

Cracked

A small guide to big ideas

Jay Ball



This is a blank space. It's not a threat. It's an opportunity.

Hello sparky

Just think, evolution has managed to squeeze over 100 billion brain cells into your skull. Each one is just waiting to be fired up and put to work. It's easy, simply feed the problem in one end and a little while later out will pop the answer. Then all you have to do is put it into a PowerPoint deck and present it.

If only it was that simple.

Of course if it really was that simple, life would be pretty boring. The truth is that it's the difficult, awkward, gnarly problems that are the most fun to crack. Yes they make you lose sleep. But solving them is pure sweetness.

Everyone needs help sometimes when faced by the spectre of a blank sheet of paper and no idea where to start. There are times when not even the smell of a freshly opened whiteboard marker can inspire you.

That's when you reach for this book. In these pages you'll find a set of thinking tools split into three sections. The blue section deals with defining the problem. The orange section covers understanding the audience. And, finally, the purple section contains tips, techniques and cheats for coming up with the goods.

Ready? **Bring it on.**



"The best way to escape from a particular problem is to solve it." Brendan Francis

Defining the problem

Often, what we're struggling with is not really finding a solution to a problem, it's finding the real problem in search of a solution.

This first section looks at different ways of determining precisely what we are trying to achieve (and what we're not trying to achieve). It sets the context and can open our eyes to opportunities hidden inside the problem.

What market are we in?

It's easy to rely on the well-worn assumptions we make about companies and markets. The problem is, it can block our thinking, box us in to the same old, same old.

Sometimes it helps to question the fundamentals. So here's one: exactly what market are we in?

Are we in product (eg hardware, software) or services?

Or are we in something more specific?

Are we in something broader?

Or are we in the market of time-saving, peace-of-mind or other more lateral categories?

Are we in more than one market?

Questioning these basic assumptions can help you gain a new perspective on both the business, the competition and the possibilities for effecting change.

Imagine what would happen if you previously believed you were in the software security business but then re-thought the market and treated it as being in the market of online discovery. This would radically change your approach and may open new possibilities.

What's happening in the market?

Change creates opportunities. Established positions shift. Customer expectations are reset. There is the chance to reframe the market.

Explore what's happening in the market. If it's shifting one way, can we take advantage of it? Alternatively, if everyone else is zigging, can we benefit from zagging?

Also look at what's not changing. Is there an opportunity to subvert the norms of the market? Can we disrupt the Holy Grail of the industry?

Is there anything we can see now that will affect what we do in the coming months?



“It is important that students bring a certain ragamuffin, barefoot, irreverence to their studies; they are not here to worship what is known, but to question it.” Jacob Chanowski

What's not the problem?

Sometimes we try to fix problems that either do not exist or do not matter.

So what's **not** the problem?

This is the same as asking: what's the real problem?

Try this:

How would the competition view the problem?

How would a customer view it?

How would your mum view it?

How would the Buddha view it?

How would a six year old view it?

Keep coming at it from different angles, see what it opens up.

What don't we know?

The answer may well lie in a gap in our knowledge. We may have to make assumptions.

This is OK, as long as we're clear exactly what assumptions we are making and are certain we cannot get the information we need to know for sure.

So what do we know is unknown?

What change in behaviour do we want to see?

If we solve the problem, how will our target audience change their behaviour?

What will they begin doing, continue doing or stop doing?

What will we see?

What's stopping them behaving this way at the moment?

What can we do to incentivise the behaviour we want?

What would they need to believe to behave the way we want them to? What can we say about our product that encourages this belief?

Can we find ways of having the customers 'test drive' a new behaviour?

What's the largest barrier to our success?

What's the biggest thing we have to overcome?

This could be anything from customer apathy to a competitor gaining traction with our target audience to a new entrant. Unless we know what we're trying to overcome, how will we know what to do or whether it worked?

