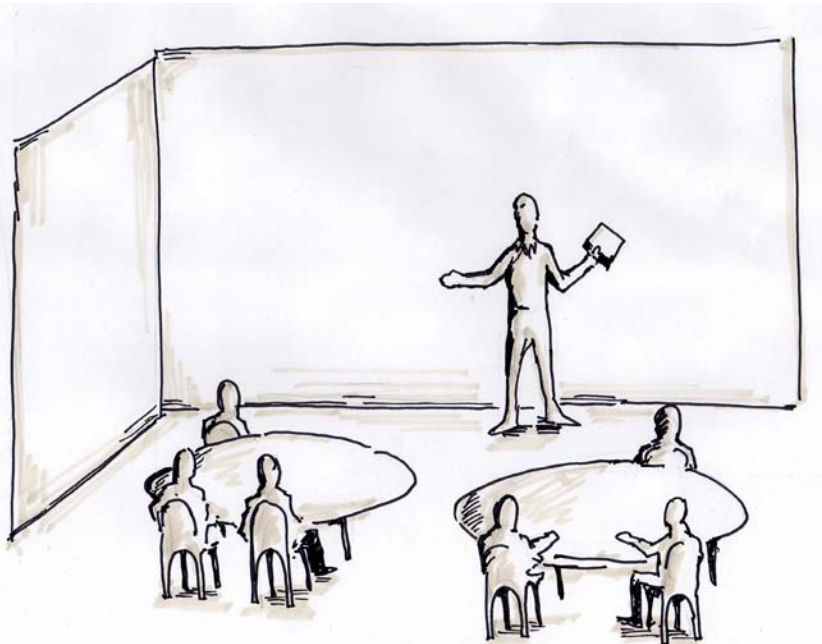








FIGURE 2.11 Playing Product Box







WHAT ARE INNOVATION GAMES?

Innovation Games are fun ways to collaborate with your customers to better understand their needs. There are twelve

Innovation Games explained in this book. Table 1.1 provides a brief description of each game.

Table 1.1 Innovation Games

| Innovation Game | | Description |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Show and Tell |  | Customers describe the most important artifacts produced by your system to you and other customers. |
| Start Your Day |  | Customers collaboratively describe when, how, and where they use your product(s). |
| Prune the Product Tree |  | Customers work in small teams to shape the evolution of your products and services. |
| Me and My Shadow |  | Discover hidden needs by carefully observing what customers actually do with your products. |
| Product Box |  | Customers work individually or in small teams to create and sell their ideal product. |
| The Apprentice |  | Create empathy for the customer experience by doing the job of a customer. |

| Innovation Game | Description |
|--|---|
| <p>Speed Boat</p>  | <p>Customers identify their biggest pain points with your products and services.</p> |
| <p>Buy a Feature</p>  | <p>Customers work together to purchase their most desired features.</p> |
| <p>20/20 Vision</p>  | <p>Customers negotiate the relative importance of such things as product features, market requirements, and product benefits.</p> |
| <p>Spider Web</p>  | <p>Customers work individually or in small teams to create vivid pictures of how your products and services fit into their world.</p> |
| <p>Give Them a Hot Tub</p>  | <p>Customers provide feedback on outrageous features to establish what is truly essential.</p> |
| <p>Remember the Future</p>  | <p>Understand your customers' definition of success by seeing how they shape their future.</p> |

PROCESSING THE RESULTS

The open-ended nature of the game allows customers to generate a variety of potentially useful information. The first step is to transcribe and categorize the type of the textual and graphical contents on the box along with any selling statements made by customers while they were selling their box to your product team. Here are some categories to get you started:

- **Feature**—Statements related to a specific feature.
- **Benefit**—Statements related to a benefit.
- **Labels or slogans**—Marketing messages, statements, or titles. It is often quite interesting to see how customers repeat, change, or paraphrase your own marketing messages. You may want to separately categorize fun, fictitious "endorsement quotes" that customers often add to their boxes.

The second step is to categorize how each statement, pitch, or graphic is related to the product. Here are some secondary categories that you may find useful:

- **Accolades**—Something outstanding about the product or company in general. Review these to see how they should influence your marketing mix.
- **Adoption**—Comments on how widespread the product is used or desired. Review these to understand whether you're hitting the right segments.
- **Community**—Comments on elements of the user community such as websites, newsgroups, user conferences, and so

forth. Review these to understand if you've created an infrastructure that allows your customers to love your product.

- **User experience**—Comments related to the user experience. How easy is it for your customers to do things such as unpack, set up, configure, use, store, or otherwise interact with your product? Review these items for specific ways in which your product is perceived as superior to competing solutions.
- **Support**—Comments related to your support infrastructure. Positive comments here often represent a fresh way of marketing your solution.
- **Technology**—Comments on your product's technological foundation. Having a technology foundation that is considered so "cool" or special that customers perceive it as a selling feature is a special advantage in today's market.
- **Price**—Comments on the specific price, including discounts, rebates, special offers, promotions, various versions or differentiated models (for example, "Basic" vs. "Deluxe" or "Standard" vs. "Professional").
- **Value**—Comments on perceived value. Review these to ensure that your perception of the value provided by your products is congruent with that of your customer, and be willing to adjust your point of view as needed!

The third step is to assess the degree to which your current product matches the idealized product your company has described.

For example, suppose that customers have written positive comments about their idealized user experience. This may be because your current product has a great user experience. It could be that they are responding deeply to something they can't stand about your current offering. Thus, you must analyze the boxes with a critical eye, looking for the gems of truth that represent things your

customers want in their idealized product that you're currently not providing.

When you're finished analyzing the boxes, display them in a prominent location. Looking at something created by a customer, in the customer's own handwriting, is much more compelling than reading a boring report on the session.

How I Can Use Product Box

To purchase the entire book, visit innovationgames.com



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To join our Linked-In Community, visit
[linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com) and search groups for
keyword "innovation games"



Software Engineering/Product Management

Innovation Through UnderstandingSM ▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶

The toughest part of innovation? *Accurately predicting what customers want, need, and will pay for.* Even if you ask them, they often can't explain what they want. Now, there's a breakthrough solution: *Innovation Games*. Drawing on his software product strategy and product management consulting experience, Luke Hohmann has created twelve games that help you uncover your customers' *true, hidden* needs and desires.

You'll learn what each game will accomplish, why it works, and how to play it with customers. Then, Hohmann shows how to integrate the results into your product development processes, helping you focus your efforts, reduce your costs, accelerate time to market, and *deliver the right solutions, right from the start.*

- ★ Uncover unspoken needs and breakthrough opportunities
- ★ Clarify exactly how and when customers will use your product or service
- ★ Identify your most exciting, sellable features, and your best marketing messages
- ★ Discover what customers don't like about your offerings
- ★ Deliver the right new features, and make better roadmap and strategy decisions
- ★ Understand where your offerings fit into your customers' operations
- ★ Specify the key artifacts your product or service will create
- ★ Increase empathy for your customers' experience within your organization
- ★ Learn how your customers define success
- ★ Improve the effectiveness of your sales and service organizations

Innovation Games will be indispensable for anyone who wants to drive more successful, customer-focused product development: product and R&D managers, CTOs and development leaders, marketers, and senior business executives alike.

Luke Hohmann is founder of Enthiosys, Inc., a Silicon Valley management consultancy that helps companies who develop software-enabled products. He is the author of *Beyond Software Architecture: Creating and Sustaining Winning Solutions* (Addison-Wesley), *Journey of the Software Professional: The Sociology of Software Development* (Prentice Hall), and numerous articles on software development.

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