

PERSONAL PRODUCTIVITY

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Few things are as
fleeting as an idea.
Now software can
help you capture
ideas and put them
to work for you.

WHY DIDN'T I THINK OF THAT?

What can you do when you're stuck for ideas? Before the advent of idea generation software, you were left to your own means, but not anymore.

"You don't have to wait for a bolt out of the blue; there are processes that will help you gather more ideas. And the more ideas you gather, the more likely you are to get a great idea," says Roy Nieremberg, creator of Idea Generator Plus (Experience in Software, 2000 Hearst Avenue, Suite 202, Berkeley, California 94709-2176; 800-678-7008 or 510-644-0694 [voice], 510-644-3823 [fax]; \$195).

The Reverend Bernard J. Joy, of Memorial Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia, needed help devising a program to help the families of soldiers overseas during the onset of Desert Shield. Mr. Joy and the program chairman brainstormed with Idea Generator Plus and developed a workable strategy in just over an hour. The plan enabled them to give assistance outside normal channels to families that might have been forgotten.

"American business is at a point where it needs new ideas, not the rehashing of old ideas," says JanSaltzman, general manager of MindLink. "MindLink uses playful wishful thinking in a systematic way and helps make connections from dissimilar things...to create new innovative ideas."

MindLink Problem Solver (MindLink, Box 247, North Pomfret, Vermont 05053; 800-253-1844 or 802-457-2025; \$299) is based on over 30 years of research. It has four independent parts: The Gym for warming up and playing; Idea Generation, which helps define the problem; Guided Problem Solving; and Problem Solving

MindLink comes with a little bag of toys and some-times asks you to do unusual things, like getting up and going for a walk or pretending an Indian leader is talking to you. Kathleen Vick of TBA Architects in Waltham, Massachusetts, has used MindLink when teaching design students and in her own interior designs because it "takes away the obvious and catapults you deeper into an intellectual approach to design."

In a recent design for a consulting firm, where most of the consultants preferred to work at home, Vick used MindLink, which led her to the question, How do you make an office and not have it look like an office? MindLink helped her write down lists of associations and make parallel lists of associations about the qualities of a home.

Now that the design is complete, "everyone is showing-up...people are more relaxed and speaking softly. The nature of colors, textures, lighting, and patterns creates a womblike feeling."

"IdeaFisher is a memory jogger," says Jess Fisher, project director for Fisher Idea Systems. "It's the only program with a database of over 705,000 idea associations and is useful for anyone who communicates."

Based on the concept that the mind works through association, IdeaFisher (Fisher Idea Systems, 2222 Martin Street, Suite 101, Irvine, California 92715; 800-289-4332 or 714-474-8111 [voice], 714-757-2896 [fax]; \$495) uses the IdeaBank, a super thesaurus of ideas, to freely associate concepts. It also has a compare function to compare concepts and the QBank, which contains questions for planning.

"When I have to define a problem, the first thing I do is crank up IdeaFisher," says

David Sonnel of Integrated Spatial Solutions, a Blaine, Washington firm that creates marketing programs and is also responsible for global positioning of 25 satellites.

Sonnel uses both the IdeaBank and QBank when developing marketing plans while interviewing clients, and especially for creating crucial business proposals. He remarks, "IdeaFisher structures the process and makes it harder to leave the important things out."

Other software available to help with ideas includes The Idea Savings Bank (Micro Computer Resources, Division of MCR Agency, 6116 Merced Avenue, Suite 81, Oakland, California 94611; 800-767-6797 [voice], 510-444-6561 [fax]; \$129.00), a ready-made database for storing and publishing ideas; Wisdom of the Ages (Micro Computer Resources, \$79.00), a collection of 6500 quotations from the greatest thinkers of all time; and Idea Tree (Mountain House Publishing, Route 100, Waitsfield, Vermont 05673; 800-639-5044 or 802-496-5000 [voice], 802-496-4320 [fax]; \$69.99), which helps chart and outline ideas.

All the people interviewed for this article adopted the techniques from the programs and used them even when not using the software. The software programs and methods don't create the ideas themselves and aren't the only ways to stimulate creativity. **Beethoven stimulated ideas by pouring ice water over his head. Any method may be worth trying if it works. (Be careful not to spill the water on your keyboard!)**

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