To paraphrase the Cheshire Cat, 'if you don't know where you're going, any way will do' – it just won't get you where you need to be.

Redrawing the problem

Are there other ways we can find to represent the problem?

Can we draw a picture of the problem or find photos that illustrate it? Can we find an analogy for it? Can we make a physical model? Can we go out and visit an environment where the problem is obvious (or where it has already been overcome)?

Sometimes words just don't help. Finding other ways to show the problem can unlock new ideas.



“Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.” Albert Einstein

Understanding the audience

We are, at the end of the day, always talking to people. Yes they may be IT-director-people or CEO-people or plasma-TV-buying people, but they are first and foremost people.

This section presents some tools on unlocking how and why people behave the way they do.

Understanding the audience using types

This way of looking at an audience is rooted in the work of Carl Jung and the thinking behind the Myers-Briggs system. In behavioural terms, there are 16 types of people in the world. Each is motivated differently and each has a preference for certain types of communication. There are four pairs of characteristics that determine a person's type:

Introversion/extroversion

Some people are energised by being around others (extroverts) others get their energy from time alone (introverts). This is particularly important for face-to-face.

Sensing/intuition

Some people like hands-on experience (sensing) others like theories and ideas (intuition). You can explain your ideas to a sensing type until you are blue in the face but it's only when they're shown a prototype that they'll engage.

Understanding the audience using types

Feeling/thinking

Some people focus on values (feeling) others on rationality (thinking). To put it another way, some act on the basis of what they know to be right, others act on what they know to be true.

Perceiving/judging

Some people hate making plans (perceiving) but others like more structure (judging). Judges will be more receptive to a step-by-step plan. Perceivers will be looking at ways they can change and improve the plan as they go along.

These characteristics can be grouped together to get four groups of types that behave and make decisions in consistent, predictable ways.

The four groups

Our profiles for each type cover over 20 categories of information (from how they make decisions to what kind of parents they are). However, we don't need to go into that level of detail here. It's possible to cluster the 16 types into four groups of predictable behaviour.

Opportunists

The Opportunists are optimistic, real world tacticians. They like practical, hands-on experience – not theory and big ideas. Communicating with Opportunists, you'll need to focus on short-term benefits, tangible action and give a real sense of what the product will do for them day-in, day-out.

Controllers

Controllers are traditional in their worldview. Very organised and sensible, they always follow through on their promises. Like the Opportunists they prefer concrete, tangible things. Communicating with Controllers means focusing on the process, on how sensible actions lead to benefits. It's all about evolution, not revolution.

The four groups

Peacemakers

These are the people people. Peacemakers are skilled diplomats always putting people first. They are passionate and emotional – the idealist group. For Peacemakers, it's always about what's right more than it is about what's true. Communicating with them must always stress the human benefits (although it's more about the ideas than the practicalities).

Strategists

The Strategists are the rational dreamers. They love new ideas and experimentation (although they are also pretty sceptical). Communicating with Strategists is all about the idea. You need to inspire them with the theory and paint a vision of the future. Keep it to the broad, big picture stuff. And watch out, they change their minds very easily when something better comes along.

Understanding the audience using core drivers

According to a 1998 study, there are reckoned to be 15 core drivers of human behaviour. It may be possible to use one of these to structure your ideas and approach. There are two ways to use a drive. One is to feed it. The other is to deny it.

1: Sex

The realm of passion and intense emotion.

2: Hunger

Both physical and emotional. The yearning for something more.

3: Physicality

The hands-on, the tactile, the sensual.

4: Avoiding distress

In neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) people are categorised as being motivated 'towards' their desires or 'away from' bad things. 'Away from' is always a more motivating force.

5: Curiosity

From gossip to gadgets, we all want to know the latest thing (or the stuff others want to keep secret).

6: Honour

A sense of personal worth projected onto the world.

7: Order

We live in an increasingly chaotic world. It's not surprising then that one core driver is order amid the chaos.

