

## CREATIVITY

## THINK FAST!

How many good ideas do you dream up in a day? We sat down with one creative who averages about 300. We asked him how he does it and how you can, too.

“A lot of people think creativity is...”

Daniel Money Penny stops himself in mid-sentence. This happens a lot.

Activity just flared in a small part of his right temporal lobe—the anterior superior temporal gyrus, if you want to get medical about it. It’s the sudden spark of insight researchers have identified by a burst of high-frequency activity that occurs about one-third of a second before an idea arrives.

Money Penny smiles and clicks open his silver briefcase, which is lined by several sticky notes, and removes a black felt-tip pen and a yellow pad. He rapidly scribbles a few words on ruled paper, and then looks up.

“A lot of people think creativity is cerebral and slow,” he continues, “like it’s a linear process that starts out with brainstorming and ends with a couple of interesting options. Forget that! The best creative sessions are rapid-fire and crazy-chaotic. It’s incredible what happens when we let ourselves go in a hundred different directions and take a long while before coming up for air. The key—and the hard part—is to stop filtering ourselves.”

On the yellow pad, Money Penny has just jotted down a possible new slogan for a billion-dollar global technology firm, which he renamed a few weeks ago. He’s sitting in a suburban Cleveland coffee shop, but this is the kind of guy who really shouldn’t be downing too much caffeine. His revved-up right temporal lobe seems to be in constant overdrive. No exaggeration: He goes through a box of five felt-tip pens a week. His right middle finger has a hardened callous near the tip

from clutching the instruments time and time again since beginning his business in 1977.

**COMPETING FOR IDEAS**

Money Penny, 57, is president and chief creative officer of emaginit, a Silver Lake, OH-based firm that offers naming, branding, positioning and ad campaign services for businesses and their products. His clients range from Fortune 100 firms needing high-level ideation to local mom-and-pop retailers looking for catchy slogans.

Money Penny has earned the reputation as one of the country’s most creative, prolific and versatile marketers. He recently spearheaded Amway’s branding efforts throughout Europe, Japan and the U.S., and led Diebold’s ATM hardware and software brand launches in 26 countries. During the past couple decades, the words he’s written and refined with his trusty pen and pad have literally meant business for clients ranging from Wendy’s (“We have no arch rival”) to the makers of Pepto Bismol (“This coat’s never out of style”) to FedEx (“We are the overnight success”). Leaders at United Way say Money Penny’s “Become Someone’s Miracle” campaign generated almost \$15 million for the national nonprofit organization.

“Marketing success begins with great ideas, and that’s really what emaginit competes for,” he says. “The creative concept should be the foundation from which all other promotional elements are executed. It makes no sense for a company to invest time and money in the execution of an inferior concept, because it will inherently result in an inferior final product. That’s

why placing a premium on creativity is so important—the best way for marketers and their clients to see eye to eye from the start.”

Money Penny has believed in that concept since eye makeup helped him launch the firm. In September 1977, while he was a student at the University of Akron, he picked up a women’s magazine and started crafting new headlines for a cosmetic ad he spotted. After coming up with about 30, he showed them to local business owners, some of whom were so impressed that they asked him to work on upcoming marketing projects.

Over the next several years, as companies became larger and ventured into new arenas, many wanted less specific names that wouldn’t pigeonhole them in a particular industry. Marketing firms, and with them the offshoot naming consultants, grew in number and power. To distinguish himself, Money Penny provides a performance-based guarantee: Clients don’t pay if he doesn’t deliver something they love, or if their preferred choices can’t be trademarked.

He begins many corporate- and product-naming projects by meeting with executives and interviewing them for several hours about their business. His aim is to “drill down to the truth,” he says—a succinct few words that best describe the firm’s mission. Money Penny leaves the interview with collateral—annual reports, financial statements, marketing pamphlets, product samples, etc.—and later dedicates three five-hour sessions to generating several hundred ideas that speak to the aforementioned truth. For his recent billion-dollar global technology client, the truth statements were, “Cutting-edge materials developed for the future” and “We apply technology to materials.” Those phrases provided the groundwork for Money Penny’s creative sessions, and he frequently rewrote them as a reminder to himself while creating.

During his creative sessions, Money Penny sometimes begins with a word and dissects it, adding or cutting prefixes and suffixes, playing with Greek and Latin roots, and toying with alliteration and assonance, until ideas begin to flow rapidly.

Money Penny works alone as a one-person entrepreneurship, which makes staying creatively sharp all the more arduous a task. He overcomes that by collaborating frequently: incessantly calling and emailing trusted cohorts to get their opinions and insight.

Most important, he says, he adheres to self-established rules about creativity. Only when he reaches hundreds of options does he go back through his work and place stars next to the few dozen the client will see in a formal report. Excess ideas are entered into emaginit’s database, which now holds more than 900,000 branding entities.

## TIPS FOR QUICKER CREATIVITY

Creativity is often curtailed by time constraints, client demands, tight budgets, administrative tasks and bad moods. Many experts say it’s inherent and ever-present, but tends to leave when those constraints rule the day.

