

The 'Original' Sin

What's the recipe for that breakthrough product? Innovation or invention? Hardcore originality or smart thinking on your feet? Read on to discover more about making 'all the difference'.

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We are not talking about Adam here; we're talking about our permanent need to be 'original'—all the time! "Who wants to do what has been done before, except, of course, when it can qualify as 'inspiration' Annu Malik *ishtyle!*"

I have found our obsession for originality to be the single reason for creative paralysis. Designers, geeks, artists... everybody is inflicted. Cameron Moll says, "Pablo Picasso, the first living artist to be featured in the Louvre, influenced the artistic world in a uniquely original way. So why is he known for saying 'Good artists copy, great artists steal?'"

"Picasso hardly meant that great artists steal popular designs whose original source is known to everyone," says Wes George, writer for *The Mac Observer*.

"What Picasso did mean was that great artists rummage through the great junk heap of lost, bypassed and forgotten ideas to find the rare jewels, and then incorporate such languishing gems into their own personal artistic legacy... Picasso implied that great artists don't get caught stealing because what they appropriate they *transform so thoroughly into their own persona*, that everyone ends up thinking the great idea was theirs in the first place."

My own belief is that waiting for the right ‘inspiration’, just to be original, is rather unviable in today’s fast-paced business world. Disclaimer: I am not advocating plagiarism or anything of the sort—far from it! All I am saying is that while trying to be original is a good thing, there is also potential in being able to ‘combine existing IT tools, ideas and practices in a different way’, simply because the context has changed.

Most of us believe that doing something that’s been done before is not fashionable. It is our wish to be different, get noticed, build an image, become famous—all the trappings of worldly success, and therefore our need for originality. Hence the question, “Is originality really a prerequisite for identity? Can just being different or doing something new ensure value?” The answer perhaps lies in understanding the difference between being different and making a difference! Ah, and being able to make a difference is quite another thing.

So you may have guessed already: what I’m leading up to is that the real need to be able to make a difference, is for us to be innovative, not necessarily original.

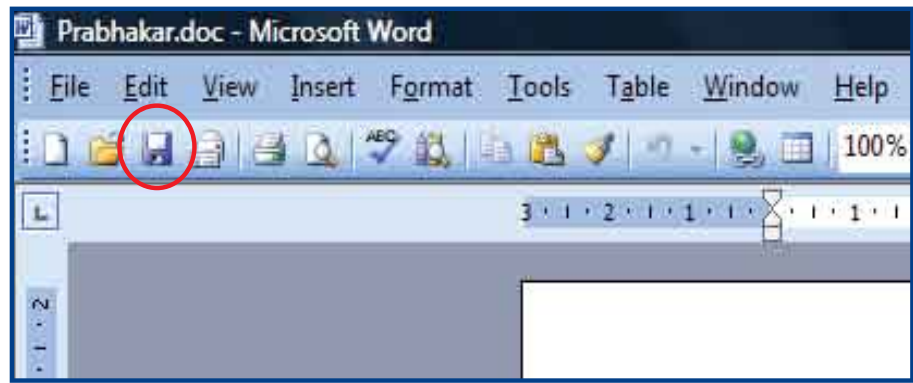
To paraphrase from Jack and Suzy Welch’s “Winning: The Answers”:

“Luckily, there are two ways to innovate, and together, they can deliver a real knockout punch.

The first ... discovery of something original and useful—a new molecule, a breakthrough piece of software, a game-changing technology.

But there’s a second, less glorified way of innovation that is just as effective. It is the continuous, aggressive improvement of what you already sell, or how you already do business.”

Continuous and aggressive improvement is not as easy as it sounds. There are aspects that we



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technophiles must make ourselves additionally accountable for. Things that go so far unnoticed that they become absurdities. Here is a simple provocation:

Who in today’s world would even know *what* a floppy disk is! The ‘Save’ icon has lost its context, but Microsoft does not seem to have even noticed its extinction. This illustrates how oversight or short-sightedness can create habits; even users stop noticing things that were meant to help them in the first place. The suggestion that emerges from the above example is to design interfaces

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that communicate at higher levels of abstraction, so that their meaning is not lost when products of everyday use become obsolete; to think things through, instead of either immediately imitating ‘familiarity’, or rushing into applying our existing skills. Imagine having the graphic of

a dinosaur as signage for a wildlife sanctuary in today’s world!

I can only suggest that we, the IT community, take a higher degree of responsibility for the total software experience—that from our current focus on functionality and performance, we must move up a notch into sustained usability.

In leading the thought for the future, I believe that building a culture of innovation should come first. And then comes the part of living that culture. At Ideafarms, we took the first foundational step five years ago, and we have been trying to faithfully live it, ever since. It shows in our projects, and in our relationships. This is why we have been positioned as the only partner worldwide for Continental AG, in the niche services that their businesses require.

We have understood the value that each discipline brings to the table, and we have learnt to respect that other skills, often seemingly irrelevant, provide that one little piece that could make all the difference. We have also learnt the challenges of working with interdisciplinary teams in a world where ‘placeless work’ has become the order of the day. We are happy to share our story with you—anytime!

Innovate to conquer! **IT**