

# Targeting Executives' Top Strategic Opportunities

A Compilation of Popular Brainzooming Strategy Articles



**Brainzooming**<sup>™</sup>  
THE BRAINZOOMING GROUP



## Targeting Executives' Top Strategic Opportunities

We ask executives about their top opportunities and challenges when they download Brainzooming strategy eBooks and tools. We reviewed their answers for the past year, identifying nine themes among their responses.

We've targeted popular Brainzooming articles for each of the executive opportunities. These articles introduce new thinking for approaching strategy more collaboratively and effectively.

### Table of Contents

Designing and Facilitating Strategic Planning . . . . .	1
Making Strategic Planning Fun . . . . .	8
Creating Alignment with Priorities and Goals . . . . .	13
Leading Change Management . . . . .	18
Developing Growth Strategies . . . . .	20
Engaging and Fostering Strategic Collaboration . . . . .	22
Implementing and Creating Results . . . . .	27
Anticipating Market Dynamics . . . . .	30
Articulating a Compelling Vision . . . . .	35

As you review the opportunities and challenges most relevant for your organization, we invite you to reach out. [Let's chat! I'm happy to offer additional ideas for addressing your strategic possibilities with the wide array of free tools and collaborative strategy approaches Brainzooming develops and uses.](#)



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**Founder**  
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## 5 Keys to Streamline a Strategic Planning Process

Strategic planning is a task most executives want to avoid. Why? Because, it's typically painful. It feels cumbersome and disconnected from what's important to the organization right now.

The good news is that simplifying strategy is possible so that it becomes engaging, productive, and fun!

Using the Brainzooming Method, we can involve more *brains* in strategy. Amazingly, that both accelerates the process and makes the resulting strategy better and easier to implement.

### What Are the Keys to Streamlining Strategic Planning?

Through hundreds of Brainzooming engagements with clients across industries, we've found five basics for streamlining strategic planning:

1. Successfully involving diverse participants across all organizational levels
2. Replacing cumbersome, traditional techniques with creative thinking exercises to expand strategic possibilities
3. Focusing strategy planning on your most important success factors
4. Customizing the process for leadership's strategic change expectations
5. Adapting a proven process to your organization to build on your strategic strengths

### The Brainzooming Method

- Incorporates creative innovation and strategic approaches from multiple disciplines
- Adapts to your business needs
- Has been employed successfully hundreds of times
- Is continuously evolving – because that's what business does
- Customizes our process for a client's specific needs



Brainzooming produces strategic conversations that lead to action and results.

**We adapt, and you succeed.**

Brainzooming 

### 1. Involving Diverse Participants at All Levels

Engaging diverse participants with a collaborative approach to strategy planning creates more thorough and robust plans. By involving more people, we routinely turn weeks of solo work into streamlined, dynamic group collaborations.

The forced-embrace of virtual meetings that emerged during the Covid pandemic dramatically furthers opportunities to engage diverse audiences. Collaborative strategy generates significant thinking and input; this can feed directly into strategy plans.

## Lowered Barriers to Engaging Diverse Audiences

The pandemic-driven shift toward greater acceptance of virtual interaction and experiences dramatically lowered barriers to engaging diverse audiences.



Organizations & individuals overcame technology and proximity-related **excuses** for avoiding collaboration.



**Incremental costs** to include and engage diverse audiences and remote groups dropped to near zero.



Using innovative online collaboration platforms provides the opportunity for **large participant groups**.



The **anonymity** options that online engagement enables, eliminate political and cultural barriers to feedback.



The right collaboration platforms **level the playing field** between in-person and remote participants.



Virtual platforms allow for shorter, targeted, and more **frequent engagement**.

### Brainzooming

When Brainzooming moves strategy planning online (whether standalone or coupled with in-person collaborations), clients can expand participant diversity in even more meaningful ways. With lower barriers to engaging diverse audiences, Brainzooming takes full advantage by emphasizing:

- Order of magnitude increases in group size (at small incremental costs) to boost diverse thinking
- Embracing anonymous responses to eliminate political and cultural feedback barriers
- Planning within shorter, more targeted engagements that free up participants from time spent in unproductive meetings

### Bringing Diverse Participation to Life

- Ensuring you are **involving key parties early** in strategy planning
- Engaging the **optimum mix of strategic perspectives and voices**
- **Using anonymity to make space for innovative ideas**

## Designing and Facilitating Strategic Planning

## 2. Expanding Possibilities with Creative Thinking Exercises

Standard planning processes make executives complete complex templates and write lengthy (but often still painfully light on detail) strategic plans. Completing supporting templates happens without efficient and effective ways to generate the necessary answers. This disconnect causes floundering and frustration for executives.

Another frustration? Writing strategy plans is an infrequent task for nearly everyone. That's why most executives never become adept at completing plans with the optimum levels of breadth and detail.

The Brainzooming Method employs a completely opposite approach to support collaboration and accelerated planning timelines.

We open doors to innovative thinking by surrounding participants (executives, managers, and employees) with productive, creative exercises. These allow people to:

- Efficiently share what they know along with perspectives
- Help them to think about familiar situations in new ways
- Express ideas in ways that lead to building strategy plan inputs as the process progresses

This approach eliminates planning's unproductive aspects. We further accomplish this because Brainzooming compiles all the input into a strategy plan with a format and depth that fits **how your organization most successfully implements**.

Replacing strategy planning's tedious aspects with efficient, alternative approaches lets participants positively contribute in more productive and efficient ways.

### Effectively and Efficiently Expanding Innovative Thinking

- Creating a productive environment for **collaborative engagement**
- Enabling blue sky thinking and breakthrough ideas
- Using strategic conversations to **accelerate planning's pace**

### Collaboratively Articulating a Direction

- **Knowing what is needed to develop the direction**
- **Questions and exercises that open the door for all audiences**
- **Managing interactions that lead to strategic ideas & implementation steps**
- **Actively listening and placing relevant ideas into themes that shape the strategic direction**

Brainzooming 



### 3. Focusing planning on your most important success factors

Organizations can mistakenly separate strategy planning from what happens on a daily basis among employees, external audiences, and markets. This occurs when executives view strategy as having *only* a long-term focus.

This mindset that only focuses on long-term issues causes your organization to:

- Miss the opportunity to positively impact many critical near-term elements
- Primarily address future initiatives with often vague steps and far-off completion dates
- Be ill-prepared to devote sufficient energy to near-term issues with strategic implications

Avoiding these risks is why we engage leadership early in any strategy planning engagement to identify:

- What matters for the organization
- What it most needs to achieve with the strategy
- The factors that will drive positive outcomes or create critical challenges

We then reach out broadly to internal and external audiences, looking for themes that suggest what's most important now and in the future.

Our leadership-driven, collaboration-centric approach employs strategic conversations and group exercises. This approach focuses on strategic issues irrespective of the time horizon. The resulting strategy plan then ties to an organization's most important activities.

