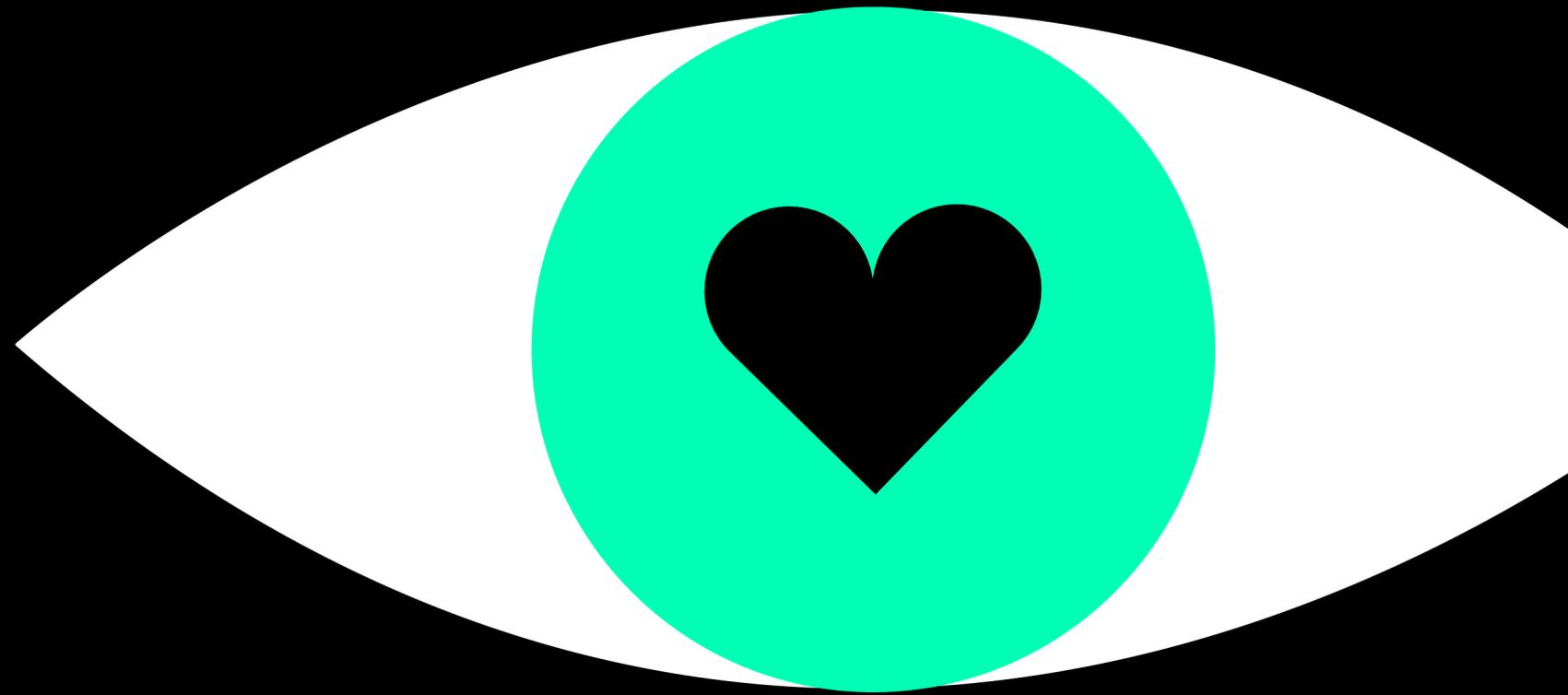


PROPHET

High-Concept Thinking

For Box Office Innovation



The big picture on innovation is a drama of (seemingly) impossible tasks.

The odds are stacked against you from frame one. Antagonists lurk around every corner. It's a race against time. But despite all the twists and turns, there's (usually) a path through the maze that can lead to a happy ending. We want box office success and red-carpet recognition for your innovation. One way to put the odds in your favor is to script in some high concept thinking.

High concept innovation is heisted from high concept movies. A good high concept movie means everyone from the studio execs who greenlight the picture to the popcorn munchers who buy the tickets can easily get what it's about from the title alone – or when the title is expanded with a few words or visuals that can fit on a poster. For example, *Seven* tracks a serial killer working his way down the seven deadly sins. And *Snakes on a Plane* can be interpreted exactly as it sounds – it combines a fear of snakes with a fear of flying. One glance at the poster and you know what to expect.

Let's deconstruct and reconstruct high concept thinking – taking what's proven to work in the reel world of movies and move it into the real world of all other types of innovation.

High- Concept

(n) A simple and often striking idea or premise, as of a story or film, that lends itself to easy promotion and marketing

High-concept thinking is just what the (script) doctor ordered for innovation of all kinds – simple and striking ideas that lend themselves to easy promotion and marketing. If everybody gets it, more somebodies are likely to buy it.

