

News Business



OPINION: Collaboration in innovation the way ahead

By Christina Gerakiteys

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AS any entrepreneur will tell you, you won't get far without determination, commitment and collaboration.

These qualities have never been more imperative than now, when the only thing on which we can count is that we can't really count on anything – at least not anything permanent.

Cases in point. Seven years ago, the iPhone didn't exist – now we are surrounded by a smart phone and tablet “war”.

Two years ago, no one really believed the resources boom would end. And we held on to intellectual property, copyright and our ideas as if they were sacred possessions that everyone was out to steal. Nowadays, hold on to them for too long and you find that someone else has thought and acted first. Or you are pretty much passe before you have reached first base.

With businesses facing new challenges every hour of every day, there is much to be said for collaboration. As Jean Bas director Kevin Coffey mentions in our workshops, the “Hollywood model” has been around for some time and the rest of industry is starting to catch on. Hollywood brings together crews “as needed” for the production schedule, depending on the type of film.

Creative conversations and innovative ideas flow when people get together and share. This becomes more apparent when industry groups gather together, and even more when there is a crisis.

The fashion industry has led the collaborative trend for some time. We've seen Peter Morrissey release an exclusive range for Big W and Jason Wu design a line for Target. Other label collaborators have included Nike with Liberty, and Stella McCartney with Gap Kids.

Entrepreneurs' magazine Renegade Collective, in an article on the art of collaboration, quotes Piers Halleen, a brand manager at Lion, as saying: "Collaboration is all about helping you innovate your brand without innovating it. Collaborating is one way of refreshing your brand quickly."

Creatives have been collaborating for some time. Around the city we have collaborative spaces such as Renew Newcastle, The Roost and, most recently, Innx at the old Gamers Motor Auction site.

In the spirit of adapting (borrowing an idea from one product, industry or business and applying it to another), collaboration may inject enough alternate thinking to inspire innovation within other industries.

That's not to say it's not already happening in pockets. Organisations such as HunterNet and Hunter Manufacturers encourage their members to share ideas at monthly meetings and through conferences and workshops. However, it could happen more often and more consistently.

We are lucky to have many resources and networking opportunities in Newcastle and the Hunter. Aside from the usual organisations that hold regular events and bring in knowledgeable speakers (Newcastle Business Club, Hunter Business Women's Network), many other organisations present events to stimulate ideas and prompt "I'd never thought of that" actions, even collaborations.

The Business Centre has a great series of "BAR – Bite Sized Business Briefings" delivered at lunchtime.

Hunter Valley Research Foundation Breakfasts provide information often directly related to our region. UQ Power has a great leadership program coming up. And in May the BRW Most Innovative Companies Breakfast will restart.

If you lack inspiration, there are plenty of avenues available. All you need is the drive and commitment to give it a go.

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