

# Ask why not, instead of why

Damien Lynch

Michael Bartholomew had not thought of a mobile phone as a potential weapon until about three months ago.

Then his employer, Australia's largest pie manufacturer, Patties Foods, invited Ken Hudson, founder of The Idea Centre, to make a presentation and facilitate at its inaugural national conference in July.

Dr Hudson has worked with medium-sized companies like Patties, which has an annual turnover of about \$150 million, on how to unlock new ideas and create a more innovative culture and new growth opportunities.

During the conference, Dr Hudson encouraged Patties' staff to complete some practical exercises aimed at getting them to think differently, creatively and laterally about everyday items and issues.

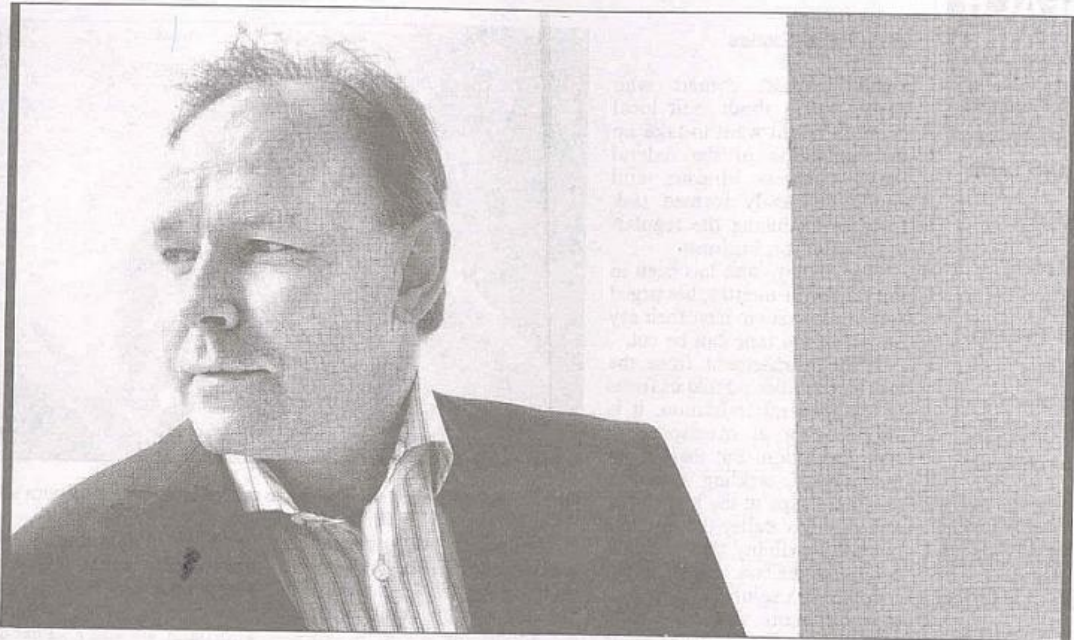
For instance, he asked them to list 50 different ways to use a mobile phone, apart from making a phone call. And that is how the idea of the mobile as a weapon came up.

"He just highlighted how blinkered we become looking at problems or solutions," said Mr Bartholomew, the general manager of sales and marketing at Patties.

"Instead of following the same old path, having an open mind and new perspectives can lead to creative ways of solving problems."

Mr Bartholomew's marketing team places an emphasis on creative thinking and on what Dr Hudson calls "creative conversations", especially in new product development.

Dr Hudson defines a creative conversation as one in which the



Ken Hudson, of The Idea Centre, wants people to have more creative conversations.

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"creative potential of both the producer and receiver of an idea is fully realised", leading to the emergence of a new idea, possibility or solution, or the strengthening of an existing idea.

When it comes to new product development, the team at Patties does not start out with a blank page. Instead, it talks about and lists the strong features in some of the firm's best-known products, like the Four'n Twenty meat pie and Nanna's apple pie.

"Sometimes you work from the bottom up when you are developing a new product and find all sorts of

problems that seem insurmountable, like costing, or logistics" Mr Bartholomew said.

"Taking a different direction, we try to create the ideal and perfect product and work backwards."

He added that it would be hard to say how much revenue growth was driven by this approach.

"But it does save you from getting bogged down in the 'why it can't be done' syndrome," he said.

In another presentation last week, Dr Hudson told a gathering of chief executives from small and medium-sized businesses that every business manager and leader

should aim to have one creative conversation per day, during which they must place an emphasis on being positive.

He advised them to respond to staff suggestions by saying "yes, and", or "why not?", or "what's interesting about the idea?", instead of saying "yes, but" or "why?" or "what's wrong with the idea?".

In citing some of the advantages of a creative conversation approach, Dr Hudson said everyone could participate and there was no cost because a business did not have to build a new structure or process or hire new staff.