

Aruba, September 10, 2015 - □ We've Become So Obsessed With 'Innovation' That It's Now Meaningless. The word "innovation" and its many derivatives have come to define the state of business today. Every company, regardless of size, the service they provide or the product they produce wants to at least be perceived as being innovative, regardless of the reality. In fact, the word is so over-used that it's quickly joining the ranks of the now-meaningless buzzword brigade, nestled securely between "cutting edge" and "game changing." Most companies, particularly startups, are challenged simply by the pressures of our economic climate to innovate or die. It's enough to drive a budding entrepreneur insane. How can you possibly constantly create the next industry-shaping idea? You see that lightning over there? Here's a bottle. Best of luck.

Here's the reality though: innovation is a double-edged sword. Everyone has to be perceived to be constantly innovative to have a chance of standing out from the crowd in today's crowded technology marketplace. But innovation merely for the sake of it is meaningless, at least to the majority of us. Sure, some of those monster companies out there can dedicate entire divisions to building teleporters and time machines, but for most of us, we're simply trying to provide valuable products and solutions and make a little money doing it.

Also, be wary of getting too good at something. Even if you were to bottle that lightning, all you've done is establish an expectation in the marketplace that you're going to do it again and again. Apple's stock is taking a hit right now even though its sales numbers remain the envy of every company in the world. Why? Because the company was so innovative for so long that any new release that doesn't blow everyone's collective mind is considered a failure.

But again, that's a bit of an extreme example. Let's talk about how we -- the business leaders and entrepreneurs of the world -- bring the perceptions and realities of innovation a little closer together. How do we engage in the nebulous activity of "innovation," while avoiding the second edge of that sword and still meeting the needs of our existing and potential customers?

For me, innovation is at its most powerful when it's born out of a need to help someone. A business, a department, a team, an individual -- whoever is having problems out there, let's bring our minds together and find a new or more efficient way to solve those problems.

Innovation has to remain customer-centric. While the population as a whole is more tech-savvy than it's ever been, they still don't move anywhere near as fast as we (the creators of technology and software) do. Not everyone wants to be an early adopter or is looking to

constantly disrupt their workflows with the newest app, tool or feature.

Instead, think long and hard about what tangible benefits a new feature or technology actually provides to those that you have the privilege to serve or sell to. I don't want to make better things; I want to make better, happier, more efficient or more productive people. That mindset is what brings the idea of innovation alive for me.

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