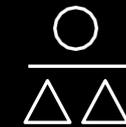
The High-Concept is first on the list of five winnovation factors we use to help clients premiere their innovations to the public.

For more backstory on all fab five factors, read our [Winnovation Factors: Five Criteria for Innovation Excellence](#) white paper.

THE 5 WINNOVATION FACTORS



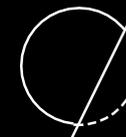
01
High-Concept



02
New Platform Development



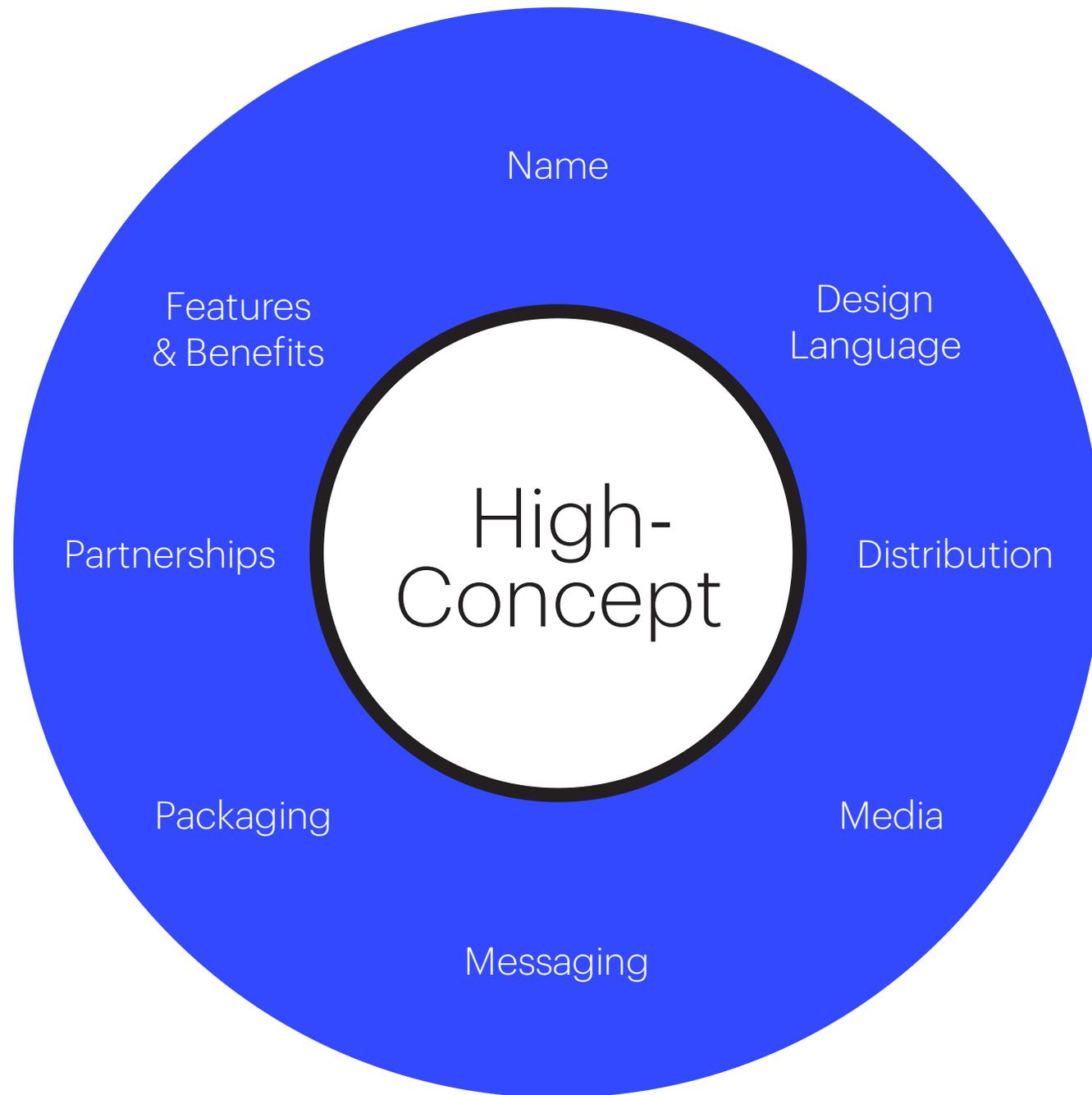
03
Multiple Needgasms



04
80:20 Familiar:Strange



05
Human End-to-End



A high-concept creates consistency

A high-concept not only creates clarity for the idea of an innovation, it also creates consistency to ensure the idea is developed and delivered as originally intended. For example, a new chocolate bar cooked up from the food trend of molecular gastronomy could be based on a high concept of **Choc Science**. How would it be brought to life? The name could be something like Chocology. The product geometry could have a unique shape that breaks the mould of flat rectangles. The product eating experience could raise the bar with ingredient inclusions that wow with unusual tastes, textures and sensations. The design language could showcase an alchemy of flavor that disrupts heritage conventions of old-world artisanship. All this (and more) is based on the high-concept of **Choc Science**.

