The Top 10 Tools for Business Idea Generation

by The Weekly Startup
I need a new business idea every week for my blog The Weekly Startup. Therefore I developed some useful techniques to generate new business ideas in a fast and efficient way.

These are my **Top 10 Tools for Business Idea Generation:**

1. The ABC-Tool
2. Solve Your Own Problems (10 ideas per day)
3. Solve Problems of Your Friends
4. Search Twitter for Problems
5. Structure the Problem
6. The Business Idea/ Market Matrix
7. The SCAMPER Technique
8. How to Make an Extra 100 Dollars
9. Make Connections
10. Use a Sketch Book

I will explain these tools in more details on the following pages.

I hope you find it useful!

Enjoy!

~ Chris

"I hope my Top 10 Tools for Business Idea Generation are useful for you. If you have any feedback, please feel free to contact me!"
1. The ABC-Tool

This tool bases on a very simple and pragmatic assumption: When a product is a bestseller at Amazon, a lot of people are buying it, therefore a huge market exists for this kind of product.

So here is how the Amazon-Bestseller-Categories (ABC) tool works:

First go to the Amazon bestseller site: [http://www.amazon.com/Best-Sellers/zgbs](http://www.amazon.com/Best-Sellers/zgbs)

There click on each category/department and write down the top 20 bestsellers of each category.
Then take the list of all the top 20 bestsellers from all categories/departments and ask the following 3 questions for each of the articles:

- Can I find a **substitute** for this product, which is cheaper or better? For example: Cheap no-name ink cartridges
- Can I find an **additional** product, which makes the product better? For example: iPad cases
- Can I **customize** the product so it fits better to the needs of at least some of the customers? For example: Individual photo albums
By doing this I usually get 10 – 15 ideas. I’ve tried it with the German Amazon site and these were the ideas I came up with:

- Offering additional products for license plates
- Building individual reflective vests
- Designing car shampoos for different car types
- Building individual activity gyms for babies
- Building a smartphone baby-phone app (most parents have two mobiles)
- Offering leasing for car seats
- Building individual sun shields
- Building cheap baby mirrors for cars
- Building individual fly screens
- Offering special designed rims-brushes

Just try it out on your own. You will be surprised how many ideas you will get!
2. Solve Your Own Problems (10 ideas per day)

This is, in my opinion, the BEST way to generate new business ideas.

Stop thinking about new fancy business ideas and start thinking about how you could solve some of your own real problems.

It actually sounds easier than it is! It’s really hard to be aware of the things that bother you. But when you find something, chances are good, that the solution to that problem is a great business idea.

Here is how I use the technique in my daily life:

1. I set myself a timer which goes off every hour
2. When the timer goes off I stop my current work and ask myself what really annoyed me within the last hour
3. I write down the things that annoyed me and write a quick solution next to it

By doing this I try to generate 10 new business ideas per day.
3. Solve Problems of Your Friends

This technique is very similar to the Solve Your Own Problems technique, but instead of solving your own problems, you try to solve the problems of your friends.

Ask your friends one of the following questions, to find out what their problems are. Do this while having some drinks with them and don’t do it in a formal way.

• How are you doing? (When they answer “fine”, just say: “Come on, how are you really doing? Nothing bothers you at all?”)
• How is it going on your job (or enter any other topic here)? Any new challenges?
• Man, I had an horrible week. Is all this crap just happening to me?
• If you could change three things in your life, what would they be?
• Here’s the deal: I pay you the next beer and you tell me three things that bothered you this week. Okay?
4. Search Twitter for Problems

If you or your friends don’t have any problems, use Twitter to find the problems of other people.

Use the advanced Twitter search and try the following search-terms:

- Problem (or #problem)
- How can I (use exact phrase)
- How to make (use exact phrase)
- Where do I find/ get (use exact phrase)
- Why isn’t there (use exact phrase)
- Etc.

You will be amazed how many valuable insights you will get by using the Twitter search.
5. Structure the Problem

When you found a problem, which is worth solving, don’t take the first solution, which comes to your mind. Take your time to structure your problem and find several solutions from which you can choose.

Here is an example from my startup Checkout +1.

