

How to be a more innovative company

🕒 READ TIME: 2 MINS

👥 AUDIENCE: BUSINESS & TECHNOLOGY

Companies often say they want to be more innovative and yet many are not sure where to start. This article aims to give you some tools and questions to be more innovative as a company.

STEP 1 - WHAT DO YOU WANT?

The answer should be a broad non-technical solution to a problem you currently have within your company. Below are some examples.

What: I want our customers to be able to store voucher codes.

Often businesses will confuse what they want with a technical solution, I want an app, or we need a database system. This isn't your what, but your how – and we'll get to that later.

STEP 2 - WHY DO YOU WANT IT?

Giving the context of why is incredibly important to a developer. At their core, developers are simply problem solvers who use computer code, and your why is the problem. The more detailed your why, the more clues the developer has to the best way to solve the problem and its limitations. Below we build upon our examples.

What: I want our customers to be able to store voucher codes.

Why: A lot of our competitors use voucher codes but none offer the ability to store them. This would mean more customers would use our vouchers over our competitors.

What a Developer Thinks: User experience and seamlessness becomes really important. Needs to be easy and intuitive to a user, otherwise they won't store vouchers. They may also want rapid development of a prototype to beat competitors to market.



STEP 3 - HOW DO YOU WANT IT DONE?

This is actually the least important question to have answered before seeing a software developer. It's the developer to suggest technical solutions, but it doesn't hurt to have some ideas in mind. It's great to have a starting point but they'll often take a step back and ask to you to elaborate on the first two questions.

This is the also the stage where one can get carried away with ideas. It's good to focus on the problem you're trying to solve and make sure you completely solve them.

What: I want our customers to be able to store voucher codes.

Why: A lot of our competitors use voucher codes but none off the ability to store them. This would mean more customers would use our vouchers over our competitors.

How: A personalised web portal.

SOME TOOLS TO HELP

A simple way to quickly learn your what, why and how is through the following fill in the blanks exercise. a is your what, b is your why and c is your how.

I want ___a___ because ___b___. I'd like to try and achieve this by using ___c___.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What do I want?
 - o What problem does it solve?
 - o What is a non-technical solution to this problem?
 - o What is another non-technical solution to this problem?
- Why do you want it?
 - o What will it make easier for you?
 - o What will it make easier for the customer?
 - o Will it save you money? If so, how?
 - o Will it save you time? If so, how?
 - o Will it make anything harder?
 - o What's the timescale for your idea? And why?
- How do I want it done?
 - o What does the thing do?
 - o What is essential for my idea?
 - o What is not essential for my idea?
 - o If your system could only do one thing what would it do?
- What is the idea in a sentence?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Before starting at Lancaster University over 4 years ago, Geraint had worked in software development roles in both IBM and the Civil Service. In addition to being a qualified teacher, Geraint has worked freelance with a varied client base as a software developer and graphic designer.