Evocative

Directive

Concise

A high-concept should be evocative, directive and concise. Sometimes a high-concept can be lifted out and directly applied as the name for a product or service (e.g., **vitaminwater**) or as a handle to frame a new category to consumers (**functional drinks**). But more often than not, a high-concept needs a bit of translation to work in the wild.

High-concept thinking re-centers how companies approach innovation

Many companies still center their innovation efforts on the mantra of 'start with the consumer', but this approach has the Henry Ford downside of 'if I asked people what they wanted they would have said faster horses'. High-concept thinking says center your innovation on the high-concept. You can start anywhere from consumer needs to cultural trends to brand truths to technological breakthroughs. It doesn't matter where you start because the high-concept provides an access point to the mind of the consumer. You don't have to start with the consumer, but you do have to finish there because consumers need to buy the concept in the real (or virtual) world.

HOW HIGH-CONCEPTS ARE USED FOR INNOVATION

Meta
Value



Positioning
Hooks



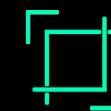
Modded
Extensions



Creative
Collisions

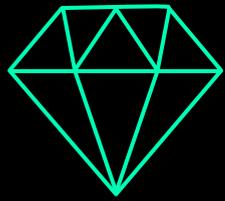


Reinventive
Reframes



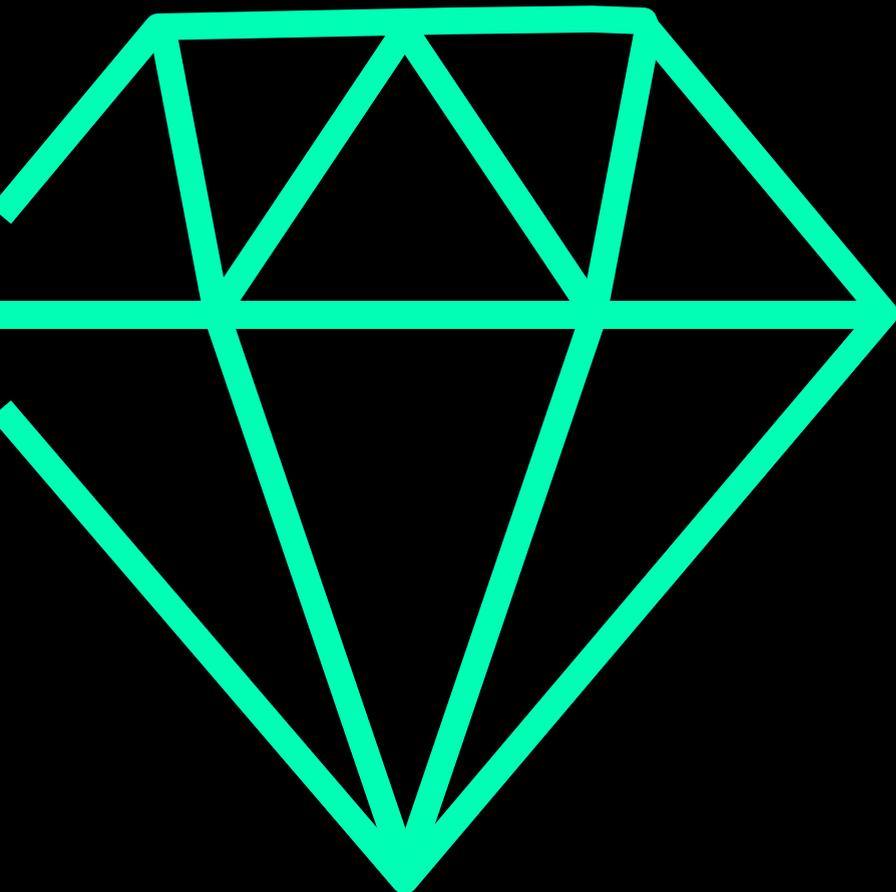
Disruptive
Epiphanies





Meta Value

The **holy grail of post-industrial capitalism** is to find a **secret sauce** that adds value to goods and services in a way that doesn't add (much) cost. This ambition seems to defy the laws of economics the way a **perpetual motion machine** defies the laws of physics. But a high-concept approach can be effective in adding meta value to something above and beyond its matter and energy.

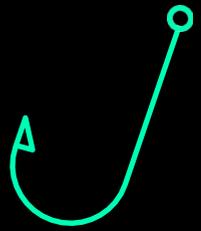


The **Louis XIII** high-concept for Remy Martin helped turn a whole new audience on to cognac by rolling with hip hop codes. It's blingy. It's scarce. It's expensive. It's fit for a king after all. It's become endowed with a legendary value far above that of the drops of century-old liquid contained in a limited-edition crystal bottle. And where's the best place to drink your **Louis XIII**? In da club? How about in your own **Learjet**? A high-flying high-concept that evokes the capriciousness of Shakespeare's King Lear.

