



By Daniel W. Rasmus

## The Tens—Ten Lessons You Can Learn About Innovation by Studying Lady Gaga

**1 Experiment** Innovation requires the ability to experiment, and along with that, the ability to let go of things that don't work. Failure should be a lesson, not a marathon to rehabilitate the mistake. Don't experiment in a linear, overly cautious way. Experiment with a bit of abandon and watch carefully for workable outcomes. Kill what doesn't work quickly and spend time with promising ideas—not so much time that you nurture them to death, but long enough that you understand how to make the idea commercial—then turn it loose so the operations people can start learning from their experiments.

**2 Innovation Delivers What People Want** A great idea that nobody buys may still be a great idea, but it isn't an innovation. Innovations change experiences and they change people. Some of DaVinci's great work wasn't innovative because it never left his personal notebook, and when it did, it was far too late to influence anything, regardless of its awe-inspiring insight. If you want to be innovative, you have to put ideas into the market, and Gaga knows all about inserting herself into the market.

**3 Borrow from Those Who Came Before** Or steal with no regrets. Let your conscious be your guide. Chances are you aren't creating something entirely new, be it a product or an experience. School yourself in people who have attempted to do what you are attempting to do and let that knowledge infiltrate your creation. Sure, you have to pay license fees for directly borrowed IP, but inspiration remains free.

**4 Differentiate** Even if you borrow, that doesn't mean copy. Innovation is about differentiation—different combinations that define the person, the product or the service. You can't differentiate if you don't know the competition—so again, study history and study the competition. Innovations are recognized by how they make a product, service or experience different for others in the same market. Getting to par doesn't cut it.

**5 Be the Brand** It is hard to be innovative if you don't know what you stand for. Innovation should reinforce the brand. Something innovative may come out of a skunk works that is orthogonal to the brand, and that's fine, but it either needs to be aligned and integrated, or spun off. Innovation is useless if all it does is confuse consumers.

**6 Don't Sit Still** The deep breath and the pat on the back may be just what you need after a grueling day, but they are also the momentary

lapse that triggers competitors to pounce. Being innovative means keeping up the pace. When you slow down and start thinking about retirement, just retire, because the slower pace means it's already over. Someday Gaga will slow down and we will reminisce about her drive. You can't tie innovation lessons to a single icon. You need to decide how you are going to fuel your drive. Only companies, not individuals, can create truly sustainable innovation because they can develop an infrastructure of policy and practices that permits experiments, failures and reinventions over long periods of time.

**7 Innovation Takes Place in Realtime** Today's innovation takes place before the world. There may be some cloistered meetings here and there, but real innovation takes place on a public stage, and you know if it is good or bad within minutes of presenting the idea.

**8 Strange Combinations** Don't look just to your domain for innovative inspiration. Gaga is integrating computing technology, social media, couture, music, visual arts and many other ideas into the experiences she creates. Lyrics and music are just the starting point, or perhaps the mid-point, as various influences drive musical and lyric formulation and other turn notes and words into experiences.

**9 Deliver on Expectations** Everything up to this point is about creating a set of expectations in the mind of the consumer. Some call delivering on the brand promise. In businesses, that consumer may be an employee, a partner or a customer. Innovation doesn't stop until you deliver on the promise.

**10 Be Brave** Lady Gaga flaunts her contrarian interpretation of culture, and by doing so, redefines it. She unabashedly confronts convention. Organizations that want to innovate need to be brave, relying on a deep-seated trust in their work, and not on benchmarking studies about how other organizations are doing things. The brave recognize risks worth taking.

"When you make music or write or create, it's really your job to have mind-blowing, irresponsible, condomless sex with whatever idea it is you're writing about at the time."

Lady Gaga in *Blender*, 9 March 2009