Understanding the audience using core drivers

8: Vengeance

Don't get mad, get even – the drive for personal justice.

9: Relationships

From partnerships to communities, we want to be together.

10: Family

Blood is thicker than water (although we will also look for non-family substitutes if we need to).

11: Prestige

This boils down to a kind of status driven one-upmanship – it's not so much we want to be rich, just richer than anyone else we know.

12: Power

In all its forms, personal and political.

13: Citizenship

A sense of the rights and roles people have within the societies and communities with which they identify.

14: Independence

All for one and everyone for themselves. A drive for autonomy and individualism.

15: Social acceptance

The drive to be accepted by your culture, society or crew.

A close-up photograph of a kiwi fruit cut in half, showing its characteristic green, fuzzy skin and bright orange-red flesh. The fruit is positioned diagonally, with the cut surface facing the viewer. The background is a plain, light color.

"Somewhere, something incredible
is waiting to be known." Carl Sagan

Understanding the audience: 4 motivations

Another way of looking at the audience and their behaviour is through motivational theory. This boils human motivation down into 4 forces:

The need to belong

Some people are motivated by a need for community, to be part of something more, something bigger. So you could look to see how to create communities of customers. Or you could look at how to make connections between customers. Exclusive or inclusive.

The need for independence

The opposing need to belonging is independence. This is the need to stand on your own two feet, to be answerable to no one. So how can we give them the tools and resources to chart their own course?

The need for stability

Some people are motivated by stability, security, the status quo. So what could you do to pour oil on troubled water, to reduce hassle, to mitigate the issues around change?

The need for change

The opposite to stability, some people want change, risk, to strive for something new and better. How can you fuel that fire?

Generating ideas

In this section, you'll find a range of tools and techniques to help you come up with new ideas and strategies.

There are some for general problems, some for brand problems, some for those just awkward problems.

Simply click through and try them out.

Bite size

Can we solve the whole problem or do we need to break it down into more manageable stages?

What would those stages be?

Sometimes a problem can appear just too big, too daunting. But often it can be broken down into a series of more manageable steps. Your job is to find them and string them together to get you to the end goal.

SCAMPER

A handy mnemonic covering a series of techniques.

Substitute

Is there anything we can substitute for part of the problem?

Combine

Can we combine different parts of the problem to help create a solution?

Adapt

Can we adapt something from somewhere else – maybe a different industry or field altogether?

Magnify

What if we take one small part and massively magnify it out of all proportion?

Put to other uses

Do we already have something that can be used in a different way?

Eliminate

Can we remove one element from the picture?

Reverse

What if we turn the whole thing on its head?