#### Focusing on What Matters

- Identifying the **right planning approach** for your organization
- Fostering **strategic thinking within an organization**
- Addressing **what matters**

### 4. Match your strategy process to your change expectations.

Before launching strategy development, it's vital to pin down how dramatically different an organization's expected direction should be relative to its current strategy. Working from a strategic change profile opens the door to designing a streamlined planning process that pushes the organization's thinking consistent with leadership's boldness.

For example:

- If the organization's current strategy has been successful, it may simply want to extend it. In this case, strategy exercises should focus on innovative, albeit incremental, improvements.
- An organization that sees upside or challenges that are addressable within its current model needs exercises that foster innovative thinking.
- When an organization needs to transform, but there's resistance or reluctance, step one focuses on presenting data and emotional messages. The goal is to create greater understanding of the need for dramatic change. Then, transformation can proceed with strategy exercises intended to push for bold, new, non-linear thinking.

While we adapt exercises to match the strategic change expectations, certain types of exercises are proven effective, including:

- Analogies – These help executives step away from familiar situations to imagine them in new ways
- Extreme Exercises – Incorporate severe constraints, permissions, and twists to spur disruptive thinking in a safe environment
- Strategic Detours – Approaching familiar strategic thinking questions and exercises through new pathways that promote fresh thinking

No matter which exercises best fit the overall process, they all need to create opportunities for participants to easily and successfully share their perspectives. This applies no matter where someone works within the organization.

### **Customizing Strategic Exercises for Effectiveness**

- Exploring **four strategic change scenarios**
- **The best strategy exercises** and their important characteristics
- Developing **actionable analogies** to open strategic possibilities
- Making **strategic detours** part of planning

### **5. Adapting the process to an organization's strengths.**

As a process, strategic planning must serve the business, not the other way around. That's why, rather than using a static approach, adapting planning to your organization streamlines the process and creates better results. A process that fits an organization creates greater flexibility for participants, saving them (and the overall organization) time and hassle.

# We Start with a Process, then Adapt.

- The Brainzooming Group customizes an approach that includes:
  - Broad input from stakeholders near the start of the process
  - Includes in-person and/or online collaboration to articulate the future direction



6

That's why Brainzooming is emphatic about streamlining strategy: it's the best way to maximize the time spent on implementation versus an overly-long process to develop strategy.

Before launching strategy planning, review your previous planning outputs and current strategy work to see how it might fit into future planning. You can do this through:

- Inventorying what's available from your previous strategy planning and subsequent work that is relevant and forward-looking.
- Determining how complete and informative your organization's market insights work is.
- Evaluating where and how you successfully implemented your previous strategies and where you struggled.
- Building on everything possible that already exists and is additive to the next strategy




We also adapt planning by matching the variety of interactions to your objectives:

- It's beneficial to ask questions one-on-one, whether via personal interview or survey, when seeking factual information. This is also important when you expect answers to differ based on who else is in the room.
- Smaller groups are ideal when you want more people actively and concurrently generating ideas.
- When a small number of people have more information than everyone else, a large, in-person group becomes appropriate. When employing large groups, though, we recommend using smaller teams from within the large group to increase diverse thinking and the volume of output.

No matter your strategy planning situation, streamline it to include only the steps you absolutely must complete for strong implementation and results.

### Adapting Strategic Planning to Streamline It

- Actionable steps to [accelerate strategic planning](#)
- Three ways to [improve your strategic planning process](#)
- [Rethinking your strategy planning approach](#)



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Learn how Blast! uses online collaboration to reduce meeting times by 80%.

<https://www.brainzooming.com/blast>

## Making Strategic Planning Fun

Strategic planning can be fun . . . if you know the right ways to liven it up while still developing solid strategies!

Let's first define what we mean by "fun" as it relates to strategic planning. *Fun strategic planning* is a mentally stimulating, very collaborative experience among highly-engaged groups to want to participate in strategic planning in the future.

Wrapping strategy meetings in creative thinking exercises and fresh, mentally-stimulating activities turns strategic planning into a productive, enjoyable, and fun experience for organizations, senior executives, and internal teams.

### Enabling Breakthrough Strategic Thinking

#### Invite broader participation and adapt accordingly

There's little fun in the same executives having the same conversations about the same challenges or avoiding the same topics that they do every year during strategic planning. Increasing the diversity of people and thinking provides an almost immediate impact. New thinking leads to new possibilities and opportunities.

Look for ways to diversify who participates in strategy meetings (or at least contributes to strategic planning):

- People who are new to the company
- People from multiple generations
- Individuals that have recently worked at competitors or in other industries
- Interns that haven't thought much about your organization but have lots of ideas
- Anyone else who doesn't look like or think like the executive team that's been in place for years

Importantly, as you include people that may be unfamiliar with the organization's leaders or are apprehensive about participating in strategy, you need to make sure that it's easy, safe, and fun for them to participate.

- Let them speak before executives weigh in
- Give them selected topics upfront to think about and come prepared with ideas
- Use language to discuss strategy in the meeting that is familiar and inviting

Think through and plan on how manage everyone's entire experience to maximize interaction. Keeping participation broad and frequent provides more opportunities for fun engagement through interactive exercises.

## **Make Strategy Exercises Fun**

One of the most significant things a strategist can do to make planning engaging is to employ *fun* exercises to develop strategy. What makes strategy exercises fun?

- They are easy for participants to understand, while still holding a few surprises
- People can clearly see how to participate in productive ways
- They provide rewarding experiences, as participants see and feel progress
- The exercises have enough structure to focus interactions while allowing space for productive strategic conversations and imagining new possibilities
- Participants aren't forced to deal with complex outputs, enabling them to easily contribute their expertise and creative thinking

When you ask people about familiar things in new and unconventional ways, there is a real opportunity to combine fun and bold thinking.

## **Pick a Venue that Says Fun**

Reserve a different location or room for your strategic planning meeting. If you always have strategy meetings in the same place, change the venue, ideally to somewhere offsite. An external venue enlivens strategy because:

- **It looks different**
- **It's flexible**
- **It removes some logistics pressure**

If you do need to stay at the office, meet somewhere different: Go outside, to the cafeteria, or to a meeting room much bigger than you'd ever need for the number of people expected. Why the extra space? Providing people more physical space for their bodies leads to more mental white space to imagine new ideas.

## **Bring Humor to Ice Breakers and Introductions**

An enjoyable strategic planning session should start on a light note, and never settle for boring introductions focused on name, title, and tenure. As you invest the time for a fun strategic planning icebreaker, try to use one that directly contributes to a fun environment or helps the group to network and collaborate more effectively during the meeting.

