

BRANDING APPLYING THE CREATIVE PROCESS TO LIBRARY BRANDING

Kellie Sparks
Evening Reference Librarian
University of West Florida Libraries
ksparks@uwf.edu

Abstract

How does one cultivate creative inspiration on demand and sustain it over the life of a project? As a library marketing professional, it can be challenging to sustain creativity when crafting ideas to establish or re-envision a library brand. This article examines the creative process with the goal of deepening understanding of how to build a sustainable infrastructure of creativity. This infrastructure is designed with an awareness of the science behind creative thought and significant creativity research. We explore how brain behavior enhances the creative process and can essentially help create a more inspiring library brand. This article provides best practices and tips from creativity experts such as maintaining daily activities including movement, meditation, and reflective thought, to enhance one's creative prowess while engaged in a library branding project. It also serves as a valuable reminder that creative thought is available for everyone and is not just limited to artists or musicians.

Keywords: creativity, marketing, branding,
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Introduction

Creativity can be an elusive creature. As a library marketing professional, creativity can well up one day and dry out the next. This can be particularly frustrating when crafting ideas to establish or re-envision a library brand. The branding process offers several opportunities to apply the creative process, especially during the stage of designing brand identity.

Catharine Slade, author of *Creating a Brand Identity: A Guide for Designers*, defines a brand as “a set of elements, both physical and emotional, used to evoke a desired response in the minds of consumers or audiences.” As library marketers, determining the optimum way to create a desired response in the consumer can be challenging. How does one cultivate creative inspiration on demand and sustain it over the life of the project? In learning to be creative on demand, it is helpful to understand the science behind creativity and the creative and branding process. With that background, you can then apply the creative process to the branding process with an understanding of what can limit and strengthen creative insight. While this is not a silver bullet for creating better brands, there are a number of tips that can assist with enhancing your creativity throughout the branding process.

The first challenge that library marketers must overcome is the belief that creativity is only reserved for artists or those born with special creative talents. You will often hear people state,

“I’m not creative;” but the truth is that everyone is creative. Creativity is not limited to a select few; it is an available tool at every person’s disposal! Dr. Rex Jung, a leading neuropsychologist and brain imaging researcher from the University of New Mexico, has stated that creativity can be influenced more so by environmental factors than by genetics and biological factors (Mehta & Mishra, 2016). To better understand this, it is beneficial to first understand the creative process. What occurs in the brain as a flash of creative insight happens? Can understanding the brain behavior behind creativity help us create a more inspiring library brand?

The Science of Creativity

Discerning how creativity impacts brain activity provides a glimpse into how one might be able to enhance their creative prowess. One common inhibitor to creativity is the belief that it is reserved for only a particular part of the brain. Many people have subscribed to the belief that they fall under the label of being either a left-brained or right-brained person. Researchers David Dunson of Duke University and Daniele Durante of the University of Padova studied a specific type of brain connectivity called white matter connections. After studying 68 separate brain regions of college-aged participants, they found there were no significant statistical differences in connectivity within individual brain hemispheres. However, when comparing data between those that scored highest on the creativity assessment with those that scored lowest, the

higher creatives showed a significant number of connections between the left and right hemispheres. This study provides an opportunity to pursue the idea that creativity is not just a right-brain or left-brain outcome. It is the simultaneous outcome of activity between both regions of the brain (Durante & Dunson, 2016). Dispelling this common myth can assist individuals in building creative self-confidence rather than being resigned to the belief that creativity is simply not available to them.

Studies have also shown that reducing activity in the executive-control region of the brain could assist in achieving better creative outcomes. In other words, making a deliberate attempt at being creative may prove futile (Saggar, 2015). It is becoming creative on demand, and allowing ourselves to be more flexible cognitively, that creative insight is more likely to occur. Researchers designed an interesting study around freestyle rap and examined neural connectivity during both improvisational and rehearsed musical performance. The study focused on areas of the brain such as the Dorsolateral Prefrontal Cortex (DPC) which is correlated with regulatory functions like decision making. The study demonstrated that during the rap artists' freestyle improvisation, the participants had fewer areas of activity in this particular brain area. This study is a great demonstration of how the brain area that controls typical daily functions such as planning, memory, and organization is less active during

times of creative performance (Liu et al., 2012). The dorsolateral prefrontal cortex can be seen as an area that potentially limits the brain from producing creative ideas in the first place.