Too rich for your blood? We'll stay with the bling theme but take it down a bit. De Beers invented the **Eternity Ring** high concept as a way to shift smaller diamonds unsuitable for its **Engagement Ring** High-concept. Some people see these metals and minerals as priceless symbols of forever love, but others see them as a conspiracy to turn marriage into a **three-ring circus**.

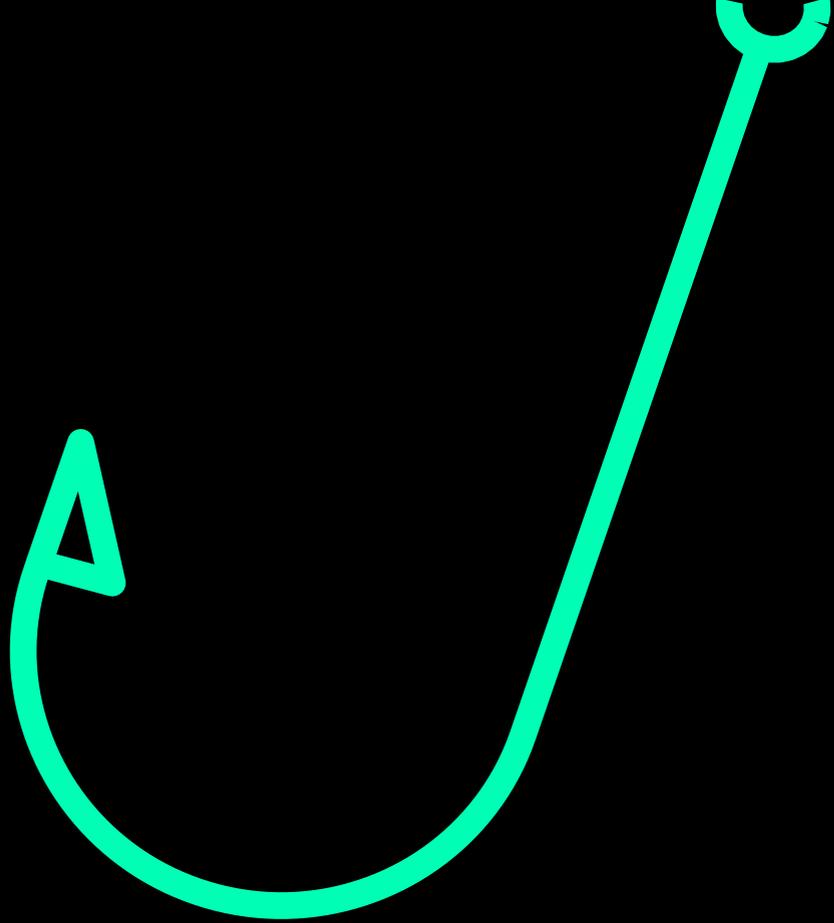
The Terry's **Chocolate Orange** high-concept adds significant value to orange-flavored chocolate. Terry's has embraced its orange-ness in multiple ways. The chocolate has the form factor of a round orange which the eater needs to peel and separate. This ritual releases chocolate pieces shaped like a segment of the actual orange. The **Chocolate Orange** concept helps ensure sizable sales over Christmas in places where it's customary for people to wake up to oranges in their stockings.

High-concepts can also be configured to promote social positivity. The **KeepCup** high-concept adds value beyond the material cost of the vessel. Consumers pay good money for a permanent **coffee cup** when they can get a throwaway (or hopefully recyclable) cup for free. A broader ecosystem of value-exchange has spontaneously formed around the **KeepCup** concept – many **coffee houses** offer discounts for people who use **KeepCups**, and their baristas usually offer up an approving smile for karma value.



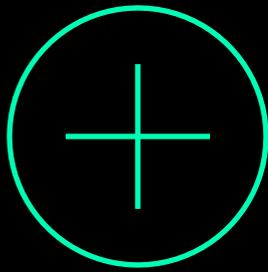
Positioning Hooks

Most product categories are highly contested, and most brands need a relevant positioning hook to differentiate themselves – especially true for new entrants into the competitive fray. The right high-concept can take advantage of category codes to carve out a distinctive space for a brand in the minds of consumers.



