

Nicolas Bordas

THE
KILLER
IDEA!

Secrets for Ideas that Last
in Politics, Business, and Culture

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How does a good idea work?

What's the difference between a good idea, and an idea "that kills"?

Why do some great ideas fall out of use?

How can you guarantee that your idea has every chance to succeed?

Why are some Facebook groups larger in population than the country of Finland? Why do we type on inferior keyboards? What did Saint Paul do to "market" Christianity? Nicolas Bordas, CEO of TBWA\FRANCE, has for years studied the way ideas work: how to best promote them and ensure their survival. In this book, he examines ideas both little and big while pointing out the keys to their success or their failure.

Understanding how ideas are born, live and die is essential for those who wish to spread their own. In today's world where communication is constant, a successful idea can radically change our political, economical and cultural future.

***The Killer Idea* is the perfect book for those who have something they're dying to share!**



Nicolas Bordas has built a career out of finding killer ideas for top French and international brands. In addition to heading up TBWA\FRANCE, one of the country's biggest communication groups, Nicolas is also a professor at the prestigious School of Communication at Sciences-Po, Paris.

Get a daily "killer idea" at: www.nicholasbordas.com

THE KILLER IDEA!

**Secrets for Ideas that Last
in Politics, Business, and Culture**

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Introduction

How do ideas work? Why do some have more impact than others? What's the secret behind a killer idea?

These questions are my life's work. For the past 25 years, I have tried to bring ideas into the world, to nurture them, and to make them multiply. Ideas are living creatures that are born, live, and die. Every day billions emerge. The vast majority of these ideas are fleeting and quickly abandoned. But there comes a moment when all of a sudden, a solid idea is born; it spreads its wings and takes flight. Sometimes the idea spreads only to one person, or to a group of people. At times it becomes a majority opinion. Occasionally, it becomes an ideology.

But before all this can happen, the idea needs to acclimate itself to its natural habitat and duke it out with other ideas. Just as humans have learned to dominate their environment to survive, ideas must confront other ideas in a kind of natural selection. The cubist painter Georges Braque put it this way: "One must have two ideas: one to kill the other."¹ The war of ideas is permanent.

1. Georges Braque, *Pensées sur l'art*.

Evolving in an environment that is all too often hostile to newcomers, ideas are at the same time the product of a particular context and the fruit of the imagination. How often have you heard someone express an idea that could have just as easily come from you? Even the subtlest of ideas float around in a particular time and place. This is the beauty of *L'Air du Temps*, or the spirit of the times, in French.

Call it an occupational hazard, but I find nothing more fascinating than observing ideas in their natural habitat. Like the early naturalists, I have spent years collecting them and noting their ability to take hold in conversations or in the imagination.

Indeed, the religious, political, cultural, economic, and social beliefs that we have been indoctrinated with are not the products of chance. We are all able to understand how these ideas work, and in return we are able to influence others through our ideas. What is most important is that we understand how these ideas hatch, grow, and dominate. Just as people shape ideas, so do ideas shape people.

The idea behind this book is to share my knowledge of ideas, gained through years of working for brands. I believe that when it comes to learning about transmitting and deploying ideas, the advertising world is a representative microcosm. Communicating ideas for commercial gain allows us to experiment with and understand how to spread ideas. The major difference is the fuel: the money that allows advertisers to spread ideas.

Working every day on ideas allows me to understand better and better how they work, from their birth to their possible extinction. Although each idea aspires to be unique, the essence of each one resembles the others. Great philosophical and religious ideas and small, everyday ideas share many

common traits. These are linked to the workings of our brains and to the environment in which they live: the “noosphere,” the so-called “sphere of human thought” described by Jesuit philosopher Teilhard de Chardin.¹ According to him, our ideas are born in a cultural melting pot containing ephemeral and substantive ideas, theories, clichés, and convictions.

If most ideas are born free and equal in rights, their growth and flowering are linked to their capacity to cross into the media. There is always an element of chance involved in this, but today it is also possible to master the critical areas of diffusion, making it easier for a single concept to dominate.

The world has never needed ideas as desperately as it does now. The financial crisis has sped up the end of one era and is signaling the birth of a new world. If the definition of insanity is “doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results,”² then today we must think differently, to create something different. More than ever, faced with global warming and an exploding population, our planet needs new ideas.

This book is for all those who have ideas and wish to see them triumph, as well as those who don’t want to be unwitting receptacles for the ideas of others. How can we avoid falling victim to bad ideas? How can we allow great ones to flourish?

1. Teilhard de Chardin, *Le phénomène humain*.

2. Rita Mae Brown, *Sudden Death*.

Part One

**The Communicative
Society and New Ways
to Create Ideas**

Chapter 1

From Communicating in Society to the Communicative Society

"An idea is salvation by imagination"
Frank Lloyd Wright

From a giant screen, before a seemingly lobotomized public, Big Brother intones in his robotic voice: "We have created, for the first time in all history, a garden of pure ideology where each worker may bloom, secure from the pests purveying contradictory truths. Our unification of thought is a more powerful weapon than any fleet or army on earth." The monologue is cut short by a young woman who throws a hammer right through the screen. As the newly liberated crowd cheers and Big Brother disappears, an announcer's voice proclaims: "On January 24th, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like '1984.'"¹

When a 29-year-old with the look of a precocious teenager, named Steve Jobs, presented this film to an incredulous audience, he did not imagine a society where each receiver could become an emitter. He did not realize to what extent the rise of personal computing would transform the world into a society of communication.

1. Film by Chiat\Day and directed by Ridley Scott.