“Everyone’s creative, but it’s too often squashed

by information that’s in the shape of a silo—vertical, defined and limiting,” says Money Penny, who offers these tips on getting *your* right temporal lobe firing faster:

**Think about the project’s use in the world, not the client.** “Don’t think about creating for Joe. Think about how the product or project will live in the marketplace once you finish: Who will need it? Who will touch it? What are *those people* seeking?”

**After you can succinctly state the client’s goal in only a few words, think of as many adjectives as possible that also describe it.** One technique is mind mapping: Start with a question or keyword in the center of a blank piece of paper. In a circle around that word, quickly write other words that remind you of the main concept, even if they seem out of place. Then, take those words and do the same thing, extending farther from the center of the page. This free association style might lead to some dead ends, but as one idea sparks another, the exercise should begin to reveal viable solutions.

**To be prolific, don’t pontificate.** Quantity can beget quality. “A common mistake is to stew over the perfect solution, or to come up with a few good ideas and stop,” Money Penny notes. “Why limit yourself? When you’re creating, turn absolutely nothing away.”

**Surround yourself with 3D visuals, and change them for each client.** “I immerse myself in the client’s product and mission, trying to feel their world,” Money Penny says. “Feel has to come before fact. When you begin, don’t constrain yourself with concepts such as budgets and deadlines. There will be time for that later, but now isn’t the time to hold back.” Some designers say the simplest way to fuel a visual stockpile is to maintain a reference file of raw material such as photographs of city streetscapes, pages culled from magazines, antique print ephemera, sample of work from creatives you admire, fabric swatches, etc. Money Penny warns that flipping through the same idea-generating sources, such as design annuals or favorite books, is akin to exercising the same muscle group while neglecting others.

**Realize that ideas trump syntax until you deliver to the client.** “Don’t let grammar get in the way,” he suggests. “The nucleus or nugget is the good idea, not correct English or an exact design color.”

**Fear, frustration and fatigue are the biggest creativity-zappers.** When the flow of creativity gets clogged, identifying the culprit is the first step in clearing the problem.

**Encourage participation.** During team brainstorming sessions, employ a “no-kill” rule. Even if a person just rolls his or her eyes at an idea, fewer people are likely to chime in from that point forward.

**Get out of your office, and be eclectic.** “It’s hard to draw upon your experiences if you don’t have them. Go meet people, and draw upon their energy.” Money Penny’s experiences include stints as a California forest firefighter, a U.S. Army paratrooper, a fashion model, an antique shop owner, a railroad worker, a Chrysler assembly employee, a cable TV salesperson and a sporting-goods store owner.

**When you're stuck, imagine.** What color is the brick of the wall that's blocking your creativity? Any chips in the mortar? What's on the other side? Record everything you "see" and feel, then go back to thinking about your design problem. Draw any connection between what you felt and your project. Following streams of ideas into unknown destinations is a source of problem-solving.

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## WORDPLAY TOOLS

Creative writing begets creative thinking, and designers staring at a blank screen (or page) can fire up their neurons by playing around with the nuance of language.

To naming, branding and corporate positioning specialists like Daniel Moneypenny, wordplay can lead to serious business. His favorite forms are the pun, a phrase that deliberately exploits confusion between similar-sounding words for humorous effect, and the double entendre, a figure of speech in which a phrase can be understood in either of two ways.

But Moneypenny's wordplay arsenal extends beyond ones you might remember from high school English. Here's a list of language tools that could help fire your creative spark:

**Antanaclasis**—repeating a single word, but with a different meaning each time ("If you aren't fired with enthusiasm, you will be fired with enthusiasm.")

**Paronomasia**—repetition of a word with a change in letter or sound ("A pun is its own reword.")

**Alliteration**—series of words that begin with the same letter or sound alike (Steak 'n Shake)

**Heteronyms**—words that are spelled the same but with different pronunciations ("Live in Arizona. Don't desert the desert!")

**Tmesis**—division of the elements of a compound word ("Fan-bloody-tastic!")

**Antithesis**—juxtaposition of opposing or contrasting ideas ("In the battle, you'll tremble.")

**Assonance**—the repetition of vowel sounds, most commonly within a short passage of verse ("It's hot and monotonous.")

## STILL STUCK?

Try transforming your existing idea into a new or modified one, asking yourself these questions:

**Adapt?** Is there anything else like this? What does this tell you?

**Modify?** Can you give it a new angle?

**Magnify?** Can anything be added—time, frequency, height, length, strength?

**Minify?** Can anything be taken away? Shortened? Lightened? Omitted? Broken up?

**Substitute?** Can you use different elements? Other material? Another place? Another tone of voice? Someone else?

**Rearrange?** Swap components? Change the pace or schedule? Transpose cause and effect?

**Reverse?** Think opposite? Go backward? Reverse roles?

**Combine?** Blend concepts?