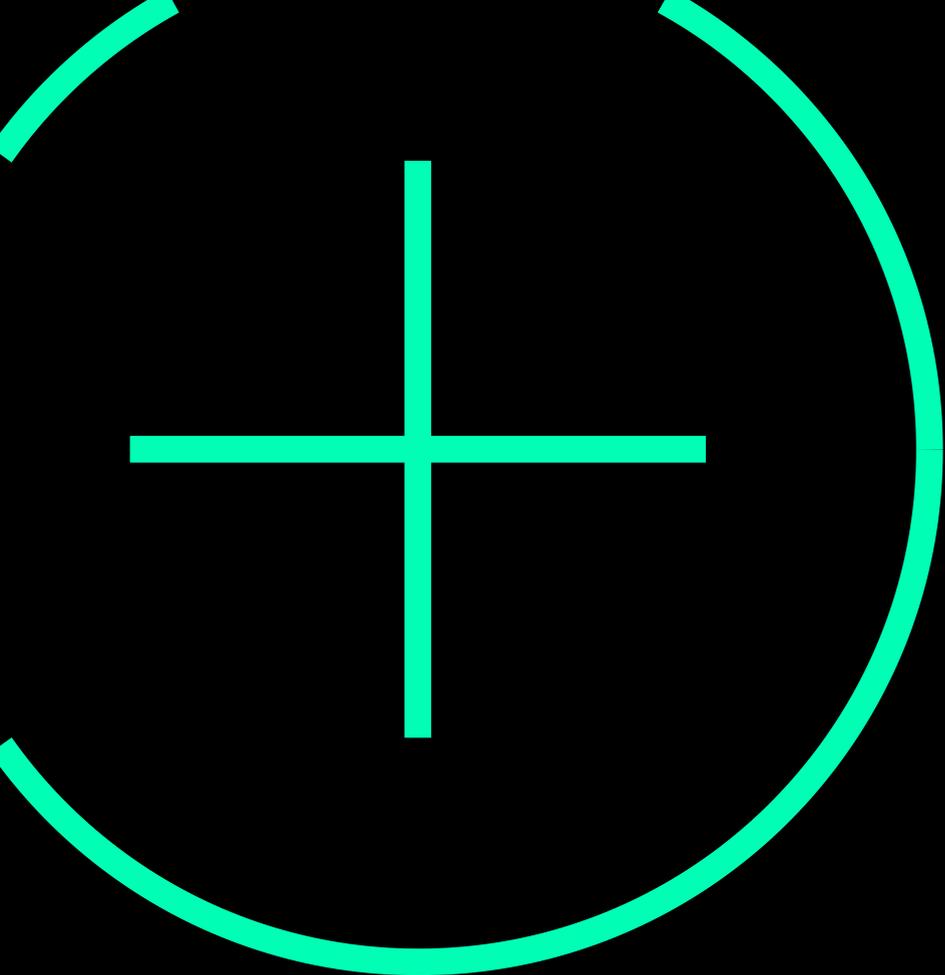
Consumers spend over \$8 billion annually on **online dating** to find their heart's desire. **Match** is the **OG** in the space and positioned itself on the high-concept of an **internet matchmaker**. Other competitors came in with more specialist concepts. There are ethnicity-based high-concepts – **MuzMatch** (playing off the match concept) for Muslims, **JDate** for Jews and **Christian Mingle** for Christians. There's **EliteSingles** for professionals with money. And there's **SilverSingles** for the mature.

Another example in the internet space is **WeChat** whose initial concept combines the convenient voice messaging feature of Whatsapp and the social networking aspect of Facebook, creating a uniquely positioned product that's both useful and engaging for its users. It's an exclusive space for communicating within your network – more straightforward, but less invasive than the usual social media.



Modded Extensions

Brand extension innovations tend to have a higher likelihood of success than innovations that are new to the world. The challenge (and opportunity) is to find the best high-concept to modify something that already lives in the minds of consumers. Extension mod high-concepts can be created through a simple formula of taking an established concept and modifying it with a qualifier that makes it more novel and interesting.

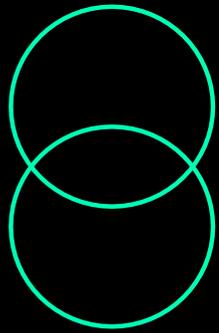


Size matters. And sizing something up or down can be an easy way to mod a high-concept. Back in the day, McDonald's used to bulk up its sales per customer through a **supersize** concept that ended up being eighty-sixed as a result of media fuss over obesity. But **7-Eleven** still lives large with a **Big Gulp** that weighs in at 32 ounces of soda satisfaction. Other FMCG brands are bigging themselves up through **family pack** and **share pack** concepts (which many consumers end up sharing with themselves).

Downsizing can be an equally effective way to mod a category extension. Mary Quant's **mini skirt** concept (named after the **Mini** car) took hemlines to new heights (and fabric costs to new lows). This same **mini** concept is now effective in selling **guilty pleasure** foods by tapping into a portion control psychology that makes **naughty but nice** snacking more permissible. Healthy foods are thinking small as well.