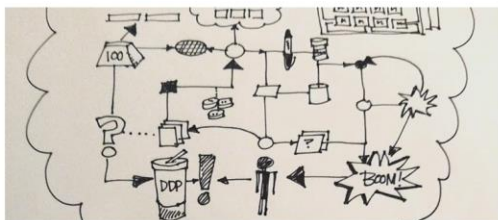
You can also post questions with a choice of two answers. Have everyone pick an answer that will help you divide the group into smaller work groups later in the meeting.

## Let People Know You Expect Outrageous

Strategy participants are often reluctant to push strategy ideas very far. That's natural. If they feel on the hook to make a big idea happen, they may hold back in sharing it. That's why it's important to let them know boldness is okay. It's even better to clearly and blatantly ENCOURAGE complete outrageousness!

If requesting outrageous thinking is new for your team, you may need to provide a bolder innovation vocabulary. This will help them describe a bigger, more dramatic vision for the future and the innovations that it will take.

## Disrupt Expectations to Create Fun



TURN UP THE SPEED & VARIETY



REARRANGE SMALL GROUPS



CREATE A COMPETITION



MAX OUT ON BREAKS, FOOD, & DRINKS

# DISRUPT EXPECTATIONS TO CREATE FUN

To spread the fun and engagement opportunities throughout any strategy meeting, create a varied meeting environment:

- **Turn up the speed and variety** - Make strategy exercises more fun by spending only seven or eight minutes with an exercise or set of questions before changing the thinking perspective. For the next round, address the same issue from a different customer, competitor, or industry supplier perspective.
- **Continually rearrange working groups** – Divide a large group into smaller ones so everyone can actively participate more actively. Repeatedly vary the small groups. Ensure that every person has a chance to work closely with many other people in the group. This type of interpersonal variety breaks up the monotony of a boring strategy meeting.

- **Hold competitions among small groups** – Create competitions among the smaller groups working on strategy exercises. Challenge each group to do more than the other groups of whatever it is you need – number of ideas, bold variations, diverse scenarios, outrageous market disruptions. Cheer for the team that wins, then give everybody another chance to win with the next small group exercise.
- **Increase breaks, adding fun food and drinks** - Schedule short, frequent breaks. Provide people time to stand up, move, and even do jumping jacks, stretches, or relaxation techniques. Bring in fun food during a break. Looking forward to something enjoyable at the next break can alleviate tedium and provide a charge during challenging strategy discussions.

While toys provide fun distractions visually and as things to play with and throw around, the fun in fun strategic planning comes from active participation, engagement, and the opportunity to productively contribute to the organization becoming more successful!



### Fun Strategic Planning is:

- Inclusive
- Fast
- Analytical
- Creative
- Innovative
- Results-Oriented

Learn the best ideas for  
making strategy planning fun  
in your organization.

Download Your  
FREE Guide Today!

<https://info.brainzooming.com/fun-strategy-ideas>



**Looking for new and varied  
strategy perspectives?**



Scan the QR Code and book a free 30-minute meeting with Brainzooming founder, Mike Brown. He'll share free ideas and possibilities for your next strategy.

## 3 Ways to Keep Strategic Priorities Front and Center with Executives

An executive reported a real-time challenge: keeping the senior team at her company focused on strategic priorities. Depending on the number of executives, or the positions of those prone to overly-detailed discussions, making sure a senior team does not get caught in the weeds during strategy meetings can be a touchy proposition.

It's an issue familiar to many organizations. We find it typical that at least one or two individuals in any senior group are comfortable sticking to more detail than you would expect them to embrace. These may be individuals who are responsible for specific areas (and perhaps have been so throughout their careers) and/or ones with personalities oriented toward greater-than-average detail.

### Keeping Strategic Priorities Front and Center

Do you struggle keeping senior-level strategy discussions at the appropriate level? If so, try these techniques  
Brainzooming has employed over the years to focus meetings on strategic priorities that legitimately deserve executive suite attention.



#### **1. Identify Where Everyone Stands Up Front**

We are major proponents for meeting with executives before important strategy discussions. Whether through in-person interviews or some type of online input, it is helpful to know which executives are thinking what, and what issues resonate most strongly with them. Pre-meetings provide a sense of areas in which individuals may take the group into unnecessary detail. Questions to explore up front include:

- What are the most important issues to address?
- Where do you suspect strategy discussions could potentially derail?
- What factors are important for determining the right strategy?
- What topics do you feel most strongly about addressing in the meeting?

Based on participants' answers, you will develop an early indication of the areas in which a meeting could go into the weeds. You will also have a sense of the major strategic themes to use in anchoring meeting conversations. Also, look for the senior

### Creating Alignment with Priorities and Goals

leaders most likely to keep things out of the weeds. Talk with them beforehand, asking for their assistance to voice concerns if a particular leader or discussion becomes stuck in tactical matters.

## **2. Implement a Structure that Emphasizes Discussions on Strategic Priorities**

Using what you identify during pre-meeting conversations, design a meeting format and structure to help the team focus on strategic issues. As you evaluate what is strategic, we recommend ignoring whether issues are long- or short-term. The timeline associated with acting on an opportunity or challenge doesn't determine its strategic importance.

Rather, think of strategic issues as those that will create a *material* impact on any of the following areas for your organization:

- Its brands
- Key audiences
- Customers and prospects
- Structure and alignment
- Financial prospects
- Vision and values
- Resources and raw materials

Sharing and adopting a comparable framework for what is strategic helps keep a discussion focused on matters that will legitimately move the needle in any of these areas.

We also use several other approaches to steer strategic conversations:

- List the major strategic themes you identify before the meeting. Allow the senior group to individually and collectively assign each item to a category: strategic, tactical, or (project) task issues.
- Assign time limits to various agenda topics, allowing more time for strategic matters—disproportionately so.
- As tactical or extraneous items are mentioned and commanding attention, stop and ask for clarification around the strategic issue to which they relate. If they can't be tied back to strategy, table them.
- Tackle non-strategic topics with questions that reveal them for what they are. Ask: How does this contribute to accomplishing our major objectives? How will this create a meaningful impact for customers (or other audiences)? If we don't address this at a senior level, what major downsides will it create?

You can use these techniques individually or in combination to help manage discussions toward a strategic level.



### **3. Actively Listening for Strategic Information**

From our experience, it's rare that senior leaders (or anyone else for that matter) will articulate clear strategy statements and strategic issues right away. Instead, strategy emerges from snippets of conversation. That places heavy responsibility on the meeting facilitator to [listen for strategic inputs](#) amid conversation that may largely seem tactical.

