

Services

It's a cliché, these days, to say that one should 'think outside the box', says SIT VP for Marketing and Alliances Idit Biton. "Well, we believe in innovating inside the box. Anyone can be creative; they just need to know what to do. We teach people how to do something with that creativity. Basically, we help program search engines for the human brain".

That approach has served SIT well in surprising places. Take, for example, a very simple product - the spirit level. A small glass vial filled with water and an air bubble and attached to a ruler, it allows the user to measure whether a surface is perfectly horizontal or vertical. The level has been a standard, mundane carpenter's and builder's tool for centuries, until Kapro Industries, a maker of measuring tools, approached it using the SIT system. Using one of the SIT's methods - that of multiplication - developers imagined adding additional vials, and then tried to see what could be done with the result. Eventually, they realized that they could place vials at angles other than 90° or 180° - builders, after all, often need to lay floors or pipes on slight slopes for drainage purposes. The result was the Topgrade Spirit Level, a unique tool with three integrated vials, one to measure whether the surface is level (i.e. 0°), a second at 1°, and a third at 2°. A simple tool was improved by the simplest means.

The Multiplication tool used in the level example is applied through multiplying one of the components of a product or service, and then performing a qualitative change in the new copy. As we saw, each new vial in the level portrayed a different angle, as opposed to having three of the same.

Try using the Multiplication tool to solve the following riddle:

You have two ropes. Each rope burns for 30 minutes, yet not equally. You need to measure 45 minutes. How would you suggest approaching the task?



Surprisingly - or perhaps not - the origins of the SIT approach can be found in post-WW2 Russia. In 1946, Soviet engineer Genrich Altshuller started reviewing thousands of patents in order to find some pattern behind successful innovation. The result was TRIZ, a "Theory of Inventive Problem Solving." Over the years, it developed into a methodology, tool set and knowledge base for solving problems by generating innovative ideas. Its approach - unlike that of the more free-form, more "Western" system of brainstorming - is to identify an algorithm for the creation of new solutions. Today, it is widely used by engineers throughout the world.

SIT's founders first encountered TRIZ in the early 1990's and since 1996 have modified it extensively, both simplifying and broadening it. Instead of a technical, engineer-oriented system requiring years to master, SIT developed a method capable of being taught in under a week, using a minimal set of tools, principles and guidelines; at the same time, it is a pure thinking method, providing tools for a nearly unlimited range of fields. Another shift - an obviously necessary one, considering the system's ultimate origins - is making it market-oriented. SIT is not interested in the abstract, nor does it care for innovation for the sake of innovation. The goal is always to create a tangible result - a product brought to market, an innovative marketing campaign, a novel solution implemented. The SIT method is continuously

evolving through academic research, as well as through constant work with the company's clients. These clients include many international companies such as Johnson & Johnson, Nestlé Corporation, Bayer Group, Pearson, and Intel Corporation.

The SIT method, in brief II

SIT divide their approach, onion-like, into five layers. The innermost level is that of tools, such as Division, Subtraction and Multiplication. Applying these tools to a product presents developers with various potential avenues of innovation. However, simply using the tools is not enough - in order to end up with viable results, developers needed to be familiarized with certain principles that allow them to understand and describe all the cognitive obstacles that can get in the way of a successful development process. These principles, the second layer of SIT's method, include the Closed World (using only available materials and technologies), Function Follows Form (finding use for what you are capable of creating), and Path of Most Resistance (ignoring conventional thought on the product's nature).

The third layer of the SIT method is that of facilitation. As developers work together as teams, they receive guidance from SIT facilitators - not just teaching them to think effectively, but also guiding their projects in effective directions. This leads to the fourth level, that of project

Takes its Unique Brand of Innovation to India



Idit Biton

management. As SIT says, ending up with a list of ideas is nice, but basically useless. SIT focuses on the practical aspects of innovation – therefore, it provides guidelines and techniques that ensure that ideas are not just generated but also implemented. They teach how to select an idea, how to tell whether an idea is viable, how to build a work plan and how to ensure that the client ends up with a tangible product. Here, SIT differs from other innovation consultants, who often put insufficient focus on bringing an idea to the market.

The final, and most recent, layer of the SIT onion is that of organizational structures. As Idit Biton says, "The finest compliment we ever hear is that we're not needed any more." SIT's goal is that their consulting not be a one-off affair, but rather lead to permanent improvements in the ways their clients approach innovation. By guiding successful projects, SIT hopes to engender absorption of the skills needed for further innovation; leading to an enhanced ability of the organization to be innovative. Several former SIT clients have already appointed their own innovation managers and steering committees – making the methods they learned part of their regular *modus operandi*.

Above and beyond their specialized skill set, SIT

bring with them familiarity with the forefront of global research and development. In a way, they are world-class experts on the field of innovation, and happy to share their experience.

"Around two years ago, we started noticing intense activity originating in India on our website," says SIT facilitator Erez Tsalik. "It went from zero to thousands of hits within six months of activity. It was fascinating."

As a result of this and other indicators, India appeared to be an obvious market for SIT's methods. Usually, the company is invited to a country (which is how SIT has worked in 50 nations around the world), but in India's case, the opportunity was too good to pass on.

"India is a perfect match for us. First of all, there's the issue of timing: Indian companies are clamoring to enter the international marketplace, and they want any edge they can find. India trains 100,000 new engineers a year. That's a huge population yearning to implement the knowledge they've acquired.

"Second, there's a cultural match between India and SIT. Indians appreciate results, and SIT commits itself to results, not to process. There's something about Indian culture that admires in-depth learning, which is what SIT offers. Unlike some of the other consultants, the company does not foster dependence with its clients.

"Finally, part of SIT's system, which often seems counter-intuitive to outsiders, is using constraints

and limitations as stimuli. A company with an unlimited budget doesn't need to innovate. SIT can turn Indian companies' relative lack of resources into an advantage."

To date, SIT has already worked with several companies in India, including Honeywell in Bangalore, Disney India, Kaya Skin Care and the Indian offices of McCann-Erickson advertising. They were also involved with MET in the organization and instruction of a 2007 UN conference on combating hunger. In addition, they have run several seminars in the country on the subject of innovation.

While a formal, limited presence may suffice with other countries, SIT knows that India requires personal presence. They have set up a partnership with the Indian-Israeli company A&G, which has extensive connections in India, and are currently training local instructors. According to Mr. Tsalik, a permanent local office will be in place by April of this year. He adds: "We take the subject of India very seriously."

SIT - A&G

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