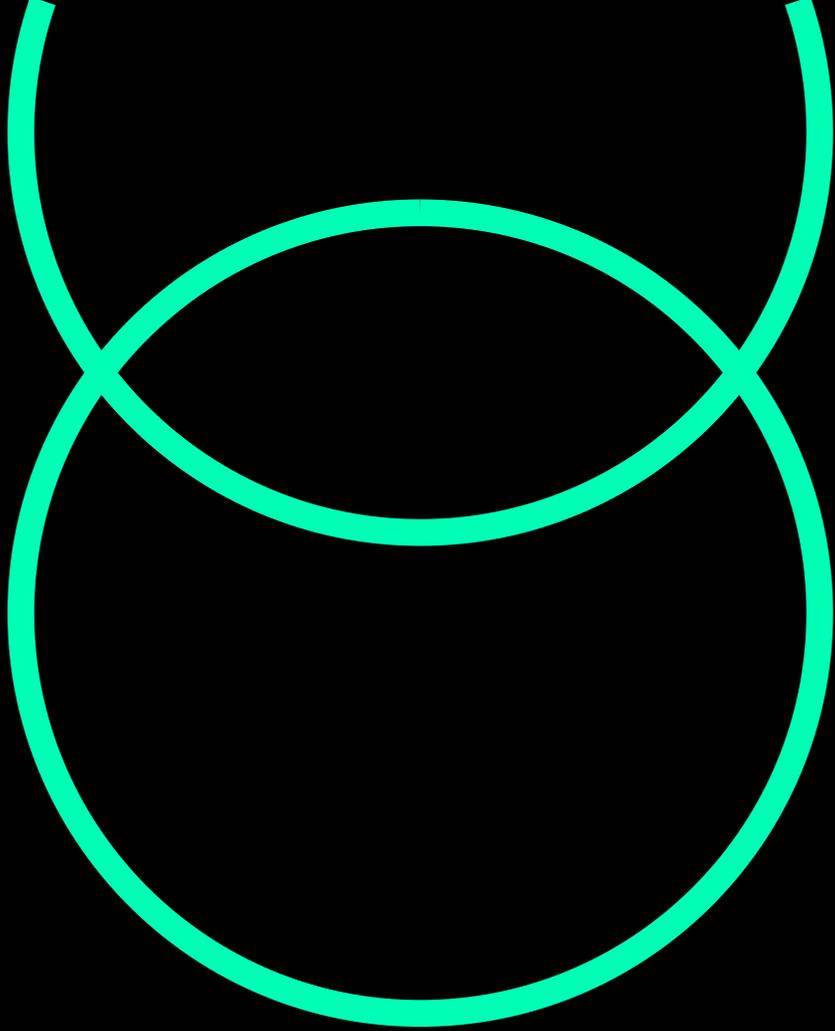
Though **baby carrots** are nothing more than fully-grown carrots cut down to size, they cost more per unit weight than adult carrots. And the latest expensive cheffie trend is food adorned with **microgreens** so small they need to be applied with tweezers.

But there are many extension mod possibilities beyond size. Take one concept, link it with another and you've got a mother lode of inspiration for birthing modded high-concepts. Consumer lifestyles are filled with modded concept narratives: A **yoga pant wearing mother** buys **organic kale** at a **farmers market** before driving her **electric car** back to the family **McMansion** where she pours herself a **Coke Zero** and uses a **smart phone** to plan a **glamping** break at a **music festival**. Modded extension high-concepts are a great way to take something established and 'make it new' in a way that fits with contemporary consumer lifestyles...**Bobos** and beyond.



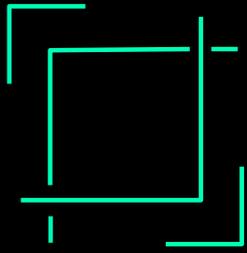
Creative Collisions

The last few decades have seen the rise of creative collisions within and across a variety of categories. The creative collisions phenomenon operates differently from modded extensions where a new concept modifies an established concept. With creative collisions you get two concepts colliding to form a whole new concept that's a fusion of both original concepts.