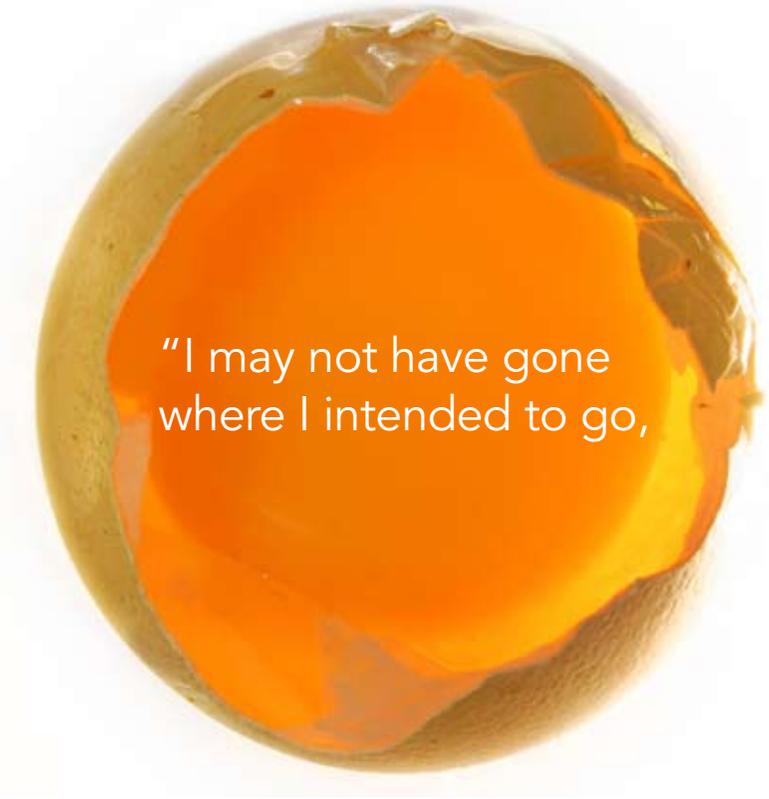
The spectacular

Suspend your pragmatic side (you know, the side that says “yes, but” and “the problem with that is...”).

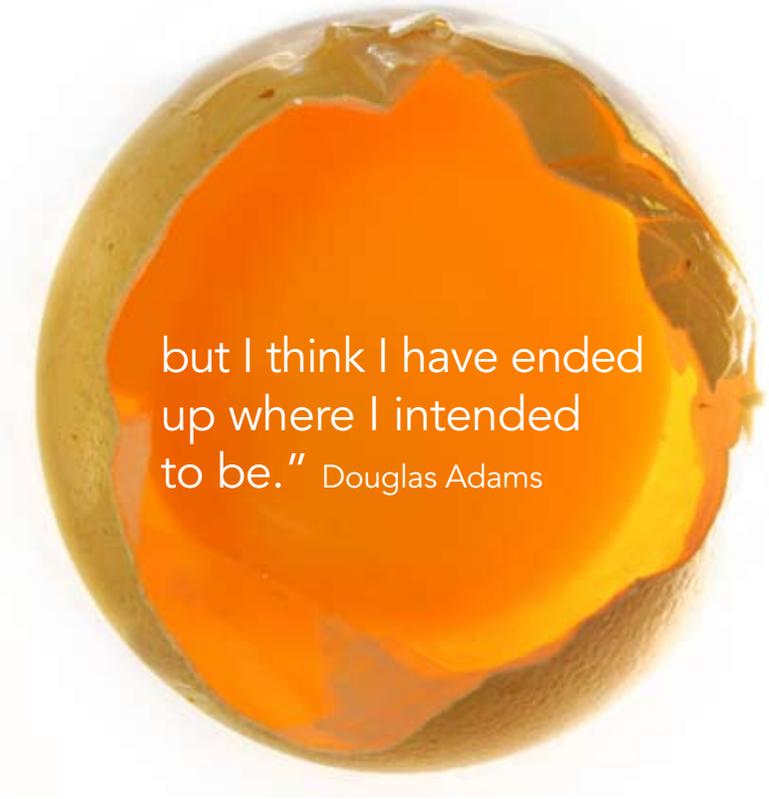
What would be the most audacious, out there thing we could do? What would get publicity over and above anything the competition would or could do?

This cannot just be an empty stunt, it has to have relevance. But it also must be pushed to its logical extreme.

Go wild.



"I may not have gone
where I intended to go,



but I think I have ended
up where I intended
to be." Douglas Adams

A matter of faith

Reality has little to do with reality. Reality as each of us sees it is largely down to what we believe about the world around us.

In turn, what we believe drives how we behave.

So, what **behaviour** do we want to see?

What would our audience need to **believe** in order to behave in that way?

What **attributes** do we have that would support this belief?

What **benefits** do these attributes offer customers?

What **single thought** can we communicate to drive this chain of events?

Come up with as many options as you can.

Your company

If it was your own company and your personal money, what would you do?

Simple as that.

Asymmetric strategies

"Do what others can't or won't."

Anita Roddick

It's not always possible (or desirable) to fight on a level playing field. The competition may have the dice loaded in their favour – more budget, a more established brand, better relationships etc. How can we change the rules?

