

Whether you have only the first inkling of an idea, or a solid concept that's too small to work on its own, it always helps to see what happens when you build on it. This info sheet offers you 'Three Simple Questions That Help Build Ideas'.



THREE QUESTIONS THAT HELP BUILD IDEAS

What can I combine this with?

Steve Jobs may have said it best when he suggested, "Creativity is just connecting things!" Oversimplifying it a little, perhaps... But sometimes you might find yourself taking one idea and combining it with something completely unrelated to create a new idea or approach, as when Johannes Gutenberg mashed together the long-established ideas of the coin punch and the wine press... That was the basis for the first printing press, an invention that revolutionised publishing and changed the world forever...

At other times, you'll simply put together two ideas that already closely relate to one another. Our favourite example of this - our favourite example of many techniques, actually - is in the [LEGO stop-motion video](#) we put out a couple of Christmases ago. We'd already thought about building a LEGO model in stop-motion for a client piece but, unfortunately, the budget wasn't there for it. Sadly, without that particular client's message, the LEGO medium didn't seem to have enough to it to be valuable - so we shelved it...

A few months later, though, Stuart quite independently discovered that you could get a LEGO avatar of yourself built. Thinking that was a cute idea, he mentioned it in passing at a team meeting, adding that it was a shame it wasn't a big enough idea to do anything with... You can see where this is going!

Combining the idea of LEGO avatars with the concept of a set-build made the notion of a DMI video involving LEGO much more interesting... This example alone confirms our belief that it's often good to ask yourself the question, "What can I combine this with?", or one of its variations: "Which small ideas can I put together?", "Does this naturally fit with anything else?", etc.

What DON'T you want to do?

You know what? To the best of our collective memory, we've never seen this question written down, or even heard it asked by someone else in creative exercises... But in the absence of any ideas at all, it's a fantastic place to start. Look at your brief, or the need that exists, and ask what you don't want to do...

Now jot down anything that comes to mind, even if it feels silly or unreasonable. Although it often hurts creativity to apply restrictions too soon, it sometimes helps you to identify a starting point. Let's stick with the example of the LEGO piece we mentioned earlier... To continue building on the two small ideas we had - a stop-motion set-build and some LEGO avatars of the team - we next wrote out a list of everything we didn't want the piece to be or do...

"DMI's team is energetic, enthusiastic - and very patient!" Chris Gowing, Seven Stones

Perhaps we should make clear, too, that it was a L-O-N-G list! We wrote down many things that we wanted to avoid doing in terms of the stop-motion alone... The technique often shows an ugly-great pile of LEGO moving about erratically as it slowly diminishes; flickering lights, inconsistent shadows, no interest in plot, no internal logic, little variation in camera technique and movement; a preoccupation with the LEGO set, terrible sound design, no music - our list goes on and on and on!

So by the time we finished listing everything we didn't want to see, hear, or do, we had quite a strong sense of direction - just no certainty as to where we were going! The next question in our list, however, changes everything... Arguably, it's the most important question in ANY creative brief - and yet very few people ask it...

How do you want your project to make people feel?

Now, obviously, we're using our LEGO video as a kind-of case study to make these points... It's important, though, that you don't think these questions only work for videos. They apply to any creative project - from paintings and dances, to presentations and writing! The human condition is to experience ever-changing emotions: if you're creating something, people that witness it are going to feel nothing or feel something...

A great many works of art, videos, dances, stage shows, entertainers, and so on and so on, may well stimulate mixed emotions, and some will do so without the creator ever really asking themselves this vital question. In our experience, though, a great deal of creative work positively depends on evoking an emotional state in the viewer. Your answer may come to you as either one very definite word, or as a series of thoughts across a broader range. In the case of the LEGO piece, our final list of emotions includes charm, curiosity, amazement, happiness and - since it was a seasonal piece - Christmassy!

Why is this question so important? Well, simply put, it provides the yardstick against which all other thoughts and ideas can be measured moving forward. If an idea doesn't seem to contribute to any of the emotions that you identify, then that idea probably doesn't have a place in the piece! So... Even if it makes you feel a little bit self-conscious, or arty farty, you can create with greater certainty when you try asking yourself: how do you want your project to make people feel?