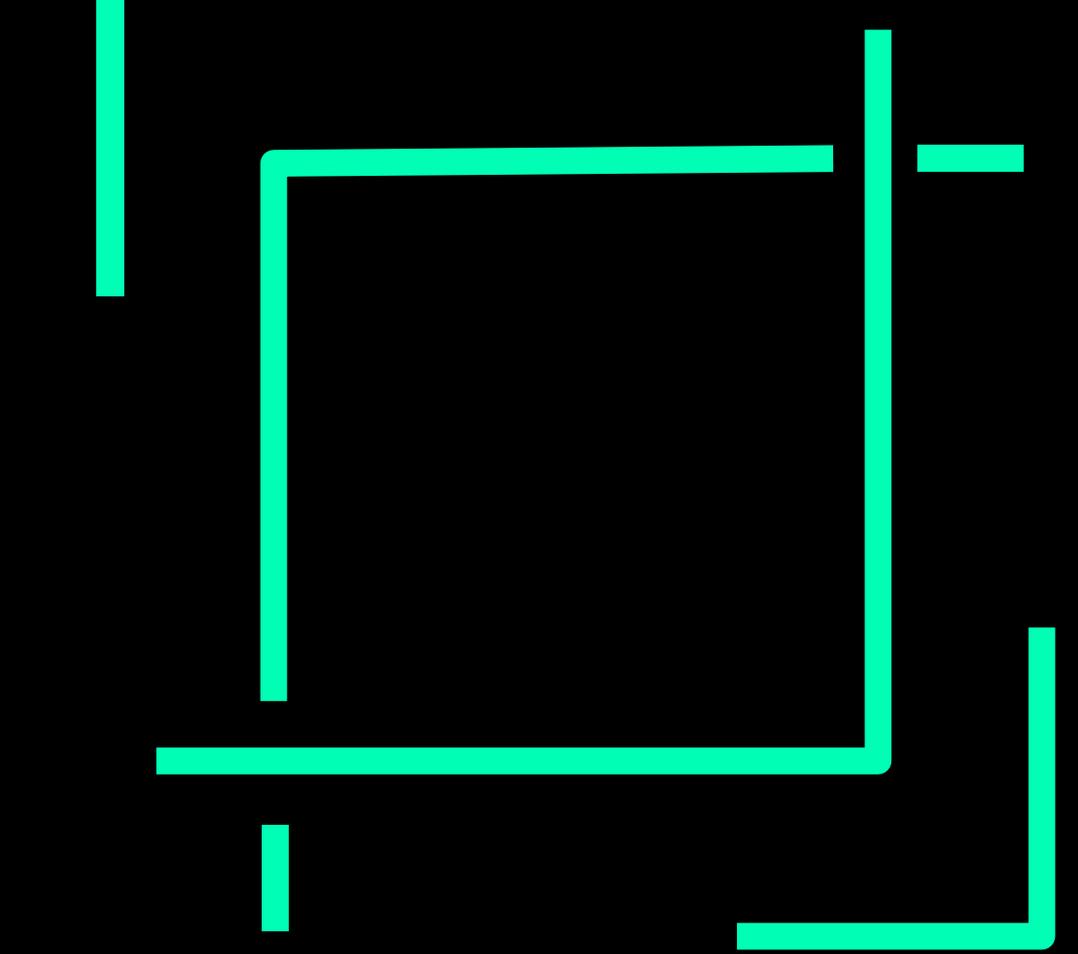
We see a lot of collisions in creative industries such as food, music and entertainment where us pop culture aficionados are always on the (cool) hunt for what's next. We can chomp into fusion eats like **sushi burritos**. We can go out to **hi/lo restaurants** like **Bubble Dog** which serves champagne with hot dogs. We can listen to **rap metal** while we cross our fingers for a full reunion of **Guns N Roses** – originally formed from a crossfire cross-pollination of **L.A. Guns** and **Hollywood Rose**. We can watch **horror comedies** like *Happy Death Day*. We can embrace **phygital** experiences that integrate the physical and digital worlds.

Creative collision high-concepts also operate in more mundane spaces. **Boxer briefs** (for men and women of all cis and trans varieties) are super-comfortable and ensure nobody gets their knickers in a twist. **Wholebean instant** coffee blends micro-ground roasted whole beans into **instant coffee** for better aroma and mouthfeel. **50:50 Bread** has the softness of white and (hopefully) the health benefits of wheat for one's **peanut butter and jelly** or **ham and cheese** sandwiches. Most creative collision high-concepts try to deliver the best of both worlds, but some like **sofa beds** can be a bit of a nightmare.



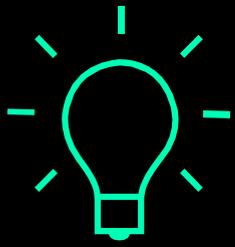
Reinventive Reframes

Sometimes the best way to innovate something new is to start with something old. If something was successful in the past, it could be rewarding to reinvent it for the present (and future). If something works in one context, it could make commercial sense to reframe it for a whole new space. Reinventive reframe high-concepts are proven to work, in part because they start with an innovation that's proven to work.



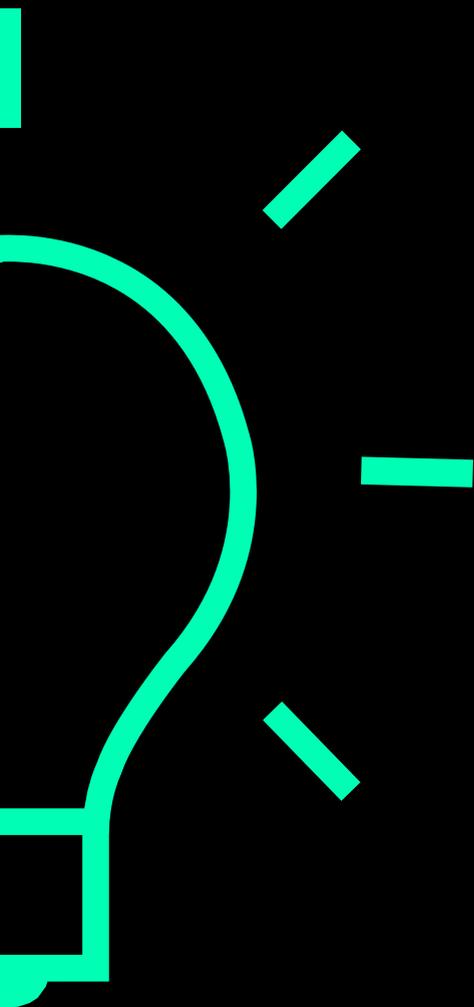
High-concept movies set a high standard for reinventive reframes. *Jaws* was the world's top grossing film before the force of *Star Wars* was with us. *Jaws* is essentially a reinvention of *Moby Dick*, but with a great white shark instead of a great white whale. **Volkswagen** is also driven to reinvent. Its **retrofuturist** concept for the **Beetle** relaunch was wildly successful. This same concept was reinterpreted more recently in the refreshed Fiat 500C.