Can we do things 10x faster?

Can we take the long view?

Can we say the unsayable? Do the undoable?

Can we redefine the market or its norms?

Can we make the argument about something else?

Can we turn our competitors' main strength into a key weakness?

Can we hijack their communications?

Can we pull a stunt?

Can we re-energise our morale or radically lower theirs?

Telling tales

Storytelling is as old as the hills. It is also one of the ways that people take in information most easily. There are many ways to tell a story. Some, however, are more hard-wired into the human psyche than others.

They say that when it comes down to it, there are basically seven types of story. They are:

1. Boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back (and vice versa).
2. A powerful force must be overcome.
3. A stranger changes the lives of those he/she encounters.
4. One person challenges authority/a great power.
5. Bravery succeeds in a heroic battle.
6. A small town/group of people experience a visitation.
7. Coming of age.

Can you use any of these core structures to base the story of your brand or product on?

Talkin' about a revolution

A brand with a purpose is a powerful thing. As Nikos Mourkogiannis points out, "In truly great companies ... the brand, the ethics and the purpose all align together."*

This tool helps you discover that purpose.

Imagine that your business takes the form of a social or political movement. You want to rally supporters to your cause and bond them to a common purpose, set of beliefs, values and behaviours.

Try to give it a name, identify its aims and describe what it stands for and what it wants to change.

Questions to ask:

- What are you fighting for and/or against?
- What do you want to change in the world?
- Who are your allies and who are your foes?
- What does success look like?
- What are you prepared to do to succeed?
- What won't you do?
- What is your rallying cry?

* Nikos Mourkogiannis in *Purpose, the starting point of great companies*

A close-up photograph of a cracked eggshell. The egg is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the frame. The shell is broken, revealing a vibrant, bright orange yolk. The egg white is visible around the yolk and at the top of the crack. The background is a plain, light color.

“A child of five would understand this. Send somebody to fetch a child of five.” Groucho Marx

Logline

Sometimes it really helps to have the most succinct expression of the brand, strategy or idea. One with just the information we need (and none of the garnish we don't).

Logline is a technique borrowed from feature film production.

It explains the idea and premise of a film in under 25 words (as if you were pitching a new film to some studio execs). It distils the essence of the film into just what matters.

Example: The Sixth Sense

A child psychologist helps a small boy who thinks he sees ghosts. Unbeknown to himself the psychologist is also dead.

Now practice:

What is the 'idea' of James Bond?

Now what is the idea of your brand, strategy or concept?

Plan B

What if the week before the campaign is due to hit, our main competitor comes out with a product at least twice as good as ours?

What if one of our assumptions is proved radically false?

What if the budget is halved? Or doubled?

Then what?

Even if you come up with the best plan for the job, the one thing you can be sure of is that the job will change. In the military there is a saying that the first thing that goes out of the window in battle is the plan.

You will have considered other options in your deliberations. Take some time to work a couple of them into a rough and ready Plan B and Plan C. Hopefully you'll never need them but if everything goes wrong, you'll be glad you did.

Stupid is as stupid does

There is a desire in many companies not to look stupid.

Yet asking the stupid questions is one of the tried and tested ways of unlocking new ideas. It's because stupid questions tend to be the ones that question the fundamentals. And it's these fundamentals that all too often are based on unfounded or erroneous assumptions.

So next time you're stuck, get in touch with your inner four year old and ask "Why?" Ask it about everything and anything. Get answers and then ask it again about them.

Just don't do it in that four year old whiny voice, that'll drive your colleagues nuts.

Expose yourself

No, not like that.

The thing is, if all you ever think about comes from within your industry then you will never ever break out of the habits of mind that are holding you back.

Einstein once said, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." Yet when you look at many businesses today, they are endlessly using the same thinking that caused their problems in the first place. They develop an industry language which imprisons their thinking.