Some people also think you need to be highly caffeinated to be creative, but this is not always the case. In the book *Neuroscience of Creativity*, Bristol and Vartanian have investigated cognitive studies on creativity, uncovering that brain states during creative insight differ from those observed during the creation of less original ideas. This brain wave state associated with creativity is referred to as the alpha band frequency, which is most prominent during a state of wakeful relaxation. These Alpha waves have been measured in several studies using a test called an electroencephalogram (EEG), which detects the brain's electrical activity (Bristol & Vartanian, 2013). A relaxed state that allows the brain to achieve the Alpha wave state could play a significant role in promoting creativity.

Dopamine is another ingredient in the creativity cocktail. Researchers have discovered a correlation between dopamine and cognitive flexibility, demonstrating increased dopamine neurotransmission during the idea generation process (Zabelina, Colzato, Beeman, & Hommel, 2016). Cognitive flexibility and one's degree of openness to new experiences have long been viewed as key players in the creative process. Finding that dopamine and cognitive flexibility are correlated could help explain why it feels so good

to be on a creative roll. This scientific background can help make sense of how the creative process can be used to stimulate creative ideas for your next branding or marketing project.

The Creative Process

The examination of the creative process can help deepen understanding of how to build a sustainable infrastructure of creativity. Inside this infrastructure of creativity lie four distinct creative processes: preparation, incubation, illumination, and implementation (Wallas, 1926).

Preparation is a key ingredient in the creative process and includes committing to practices such as brainstorming, internal and external research, and reflection. To enhance creativity, brainstorming and external research should include as diverse sources as possible. This is the opportunity to truly think “outside the box” and find new and unexpected sources of information and ideas.

Incubation is the time when it is beneficial to simply take a break and do something different than what is required of the creative project. This leaves room for both the conscious and unconscious mind to assimilate research and details from the preparation stage (Gilhooly, Georgiou, & Devery, 2013). This can include working on other projects or even “sleeping on the problem” for a day or two. As taught by Professor Jim Jipson in the Advanced Ideas and Concepts art class at the University of West Florida, the incubation stage can also

be assisted by the practice informally termed as “mushing” – the tactile action one takes during the early stage of creative work. This practice consists of doing something with your hands, like knitting or doodling, to keep the brain active and stimulate the further flow of ideas. Tactile stimulation is an excellent way to promote creative insight when working on a creative branding project (Schott, 2011).

Preparation and incubation should lead to the illumination stage. This is the time when the idea comes together and the library brand begins to take shape in your mind. It might be a fleeting vision of an end goal or a big “A-Ha!” moment. But illumination generally involves an insight into how the idea can come to fruition as a tangible, solid branding project.

Illumination then leads to the implementation stage where one begins to actively work with the ideas and concepts they have acquired and begins production on creating or refining a library brand. This process can be arduous as one refines, revises, and continues to edit the idea. The creative process, sharing many similarities with the branding process, provides the spark to ignite innovative insight throughout a branding project.

The Branding Process

There are several fundamental stages that compose the branding process: conducting research, clarifying strategy, designing identity, creating touch points and managing assets. As

you begin a branding project, the initial stage is to gather research with the goal of deepening your understanding of your library.

The second stage, clarifying your branding strategy, consists of narrowing the focus of the brand which involves both “methodical examination and strategic imagination” (Wheeler, 2013, p.132). The clarifying stage also includes brand positioning, which is “a process to identify what boldly differentiates a brand in the mind of a customer” (Wheeler, 2013, p.136). Successful positioning should capture the value and essence of your library brand. This essence can then be reflected in a creative brand brief. A brand brief is a document that outlines a clear pathway as to who your organization is and why it exists. This document will provide a strategic direction for your library brand and address several essential components: vision, mission, brand essence, attributes, value proposition, key beliefs, target audience, competitive advantage, stakeholders, and driving force (Wheeler, 2013, p.138).