Beyond monitoring for the strategic areas we mentioned earlier, listen for any conversation that touches on:

- Organizational aspirations
- Expectations tied to strategic initiatives and outcomes
- Numbers that help size the impact of a strategic initiative
- Significant strengths and weaknesses
- Factors impacting organizational success, either positively or negatively
- Descriptions of metrics and objectives
- Beliefs central to the ways in which an organization conducts business
- Elements that will contribute to decision making

By identifying the types of information you need to develop and refine strategy, you can better recognize relevant elements that surface throughout a strategic discussion. When details emerge, record and organize them in a way that both highlights their strategic nature and provides a visual aid to align the group. We've used this technique to allow a leadership team the flexibility to talk in an open format, while capturing their strategic insights and organizing them in a way they can productively use. Another advantage to actively and distinctly posting strategic decisions and issues as you go through a meeting is that it creates a visual aid to manage the conversation. If people get in the weeds when trying to revisit previously-made decisions, you can point them to the decision list to demonstrate it has already been addressed.

Additionally, if several senior participants are struggling to stay on a strategic plane, divide the larger group into smaller sub-groups. Put tactical thinkers together, freeing those ready to stay focused on strategic topics and make progress.

#### **Keep Trying**

We've suggested various ideas for keeping strategic priorities a focus for executives . We've used them all successfully. Yet they won't all work in every situation. Try them, adapt where you need to do so, and develop your own variations that work most successfully with your group of senior leaders.

## Whole-Brain Metrics Link Implementation to Results

What types of metrics should support a **strategic plan's implementation**? During a large organization's visioning initiative, the chief executive demanded a new monitoring approach with stronger and sharper metrics to link implementation to results and allocate future resources. Selecting the best approach was easy for us. Brainzooming always recommends customizing whole-brain metrics to tightly integrate a strategic plan's implementation, impact, and returns.



What are whole-brain metrics? How can you introduce them to create the greatest advantage as you develop your organization or unit strategy?

### The Whole-Brain Metrics Approach

I envisioned whole-brain metrics years ago as the way to easily transition strategic planning into a dashboard that guides implementation. Whole-brain metrics incorporate two dimensions:

- Factors that describe implementation progress numerically (quantitative metrics) and qualitatively (via anecdotes, stories, examples, images)
- Three performance-based measures (Implementation activities, early indicators that the plan is taking hold or isn't, and business returns the strategy is expected to deliver)

Combining the quantitative and qualitative indicators across the three types of performance metrics leads to a dashboard with whole-brain metrics to guide developing and implementing a plan.

## WHOLE BRAIN METRICS

	Activities (What you do)	Indicators (Reactions to what you do)	Results (Business returns related to your activities)
Quantitative • (Return on Investment)	Number of times we are doing something	Numbers related to early indicators from activities	Measures that demonstrate returns, costs, investments
Qualitative • (Return on Intangibles)	What we're hearing about our activities	Perceptions about these interactions	Reactions and perceptions relative to relationship

### Whole Brain Metrics Link Planning and Implementation

In the client example above, Brainzooming facilitated the organization's overall strategic vision and strategy. We created their initiative plans from **online collaboration and survey input (which was very efficient and kept people out of extended strategy meetings)**. We also incorporated strategy work from a pre-existing internal team where metrics were hardly mentioned.

We developed the metrics dashboard by asking the following questions for each initiative:

- What vital activities will determine whether the organization is moving forward with the initiative?
- Where will the first signs surface that employees and external audiences are responding to strategies for delivering services and information in new ways?
- What business goals will ultimately demonstrate that the **organization's transformation** is successful and generating impactful results?

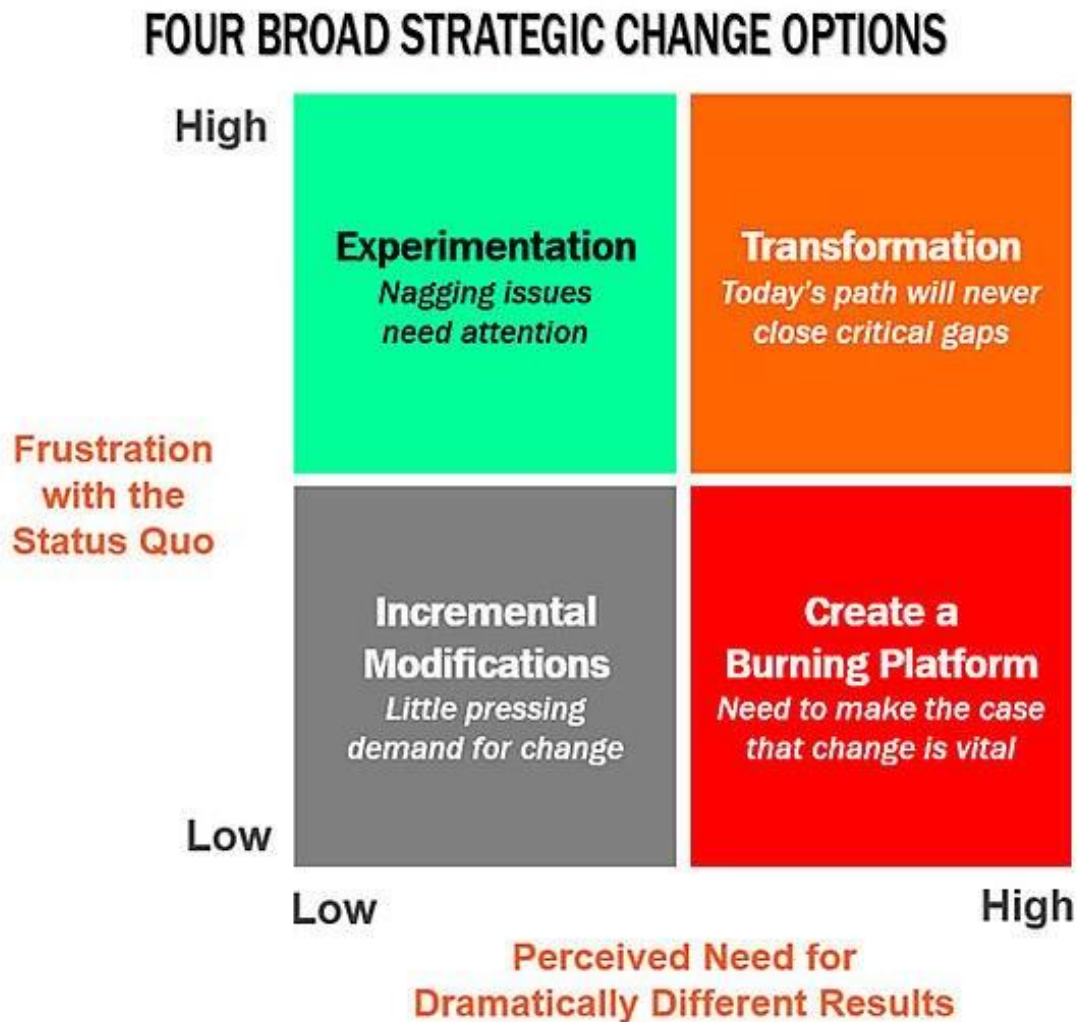
Creating the metrics dashboard from answers to these questions was straightforward. Since this concept is rooted in strong integration with a strategic plan, the metrics practically jump off the plan's pages.