It's time to escape. Look outside the industry. What can you learn from other companies in other markets? What inspiration can you gain? What can the worlds of science, art, education, brain surgery and stamp collecting teach you that the competition remains completely ignorant of?

BRAN is good for you

This is less a technique for generating good ideas as a way of weeding out bad ones. I don't know where it came from originally but it was taught to me during ante-natal classes. It's a handy little mnemonic for benefits, risks, alternatives, nothing.

It works like this. Take your idea and first look at the benefits of your approach. What does it have going for it? What are all the good things, the **benefits**, that could happen as a result? Then look at the **risks**. What could go wrong? What do you stand to lose? Then ask yourself what the **alternatives** are. This is sadly overlooked in far too many strategy sessions. Finally, what do you think would happen if you did **nothing**?

Simple, yet effective.

Take a walk

A stuck mind loves a static location.

However nice the meeting room you're in. However lovely your desk is. However interesting and entertaining your colleagues are. Sometimes you need to get out. Especially when you're tormented by a blank sheet of paper and no ideas.

So get out. Take a walk. Go to a local café.

Importantly don't try to think too hard about the problem. Let your mind wander and drift where it likes. It is far better at making connections unconsciously than you are at forcing them. You just have to trust it.

Just make sure you have a piece of paper and a pen to hand for when the ideas come.

Go for quantity

The scientist and Nobel Prize winner Dr Linus Pauling once said, "The best way to have a good idea is to have lots of ideas."

We're all time pressured. We're all up against it. And we're all far too keen to assume that the first idea is the best idea.

There's an NLP saying about choice. It says that if you only have one choice you are a robot. If you have two, you're in a dilemma. And it's only when you have three or more that you really have meaningful choice.

So when you are coming up with ideas, come up with lots of ideas. Very importantly, these do not have to be good ideas. Feel free to have bad ones. In fact try to have some really appalling ideas.

Try setting yourself a challenge – in the next 20 minutes, come up with 20 ideas. Don't dwell on them, just write them down. This is not the time for analysis or for why not.

If you are working in a team then build on each others ideas, let them spark new ideas. Keep the momentum.

Heads I win...

