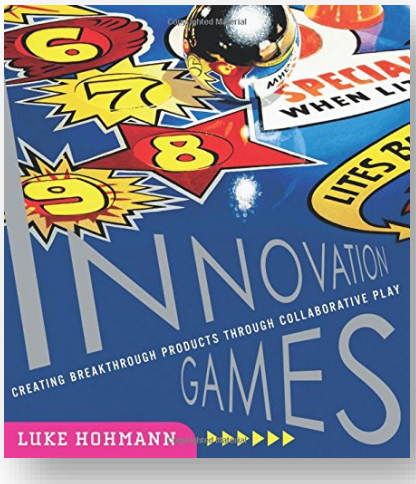


Book title: **Innovation Games**

Author(s): **Luke Hohmann**

Publisher: **Addison Wesley, 2006**

Luke Hohmann brings us a great instruction manual on how to use games with your customers to uncover their needs and wants or, as the book says, “create breakthrough products through collaborative play”.

Review

Whatever development process you are using, discovering customer requirements is a crucial part of the product management role. Most of us take the standard approach of customer meetings, market research, and talking to sales and support. However, getting real customer insights is usually a challenge.

Innovation games are a fun and effective way of working with customers to understand their needs, wants and desires. They are an alternative to simplistic questioning which tends to influence the discussion or costly market research where an agency interprets the responses for you. Customers often have a hard time articulating their problems or envisioning solutions, and these games draw out insights and nuances that can be extremely valuable.

The book’s tagline summarizes its goal of creating breakthrough products through collaborative play. It contains 12 different games with a description of each, why it works, how to prepare for it, and how to process the results.

One of the games is called Product Box. You ask customers to imagine they are selling your product at a trade show. You give them some blank cardboard boxes, pens and coloured paper and ask them to design the box packaging. The box might show marketing slogans, features, pricing or pictures. When finished, they must present the box back to the room and persuade the other players of the features and benefits. It provides a way for customers to tap into their latent preferences and requirements and express them as they sell your product back to you.

Of course, one of the potential drawbacks of these games is getting hold of the customers to participate. And the next thing to consider is whether you feel confident to run the innovation games yourself or want to bring in some outside consultants to help. However, once you’ve addressed these issues, the games are a low-risk and engaging way of getting high-quality insights into your customers’ requirements.

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