



Stanford eCorner

Ideas Come From Everywhere

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Marissa Mayer, Google's Vice President of Search Products & User Experience, believes that ideas for new products come from everywhere - every employee, every department, from both necessity and serendipity. By creating an environment where ideas can be freely exercised, like a muscle they will likely get more toned and more in tune with the organization's circulation.



Transcript

Ideas come from everywhere. A lot of people will say, "Well, how do you get the idea for Google Maps or the Google Toolbar? Where did it come from? And the answer is, in an environment like Google, ever since the company was small, even till now when it's really large, we expect everyone to have ideas. You know, our engineers come up with ideas, some things come top-down, and ideas come from our users. And it's interesting, because when you look at the myriad of different products Google has released, we actually have examples of almost all of the above. Google Maps, you know, the idea for that actually came from an acquisition. We found these engineers in Australia who were just amazingly good at building mapping interfaces and combined them with a bunch of Java Script experts at Google and said, "Okay, let's take their ideas on how you navigate maps, place them on the Web using Java Script, and ultimately build this really great application." So, you know, ideas really do come from all kinds of different inspirations. There's other things that we do that are very strategic and top-down. When we looked at say something like Google Desktop, we thought, "Now, for a lot of strategic reasons we need to have a deeper, more meaningful relationship with our users. What functionality could we provide them that they'll want to have on their computer and that will allow them to access Google really easily all the time?" So sometimes it comes from an overall strategy or a strategic concern, sometimes it comes from, you know, what acquisition that we're doing, and sometimes it just comes from someone wanting to solve a problem that they feel we could solve better. Google News is a great example of that.

There was an engineer named Krishna Abarat, and he was a news junkie, and after September 11 he found himself really consumed with reading news, and he found he had the same pattern every day. He would go and visit his favorite 15 news sites, and he would try and find, you know, the same story about anthrax all throughout, you know, the different stories to get all the different perspectives and get the maximum amount of information. And then after he did this for about a month, he thought, "Well, this is kind of silly," because, you know, he's like, "I work at a search engine. I actually could probably crawl all this data, and I could also" you know, he's actually an expert in artificial intelligence, and he thought, "You know, I could cluster things." So he built this little script that crawled his favorite 15 news sites, gathered up all the news, and then clustered it, so it would actually group the stories to read together. And he built this little tool for himself to read news more efficiently, used it for a while, thought it was pretty useful, mailed it out to the company and said, "Hey, like, I use this to read my news. Maybe some of you would find it useful." And, you know, a bunch of us saw that, and we decided, you know, this isn't just an internal tool to help Krishna read news better; this is something that could help a lot of people read news better, and we should, you know, take it up to the next level so it's not just a plain white page with lost of blue links, but actually looks more like a news experience, and make it available to our users. So there's a myriad of different places that ideas come from, and what you

really want to do is set up a system where people can feel like they can contribute to those ideas and that the best ideas rise to the top in sort of a Darwinistic way by proof of concept of the powerful prototype, by demonstrating that's it's going to fill a really important user need, and so on and so forth.