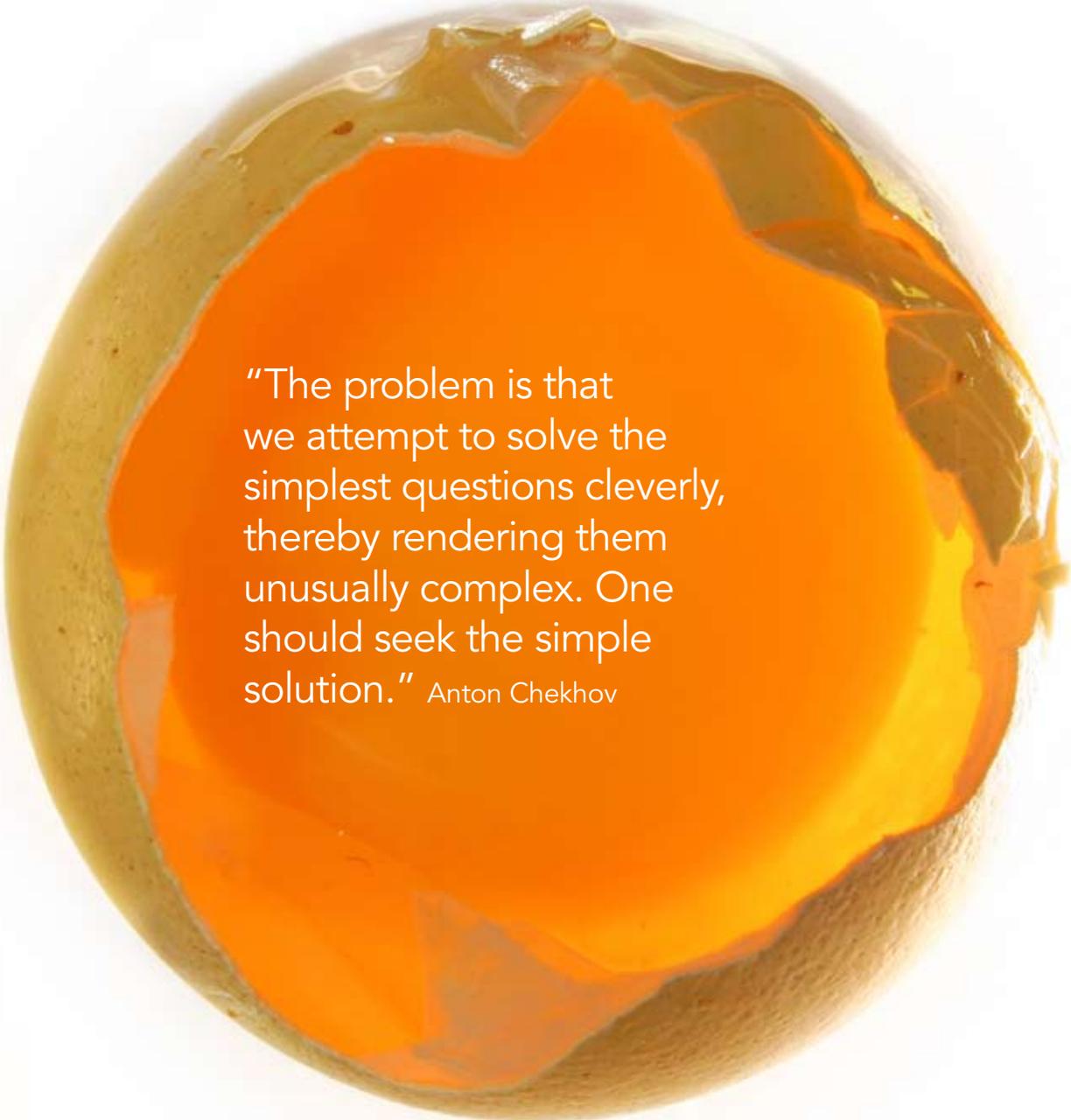
So you've done all the hard work. You've come up with loads of ideas. You've ruthlessly culled them down to the final two. The trouble is, they both seem right. No matter what, you just can't decide between them.

What do you do?

Simple, reach into your pocket and pull out a coin of the realm. Propel it into the air with a flick of your thumb, assigning one of your ideas 'heads' and the other 'tails'.

Choose the idea that matches the result.

Now this part is very important. If once you've done this you experience doubt about your choice, immediately switch to the other one (this is your subconscious' way of guiding you to the right decision). Plus, you get to keep the other option as Plan B (see the Plan B section earlier in the book).

A halved orange is shown from a top-down perspective, with the bright orange flesh exposed. The quote is centered over the orange's surface.

“The problem is that we attempt to solve the simplest questions cleverly, thereby rendering them unusually complex. One should seek the simple solution.” Anton Chekhov

About Banner



At its simplest, Banner is a marketing agency specialising in technology. So if it's got a plug, if it runs on a PC, if it goes beep – we're up for it.

Importantly, we're an integrated agency. This means we can take on seemingly impossible marketing challenges and solve them (without assuming the answer is a full-page press ad).

Abraham Maslow once said "If all you have is a hammer, you'll treat everything as a nail." Integration is about having a hammer, a screwdriver, a full set of spanners and every other tool in the box.

We mix and blend disciplines to deliver better answers to the issues our clients face. We can do this because we have specialists in strategy, advertising, direct marketing, media, events and digital all under one roof.

And we have the experience of making it work for world-leading technology brands in both the business and consumer spaces. We do this across Europe and beyond from a single easy-to-manage location in London.

So now you know.

You can find out more about us at www.b1.com or on our blog at www.b1blog.com. And you can reach me at jay.ball@b1.com.