Another implementation advantage to this approach? Limiting your organization to the typical strategic plan metrics (revenue, profit, operational performance, net promoter score) can mean that it will take months to learn the full story on strategy implementation. In contrast, whole-brain metrics develop from the earliest stages of implementation; this provides the opportunity to focus on managing the strategy for success as implementation begins.

## 4 Strategy Options for Change Management

Here is a view of strategic change options we created for a frustrated change maker. The change management options are based on comparing how big the perceived need for dramatically different results is relative to frustration levels with the status quo situation.

Four Strategy Options for Change Management



### ***Incremental Modifications***

When both the level of frustration with the status quo and the perceived need for dramatically different results are low, incremental modifications are in order. With no pressing demands for change, [intense efforts to innovate and create change are best applied elsewhere.](#)

## ***Experimentation***

If there's high frustration with the status quo yet no compelling push for change (think dissatisfaction with a process that's more trouble than it's worth even though the results are okay), it's an opportunity to experiment, simplify, streamline, and try new things. These situations are ripe for constant tweaking and learning from both successes and failures.

## ***Creating a Burning Platform***

Creating a burning platform is the recommended course of action when results are substandard, but there's an unwillingness, reluctance, or blindness to make dramatic changes within an organization. It usually calls for a well-crafted mix of facts and emotion to create the burning platform to move people to recognize the need for action and the importance of getting started right away.

## ***Transformation***

Total transformation is called for when everyone understands results are way off goal and the current course of action will never close the gap. When put that way, it could seem transformation might be the easiest of the quadrants. That's hardly the case though, since the stakes are greatest and the response will likely be more complex and multi-faceted than any of the other quadrants.

### **Applying these Strategic Change Options**

When sitting down with a client, discussing leadership strategic change aspirations and expectations is critical, as early as possible.

How could  
**YOU**  
benefit from  
30 minutes of  
fresh thinking, ideas,  
and possibilities?

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## 9 Business Growth Strategy Directions to Explore

Where is your business growth strategy pointing to next year? it's always important to ensure you explore all the relevant opportunities.



Brainzooming uses this framework with clients to explore three potential business growth strategy areas (market development, product development, and business transformation). Across the three areas, there are nine possible opportunities you can include as you [develop your success strategies](#):

### Market Development

- **Targeting current customers** – Sell more of what you currently offer to those already buying from you.
- **Grabbing share from competitors' customers** – Take business from prospects who are currently doing business with competitors.
- **Opening new markets** – Begin selling what you currently offer to new industries, markets, and geographies.
- **Converting those who use substitutes** – Incent customers who are using alternatives to what you sell to switch to your offerings.
- **Selling through new channels** – Introduce your offerings into new sales channels, whether they are external or internal to your organization.

### Product Development

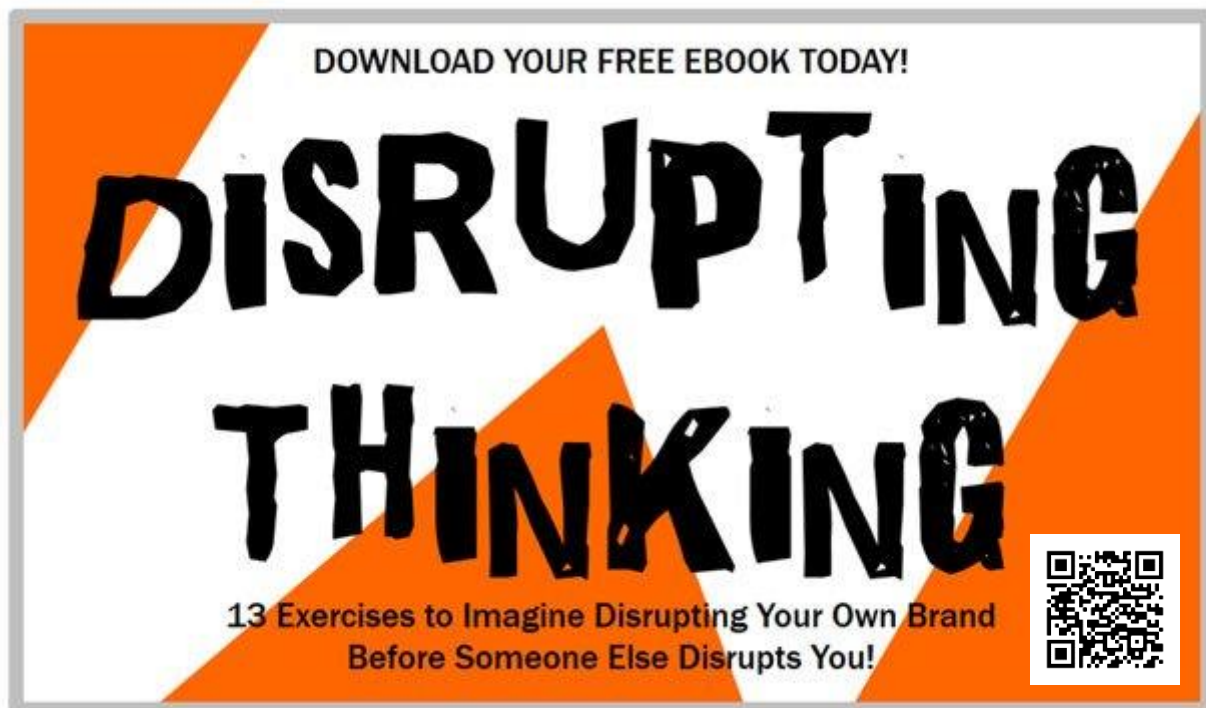
- **Enhancing existing products** – Increasing sales of a modified version of what you currently sell.
- **Innovating new products** – Growing sales through new marketplace offerings.

## **Business Transformation**

- **Acquiring growth** – Purchase a competitor to grow your customer and revenue base.
- **Changing the business model** – Revamping your go-to-market approach to fundamentally change the nature of what you offer and how you take it to market.

## **Strengthening Your Business Growth Strategy**


If you see a growth gap in your forecast, now is the time to identify your strategic opportunities in a deliberate way and begin making moves to prepare to market more aggressively, innovate, enhance your experience, and/or directly grab share from competitors. As you determine where your best opportunities will be, you can use the outcomes to communicate growth priorities, provide a platform for developing new growth ideas, determine whether your overall plan is delivering on expectations.



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# DISRUPTING THINKING

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<https://info.brainzooming.com/disruptingthinking>

## Engaging Employees in Strategy – Our Buy-In Manifesto

Business executives [downloading Brainzooming eBooks](#) frequently mention gaining “buy-in” for significant change initiatives as a major challenge. That’s no surprise. There are so many ways to botch involving employees (and community members, if that’s your audience) in developing and successfully implementing an innovation strategy.