Reinventive reframes can expand a market. Nobody wanted to sink their teeth into Patagonian toothfish, but when it was reframed through the concept of **Chilean sea bass**, people couldn't stop eating it up. The classic summer drink Pimm's had a sales window as narrow as the British summer, but it was successful in growing sales in colder climes through a **Winter Pimm's** high-concept distilled from a dark spirit instead of a light spirit. Reinvention can be a great approach to invention.



Disruptive Epiphanies

Disruptive innovations are few and far between. They also can be confusing to consumers because they're bringing something completely new and different into the world. Disruptive epiphany high-concepts must work extra hard to help people understand what a novel innovation is all about, usually by making reference to ideas that are already present in the collective **cultural consciousness**.



If you've built a better mousetrap that disrupts the dominant mousetrap paradigm, you need the right disruptive epiphany to help the world beat a mental path to your door: **Humane trap** concepts could kill with kindness, a **Sleeping Beauty** concept might put the mouse to sleep instead of killing it ('catch and release' outdoors), an **abracatRAPra** concept could make a mouse carcass completely disappear (out of sight, out of mind) and a **Circle of Life** concept could turn a mouse into lawn fertilizer (disruptively turning death into life). All of these high-concepts declare their mousetrap difference and make some cheddar by tapping into established cultural meanings.

Many disruptive innovations are based on a disruptive technology, and tech (and tech-enabled) companies have played the disruptive epiphanies card well over the years. The **personal computer** concept disrupted the paradigm that 'computers are just for business'. Later, the **Windows** concept cured computerphobia for the masses by turning arcane computerese commands into a visual system of computer ease anyone could see through.

Then still later the Internet became a vehicle for disruptive technologies like **cloud computing** that's concept doesn't try to explain how it works, but instead evokes a feeling that something good is happening up in the clouds. It was another high-concept, **search engines**, that made the internet useful – netting out with a commons' infrastructure to enable disruptive business concepts like **Netflix** and **Net-a-Porter**.

One of the most satisfying things an innovator can do is bring a whole new product category to the world. And disruptive epiphany high-concepts can be particularly valuable in these endeavors. At the turn of the 20th century, the preferred mode of transportation shifted from horses and carriages to **horseless carriages**. The **horseless carriage** concept (later abbreviated to 'car') gave consumers the epiphany that this new technology was just like what they were already using – only without the horse (but maintaining 'horse equity' by measuring the engine in horsepower).

At the turn of the 21st century, smoking started giving way to **vaping**. The **vaping** high-concept references smoking in a way that conveys 'new and different' (and less harmful) than smoking. We naturally breathe out water vapor every time we exhale (visible during cold temperatures), so the concept of **vaping** feels more intuitive and comfortable to consumers.

Sometimes innovators take matter(s) to a more fundamental level and bring new molecular substances to the world. The **NutraSweet** high-concept conveyed 'nutrition value' with a lab-made molecule that didn't have any nutrition value at all – making consumers feel better about ingesting an **artificial sweetener**. Many Rx pharmaceuticals have high-concepts based on what abstract linguistic units evoke in the human mind – **Paxil** evokes 'peace' and **Zoloft** creates a loftier mood. Better living through chemistry.

PROPHET

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If you're thinking about how to best foster resilience in your company and would like to discuss these ideas and specific approaches further, please [contact us](#). We'd be delighted to help you to slingshot your organization towards a more resilient future.

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About Prophet

Prophet is a consultancy that helps clients find uncommon growth through marketing, brand, experience, innovation and organization & culture capabilities. We operate differently than other consultancies, blending insight, strategy and creativity with an optimistic yet pragmatic approach.

We have partnered with some of the world's most successful companies, including Marriott, Walmart, AB InBev, AXA, Samsung, Emart, Midea and MB Bank. With twelve global offices and more than 450 experts in marketing, innovation, digital and design, we are able to bring together the right people with the right experience to solve our clients' business challenges.

Our Core Work:

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