I wanted to solve the problem “People are waiting to long in waiting lines in supermarkets”. I structured the problem by finding the biggest factors of influences:

![Diagram of waiting line problem structure]

Next I tried to find at least 3 ways for each of the 4 factors of influence to reduce the waiting time in a waiting line.

By doing this I got instead of 1 idea, $4 \times 3 = 12$ ideas from which I could choose.
6. The Business Idea/ Market Matrix

One very efficient way to get new business ideas is the Business Idea/ Market Matrix.

I am using this matrix very often, when I look for new business ideas.

![Business Idea/ Market Matrix Diagram]

Looks weird, but it is actually quite useful. So what are the fields I – IV all about?

**Field I (Existing Market/ Existing Business Idea):** This field is for business ideas which people are already willing to pay for. That's great news, because if you can make your product just a little bit cheaper or better than the existing product you will probably find customers very quickly.

**Field II (New Market/ Existing Business Idea):** This concept also works very well. Just look out for business ideas that work well in other countries and copy the business for your own country. There are thousands of startups that made a lot of money by following this concept.

**Field III (Existing Market/ New Business Idea):** In this field, you take an existing market and try to find new business ideas. Building a startup here is a little bit harder than in the two fields before, because you have to convince the market of
your new business idea. And this is generally a lot of work.

**Field IV (New Market/ New Business Idea):** This is where most entrepreneurs want to go, but where it’s the hardest to make some money. The chance that your startup will succeed in this field are veeeeeery low, but if it succeeds you will probably earn a fortune. Why is it so hard to make money in this field? Because you have to find a new business idea, convince a market of it AND create this market. This is really, really tough.
7. The SCAMPER Technique

SCAMPER is a creativity method developed by Bob Eberle.

SCAMPER is an acronym and stands for: Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify, Put to another use, Eliminate and Rearrange/Reverse. This tool allows you to apply modification on existing business idea and finding new ideas by doing so.

Let me explain how this technique works: Let’s try the SCAMPER technique with a laptop.

**Substitute**
Let’s substitute the screen of a laptop with a tablet. This is what Lenovo, Asus and other big laptop companies did.

**Combine**
Combine a laptop with a webcam. This is what engineers did some years ago. Now every laptop has an integrated webcam.
**Adapt**
Let’s adapt laptop for kids. This is what many toy manufacturer did to grow their revenues.

**Modify (Magnify or minimize)**
Make your laptop smaller. This is how the first palm-organizer were invented and what finally brought us the smart phone.

**Put to another use**
You could use your laptop as a second monitor. This is probably how Lenovo came to this idea.
**Eliminate**
Let’s eliminate the keyboard of the laptop. What do you get? Right: A tablet!

![Image of a tablet](image1)

**Rearrange or Reverse**
Rearrange a laptop? Sure! You could rearrange the touchpad. This is what IBM did with its trackpoint.

![Image of a laptop keyboard](image2)

You see: The SCAMPER technique produces quite a lot of results.
8. How to Make an Extra 100 Dollars

Very often we make the mistake just to think about the big business ideas: How could I change the world, how could I become a billionaire and so on.

By doing this we tend to forget the small ideas, which in most cases work better. Every business started with a small idea (Facebook was launched just for Harvard students, AirBnB started with 3 air mattresses) and then get bigger.

The “How to Make an Extra 100 Dollars” technique is all about small ideas.

It’s fairly simple: Set yourself a timer of 1 hour and think about how you could make an extra 100 Dollars. Write down all the ideas you get and take the one which sounds the most promising.
9. Make Connections

This technique generates fresh, new ideas.

Just take two (or more) completely unrelated things and connect/combine them.

Here are some examples:

Combine a blanket and a sweatshirt and you will get a Snuggie.

![Snuggie](SnuggieUniverse.com)

Combine a car and a house and you will get a camper.

![Camper](image)

Connect a screwdriver with a drilling machine and you will get a cordless screwdriver

![Cordless Screwdriver](image)

It’s that simple!
10. Use a Sketch Book

Get yourself a Sketch Book, where you can write down all your ideas and collect all the things you find interesting.

I’ve got a sketch book where I collect interesting newspaper articles and my ideas related to it. This gives me the possibility to crawl through my sketch book once a year, looking for some useful ideas.

It doesn’t matter if the sketch book is made out of paper or a digital one. Just find the thing, which fits best to you.