The next stage in branding, designing identity, requires a strong understanding of how to communicate effectively within a highly visual environment. Designing identity is perhaps the most closely aligned with the creative process. It is an iterative process that requires skill, patience, and discipline. The goal is to create a visual identity that resonates with your library user and a look and feel that is distinctive.

The final stages of the branding process include fine-tuning your library’s brand elements by creating touchpoints and managing brand identity assets. Creating brand touchpoints involves selecting those that make the most sense for your library brand and patrons. For example, website design, banner advertisements, and social media may be targeted to those who interact with your library significantly online (Joseph, 2010, p.119). As you work through the branding process, the creative process can be used throughout to enhance the outcome.

Applying the Creative Process to Branding

As Brian Tierney, CEO of Brian Communications states in *Designing Brand Identity*, “The process is the process, but then you need a spark of genius” (Wheeler, 2013, p.102). The opportunity for a spark of genius can be enhanced by applying the creative process to library branding.

It is no coincidence that the branding process and the creative process begin with internal and external research. During a library branding project, you might conduct internal research by re-viewing your library’s vision, mission, strengths and weaknesses. Taking a lesson from the creative process, you could also go further by looking internally to understand how the idea and project reflect your own library’s core values. Ensuring the purpose of the project is aligned with the library’s core values and strategic plan creates an

impetus for creativity to be sustained over time.

Similarly, with external research, you might initially only focus on interviewing primary stakeholders such as repeat patrons and staff. However, to enhance the creative process, external research could consist of absorbing knowledge from a diverse pool of information, whether it is conducting site visits to your library, focus groups, or observing library patrons interacting with staff (Slade, 2016). It can also include reaching out to those people who are not using the library to learn what would motivate them to become patrons.

Another opportunity is the potential to enhance the process of clarifying brand strategy by applying the creative process of incubation. For example, after seeking out the perspective of others, it is often beneficial to take a step back to examine the larger landscape of your library. Similarly, carving out moments for reflection, mulling, and working on other creative projects can be valuable tools to help avoid, or get over, creative blocks. Taking the time to allow your conscious and unconscious mind to synthesize information and place it in context of the larger landscape of your library, can lead to new ideas, stronger brand strategy, and further ideas for elements such as brand aesthetics, identity or messages (Rothenberg & Hausman, 1976).

As these ideas start to come together you are entering the illumination stage

of the creative process and the designing identity stage of the branding project. As you move toward that “A-Ha” moment, the creative process can help enhance the outcomes. For example, a period of time that is known for creative insight is right after waking from sleep. Mornings can bring a flash of insight during the first few minutes of waking up as you are in a more relaxed state (Sawyer, 2012). These insights can be recorded in a journal before they slip away as you focus on the activities of the upcoming day.

Designing your library’s brand identity takes time and even after the final idea takes shape, another round of the creative process begins. Visual elements such as your library brand name, tagline, and logo should also be aligned with your library’s values. As Abbott Miller states in *Designing Brand Identity*, “Look is defined by color, scale, proportion, typography, and motion. Feel is experiential and emotional” (Wheeler, 2013, p.148). The task of creating the right look and feel of your library brand can be enhanced by the insights gained through both the incubation and illumination creative stages.

Finally, the implementation stage invites those with differing viewpoints to again critique and provide feedback. This may extend the refinement process as you move toward a particular deadline for the branding project. Allowing room for improvement allows for the opportunity for the birth of a second, third, or even fourth related project to form in the future.

Limits to Creativity

The path to creative insight is not always a straightforward one. Limits to creativity often occur when an idea is just starting to take shape. The word “no” can be a barrier to creative action if project stakeholders are not flexible with the evolution of an idea. Fear is another common limiter to the creative process. One might choose to “play it safe” instead of embracing a creative risk that could result in a fresh, original brand (Sawyer, 2012).