Here are five keys we’ve found for successfully engaging employees in innovation strategy. Consider it “The Brainzooming Buy-In Manifesto,” written in the voice of your employee or community member.

### The Brainzooming Buy-In Manifesto – 5 Keys to Engaging Employees in Innovation Strategy



#### ***Ask me to participate***

Ask about my aspirations and hope for our organization. Help to me to productively contribute to identifying what we need to do and what it might mean for us. Let me share ideas for how we might be able to accomplish the changes we need to make.

#### ***Listen to my ideas***

Let me share what I’ve been thinking about or maybe just imagined. Listen as I struggle to put words or images to big ideas that aren’t fully formed. Listen to the ideas you hoped to hear and keep listening when I share challenging perspectives and ideas that aren’t nearly as comfortable to accept.

#### ***Incorporate my ideas in our collective direction***

If I’ve shared ideas, I expect to be able to recognize how they shaped what we’re going to do. We may not do everything that I suggested, but I want to be able to see how my participation influenced or shaped the overall view of what we’re going to try to accomplish, and how we’ll make it happen.

## Engaging and Fostering Strategic Collaboration



### ***Let me know what's going on***

I've shared my ideas. I don't want them to simply go into a big black box and then have to comb through a document or internal announcement later to see what happened after I was involved. Even if I need to return to what I do every day, don't forget I was part of the team in its earlier stages. We have a legitimate expectation to keep hearing about what's happening even if my participation is reduced.

### ***Talk in real words***

When sharing ideas and information, use familiar language we use within our organization. Don't hide questionable ideas or intentions in vague or jargon-filled language that obscures meaning and understanding.

### ***This Is Your Start***

If you want engagement and ongoing participation for developing and implementing an innovation strategy, start with these five keys.

# Where can you go to discuss your questions and thinking



on strategy, vision, collaboration, innovation, alignment, growth and results?

**Bring them to a free 30-minute call with Brainzooming founder, Mike Brown. It's easy:**

- Click or QR** to find a time that works for you
- Share where you want to focus
- Get ready for **new strategic ideas and possibilities!**



## Collaborative Strategic Planning – 5 Things It Isn't

Collaborative planning involves a process that goes beyond the board room to meaningfully include individuals throughout the organization to provide insights, input, and help shape organizational strategy.

Admittedly, collaborative planning processes aren't all that common.

In fact, they may be relatively rare.

Because of that rarity, we run into potential clients with serious apprehensions about opening the door wide to have employees throughout the organization share strategic ideas. That leads to a variety of misperceptions.

Let's clear up at least five of those misperceptions about collaborative planning.



### Collaborative strategic planning isn't:

#### **1. Unplanned**

Instead of just inviting people and seeing what happens, we carefully identify and vet potential participants in collaborative strategy planning. This step ensures diverse perspectives and a process that allows them to participate successfully.

#### **2. A democracy**

A large group really makes collaborative strategy planning work. We ask them to provide ideas, input, and even express preferences and recommendations. While that input is vital, it isn't the final say. The business leader still owns the decision making for what makes it into the final plan.

#### **3. A free for all**

We design collaborative strategy planning for each client with a clear understanding of the overall goal. While the individual steps may seem to go in varied and unexpected directions, they're all pointing toward the end result of a highly-actionable strategic plan.

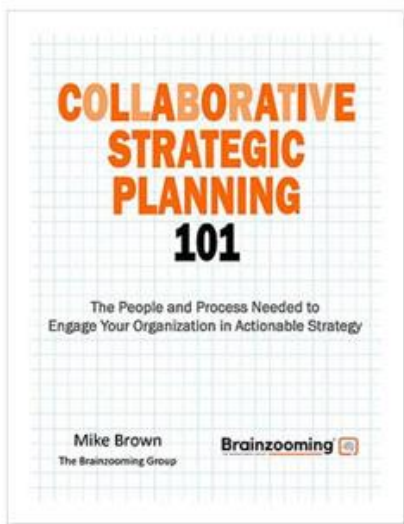
#### **4. The same for all participants**

Individual participants take on different roles within collaborative strategy planning. They may work on different strategic thinking exercises and questions based on their

perspectives and areas of expertise. The cumulative input provides a richer and more robust basis to align and coordinate the organization's activities even though everyone didn't participate in exactly the same ways.

### ***5. More time consuming than less collaborative planning***

Including additional participants allows for more efficient and concurrent input. Additionally, our design process takes into account what will make collaborative strategy planning participants most efficient and effective. The net of these two approaches is that our client engagements are months shorter than typical strategic planning processes.



**This guide spells out  
the fundamentals**

- What collaboration involves
- Inviting diverse participation
- Collaborative leadership
- Productivity keys for groups
- Deciding how it looks for you

**Download Your  
FREE Guide Today!**



<https://info.brainzooming.com/collaborativestrategy101>

## 5 Implementation Strategy Steps Pave the Way for Success

Looking ahead to transitioning from planning to doing and wanting to maximize success? Try these 5 **implementation strategy steps** for launching a big initiative properly so the initial implementation leads to outstanding results later.

### 1. Make Sure You Have the Right Team

The big first **implementation strategy step** is assembling the right team with the skills, experience, and perspectives to make a big initiative happen. This begins with envisioning the initiative's scope and reach. For those who've been blessed with skills as visual thinkers, this may be an easy step. These types of people can simply "watch" an initiative play out in their minds, almost as if it were a movie. They see the scenes and think about what happens and all the people that need to be in place.

For those less visually-inclined, it helps to get a couple of people you know will be on the team, the starting project timeline, and a white board. List the key steps for implementing the initiative. Then, for each step, list who is best prepared to implement it, whose work they will depend on before theirs so they can implement, and who will work with what they produce in the initiative. By exploring those three areas for each step, you'll have a much more robust list of potential project team participants. With this expanded list, you can start to make sure you have all the types of people and necessary skills accounted for among your project team.

### 2. Share the Expected Impact and Experience from a Successful Initiative

Even if there is a stated objective or SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-focused, and Time-bound) goal created for the initiative upfront, it's helpful to envision in a broader way what the initiative is supposed to deliver. You can frame the initiative's expected impact in several concrete ways:

- What will the team do to implement the initiative?
- How will the initiative's audiences react as it is implemented? How will they benefit from it?
- What will be the business results from the initiative's success?

Articulating this envisioned impact provides a more complete perspective of the experience and look of success at every step of the initiative's implementation. This prepares a team to help you, as a leader, monitor and adjust to keep the initiative on track for its timely completion.