Another potential limit to creativity is convergent thinking. Although the well-respected journal, *Creativity Research*, presents a solid argument suggesting convergent thinking is an essential part of the creative process, it is still known to limit creative thought. Convergent thinking emphasizes an extensive use of logic and accuracy to determine the best answer to a clear and specific question. Typical convergent thought processes might include recognizing the familiar, reapplying set techniques, or sticking to a narrow range of relevant information when pondering an idea (Cropley, 2006). While this kind of thinking can assist in creating a plan for the project, you will want to refrain from remaining solely in this frame of thought.

Finally, a lack of play can also seriously derail the formation of ingenuity. Play can be an important component of the creative process, allowing you to forge pathways toward thoughtful risk-taking, curiosity, joy, and discovery. Play

can also allow a safe space for questioning assumptions and for allowing mistakes to be seen as opportunities to learn from, rather than a threat to success (Stevens, 2014). Play can be a vital part of the creative process if one allows it to be. Making play a daily priority and allowing opportunities for spontaneous play throughout the day can enhance one’s creative process. Play is just one example of how one can sustain creativity throughout a branding project.

Tips on Staying Creative

The stresses of modern day can often wreak havoc on the creative process. Between the juxtaposition of personal and professional responsibilities, the time for creativity becomes less of a priority. However, enhancing your creative potential while engaged in a library branding project can be initiated by a variety of different practices. Some notable practices include meditation or daily focused breathing activity, keeping a journal, and adhering to a clean, healthy diet with proper hydration. By turning your attention inward and reducing visual input by simply closing your eyes, you can increase the likelihood of creative thought (Salvi, Bricolo, Franconeri, Kounios, & Beeman, 2015).

Divergent thinking is also a practice that can encourage creativity. It involves spontaneous idea generation that is less structured than convergent thinking. Brainstorming, as mentioned previously, is one example of how divergent thinking can be stimulated

during the creative process. An interesting study was conducted by the authors of the book *Breakpoint and Beyond: Mastering the Future Today*. The authors George Land and Beth Jarmin discuss the results of their multi-year study that examined creative activity and divergent thinking from childhood to adulthood. The study followed the same group of people from Kindergarten until age 15 and assessed their capacity for divergent thinking. As kindergarteners, the group scored within the genius level of divergent thinking but as teenagers, only ten percent reached the genius level. The study presents strong evidence that our creativity tends to decline as we grow older. As creative professionals, it is essential to make creativity a priority during our daily lives and forge new ways of creative play within the mundane. Furthermore, marrying both convergent and divergent thinking to a well-thought out concept can produce both a unique idea and a solid plan for implementation.

In addition to divergent thinking, engaging with at least three creative projects at the same time can enhance creativity. Working on several creative projects simultaneously can support the conscious and unconscious thought process of creative problem-solving. The idea is if you are consciously working on one project, you will unconsciously be working on the other two. This can especially be helpful when there is a problem to be solved but an answer has not fully materialized. It is also important to re-

main emotionally agile and allow yourself to be flexible during the creative process. During the creation of a new brand, try to maintain a fresh outlook every day and foster an understanding that great ideas can be fueled by both triumph and adversity (Kaufman & Gregoire, 2015).

Allowing time for movement and exercise is another simple way to enhance the creative process. Research from the *Journal of Experimental Psychology* highlighted that walking can help improve creativity by as much as sixty percent. Short walking breaks in nature can be especially restorative when the mind becomes overly occupied (Oppezzo & Schwartz, 2014). Spending time near water can also assist with stimulating creative insight.

Conclusion

Creative thought is available for everyone and is not just limited to artists or musicians. Studies have shown that creativity is not limited to a left-brain or right-brain function, but draws on the whole brain acting together. It is a way of thinking that can be accessed through a number of daily activities such as movement, meditation, and reflective thought. Although there are limitations to creativity, one can encourage creativity through practices such as divergent thinking or through spontaneous play. These tools can assist in enhancing one's own personal creative infrastructure and help sustain creativity over the life of a branding project for a library marketing professional.

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