### **3. Provide a Broad Starting View to Your Team Members**

Typically, an initiative's leader has greater exposure to the plan based on the length of time you've been involved, your experience, and/or where you sit in the organization. If this is the case, it behooves you to share as much of what you know as possible with newly-involved initiative team members. To launch the team most successfully, the leader should bring together all the relevant information – including highlighting what isn't known – to make team members as uniformly smart as possible on the initiative.

Offering this overview even before the team meets the first time provides an immediate confidence boost. It sends a clear message that the work is important (since you've taken time to prepare), strategic (through providing valuable context on how the initiative supports business objectives), and action-oriented (because you anticipated the initiative's timeline and impact).

### **4. Set Change Boundaries**

While it might strike some people as odd to discuss setting 'boundaries for change,' this is an important element in a big initiative's success. This implies letting your team know where they have more and less latitude for introducing new, creative, and untried solutions that can turn the initiative into reality.

Team members can determine where to best invest their time, ideas, and diligence most effectively when they know whether an initiative is viewed as needing to deliver incremental vs. transformative change. If the organization isn't looking for major changes from an initiative, understanding that upfront helps team members develop more realistic strategies and timelines.

When, however, an organization expects significant transformation resulting from an initiative, team members can set targets appropriately. They can better identify how much personal and organizational creativity to bring to the implementation steps.

### **5. Embrace Moving Back and Forth between Strategy and Details**

Think about implementing a major initiative implementation as an *event*. Using an event framework is helpful because successful event planners must move continually back and forth between a strategic perspective and tactical implementation. This implies, in practice, both identifying implementation steps that support overall strategy and being comfortable (while implementing) testing each step against how it supports the overall initiative strategy.

This ongoing back and forth movement between strategy and detail is integral to implementing a big initiative. It's neither all about the thinking, nor all about the doing. Additionally, there aren't necessarily exclusive times for separate thinking and doing. A great initiative leader has to be adept at moving back and forth between the two, while helping team members do the same."

## Implementation Strategy Steps and Future Success

Brainzooming firmly believes that delivering a successful initiative is highly dependent on it starting properly rather than having to make major adjustments later when a poorly-planned launch creates performance gaps. Following these five **implementation strategy steps** sets the stage to launch a major initiative with the right team members having clear expectations on what they are expected to deliver and the change impact the organization needs.

***Fast Forward!!!***  
**Successfully Implementing Your Strategic Plan**

If you need to move your organization from strategy to results ASAP, *Fast Forward* is exactly for you. Using its strategies will improve the experience, impact, and implementation results from all your strategy planning work!



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***Fast Forward!!!***  
*Successfully Implementing Your Strategic Plan*



<https://info.brainzooming.com/fastforward>

## 6 Strategies to Stay Ahead of Customer Needs

What are strategies to identify innovative business ideas to stay in front of customers? These six all contribute toward achieving a compelling, innovative marketplace edge:

**1. Dive into Analyzing All Your Online Data in Creative Ways** – No matter the sources or types (purchase data, online activity, external sources), do the analysis. Every day, there is more unprecedented access into customer thinking. Leverage all of it you can.

**2. Talk with Lead Users** – We use a market research strategy to talk in-depth with customers and industry experts on the forefront of strategic thinking and implementation. These discussions with people who are several years ahead of everyone else in an industry help identify what will keep you ahead of the rest of the market.

**3. Small but Strategic Unconventional Moves** - In many industries, leaders aren't doing dramatically different things. Strategic insights into subtle (often unarticulated) customer needs and flawless execution in addressing them can be enough to stay ahead of customers and competitors. To generate strategic insights, establish listening posts to monitor customers' requests no one is addressing along with both customer and employee-precipitated innovative workarounds in your product or service.

**4. Think about Your Business in General Terms** - One fundamental in strategic thinking is detaching from day-to-day details of your business to view it in abstract, general terms. Focusing on business models, the broad assets your company possesses, and where/how you create value, put you in a position to unlock innovative opportunities that more literal thinkers won't notice until it's too late.

**5. Move into Adjacent Markets** - Anticipate new value you can bring to customers through strategically examining the benefits your company delivers. Then ask which players in other markets could deliver those same benefits. Not only will this signal new potential competitors, it can also point out markets you can disrupt to create innovative value for your customers.

**6. Protect and Prioritize Challenging Ideas** - Even after identifying moves to keep you in front of what your customers are looking for, you'll likely have a lot of work to keep decidedly non-status quo, uncomfortable ideas from getting killed inside your business! If your company is reluctant to move forward with game-changing ideas, work to understand potential issues and create a sense of comfort for ideas you're valiantly working to keep dramatic in the market.



## 15 Ways Whoever Is Going to Disrupt Your Market Isn't Like You

Whoever is going to disrupt your market isn't like you, which makes them really hard to identify right now.

The Number 1 way they are different than you? They may not even be in business yet.

That's a big difference, but it's not the only one. Here are fourteen other ways the disruptive player(s) in your market aren't like you. They:

2. Don't care about preserving anything related to what's made your brand successful.
3. Are happy to get a small share of the market at a premium price with a dramatically different offering.
4. Are happy to get a bigger share of your market (since it's related to their market) at a really low price.
5. Don't have any qualms about introducing a product/service and price point combination that's really tough to compare to anything else your market has been doing.
6. Make decisions and move really quickly because the stakes are so much lower for them.
7. Can get away with using some, but not all, of the marketing mix to beat you at your own game.
8. Compete really effectively by looking at a couple of things (or maybe even only one thing) in a radically different way.
9. Don't have to fund their new venture out of the dollars coming from your market.

10. Have figured out a different entry point into the customer model in your industry.

11. Don't (or aren't) going to look like you in very fundamental ways - size, structure, scope, etc.

12. Don't have to have a complete offering since they're appealing to a different market segment.

13. May have glaring weaknesses compared to traditional competitors (i.e., "you") in areas traditional competitors think are really important but customers are willing to overlook.

14. Will not be focused on delivering the same benefit package you are.

15. Are fine with putting together parts and pieces tried and thrown out by others to compete in new ways.

Look for disruptors. Also, start looking for who you are going to disrupt, because you'll be just as hard to identify for them.

How could  
**YOU**  
benefit from  
30 minutes of  
fresh thinking, ideas,  
and possibilities?  
  
P.S. And, it's free!  
[Schedule it now!](#)

## A SWOT Analysis to Push Dynamic Thinking

The letters in the SWOT analysis name stand for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. To add depth and breadth to the strategic thinking exercise, however, we recommend four probes to each area of the SWOT analysis. This helps a group inside of a strategy meeting more effectively and generate possibilities.



Here are the four questions associated with each SWOT analysis area:

### ***What are our STRENGTHS relative to:***

- How we deliver value for customers?
- Creating lasting relationships with stakeholders?
- Consistently moving with greater agility than competitors?
- Creating engagement with our employees?

### ***What are WEAKNESSES relative to:***

- Delivering the product attributes and performance most important to customers?
- Staying well ahead of competitors' most important strategic moves?
- Being a leading instigator for market disruption?
- Cultivating a workforce with great potential to create an amazing customer experience?

### ***What are OPPORTUNITIES relative to:***

- Market needs that we have yet to address?
- Better supporting employees in delivering and incredible brand experience?
- Entering new markets where our brand would have an underdog's advantage?
- Better capturing the best, most attractive prospects that are not doing business with the brand right now?

**What are *THREATS* relative to:**

- Emerging competitors not playing by the same rules we and other industry players do?
- External forces beyond our influence that are redefining marketplace competitiveness?
- Gaps customers perceive in how the brand delivers its promise and experience?
- Systems and processes that are working fine, but whose failure could readily jeopardize future success?

Use this strategic thinking exercise in a group setting to help everyone push their thinking into areas that they might otherwise ignore, whether purposely or by accident.



Want your organization's vision to inspire your team?



**FREE Download**  
***Big Strategy Statements –***  
***3 Steps to Collaborative Strategy***

## 8 Easy Starting Points for Developing a Vision

If you are exploring ways to update or develop a new vision statement to guide your organization, consider one or more of these possibilities as starting points. If visioning is a struggle, beginning with a solid starting point can have a huge impact:



1. **Audiences / Targets** - Start by listing exciting possibilities for what your organization can represent among those you serve or are trying to reach in impactful ways.
2. **Product or Service Offerings** - You can build the vision statement around expanding the distinctiveness of what your organization provides to audiences.
3. **Impacts and Results** - Link the effects your brand delivers from its activities to audience benefits and an overarching direction.
4. **Making Connections** - The organization vision can emerge from focusing on the people and parties you can bring together in new, meaningful ways.
5. **Resource Availability** - The vision could revolve around access to or the availability of unique resources of any type.
6. **Capabilities** - Organizational talents and abilities can form the core of the going-forward direction, more fully leveraging them to benefit audiences.
7. **People and Expertise** - More specific than capabilities, the people that make up the team gives the brand life and can be the basis for ongoing advantage and value delivery.
8. **Responsiveness** - The brand's ability to address routine and extraordinary situations for its audiences can direct the vision.

You can build your vision statement around a combination of these themes, too.

*Gain targeted tips and thinking to improve your strategy process and results.*



*Only 30 minutes,  
and it's free!*

*Brainzooming founder, Mike Brown,  
is at your service! To schedule your  
best time, scan the QR Code.*



# What is Brainzooming™

THE BRAINZOOMING GROUP

Since launching in 2009, Brainzooming has been consulting to clients across industries. We design and implement engaging, productive, and fun strategy processes; they lead to successful collaborative plans and results.

Clients most frequently ask Brainzooming to develop strategies for their important opportunities in:

- Organizational transformation
- Innovation
- Branding
- Leadership

We offer Brainzooming services and content through:

- Custom engagements in-person, online, and hybrid
- Blast! online collaborations delivering ideas and impact in thirty minutes
- Speaking and training programs, both in-person and online
- Digital books, magazines, courses, articles, and tools that translate the Brainzooming method into DIY resources

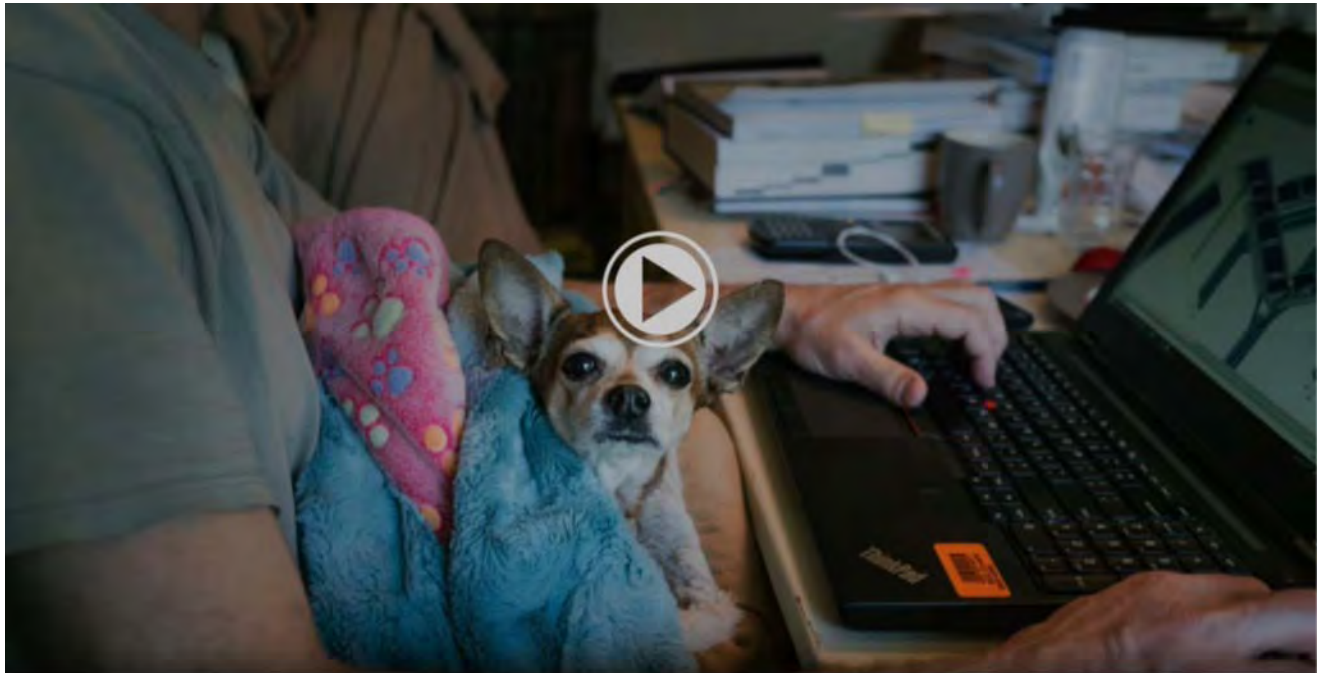
## The Brainzooming Approach to Collaboration

The Brainzooming method and tools emerged from inside a Fortune 500 organization. The result? Our approach makes us the collaborative, results-focused type of partner that you want as a client.

From our first conversation with you, Brainzooming translates your objectives and aspirations into a collaborative process. We are tenacious in delivering your most important outcomes. Through inviting and supporting diverse participants, we'll empower them to positively shape your strategy, implementation, and results.

If you have been searching for a partner who prizes collaboration, diversity, flexibility, learning, results, and fun as much as you do, your search is over. You are ready for Brainzooming!

**brainzooming.com**



There's a new, productive way to collaborate,  
no matter *where* your team is working from.



**Brainzooming**<sup>TM</sup>   
THE BRAINZOOMING GROUP

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