the Best Ideas Out of Your Next Brainstorming Session

A good brainstorming session can be pivotal for any business, but a bad one can leave participants with lower morale and the feeling that they've just wasted a few hours at work. Follow these steps to set up your next brainstorming session for success:

1 Be smart about scheduling and the setting

Getting out of the office can help participants focus on the task at hand. Choose a brightly lit space with plenty of room to move around. To encourage collaboration, place large easel pads or hang posters around the room that people can use to sketch out ideas. Start early in the day, so that participants won't be worried about getting out to head home.

2 Invite the right people

While you'll need to invite the core members of your team, you may want to cast a wider net. "Diversity is important to increase the creative potential of the group," says Keith Sawyer, author of *Group Genius: The Creative Power of Collaboration* and a professor at the University of North Carolina. "It's important to have people who bring different bodies of knowledge that might be relevant to the problem."

Everyone in the group should feel like they're participating, so if you have more than eight to 10 participants, consider breaking into smaller groups.

3 Unplug

If participants are on laptops and smartphones, it will be easier for them to become distracted. Instead, hand out notebooks, pens and markers, and ask everyone to turn off their electronics for the session.

4 Provide tools and tasks that spark innovation

Consider starting with an icebreaker, such as inviting participants to create a vision board that draws inspiration from your company or the problem you're hoping to solve. Provide posters, scissors, glue or magnets and plenty of magazines, postcards and photos with which they can create the board.

Other props that might help trigger ideas include a deck of cards with thought starters, or blank mind map templates that people can use to organize information and thoughts. Participants should also arrive to the session prepared with some written ideas recorded in journals and notebooks. This will help the team think about solutions in advance, and to come to the meeting owning their ideas and ready to share.

Phillips & Co., an Illinois-based innovation consultancy that has worked with brands including Hyatt and Verizon, often creates custom tools for brainstorming sessions, such as worksheets or maps showing a customer's journey. "You're trying to take very conceptual ideas and make them physical," says company President Matt Phillips. "Paper is the best tool for that. It allows you to take something that might be a service or process and turn it into a sketch. Then people around the table can play with it or modify it using markers or pens."

5 Appoint a leader to keep things moving

While you want ideas to be free-flowing, you also want to ensure that the team is able to remain focused. Make sure everything is written down: In addition to having one person lead the brainstorming session, you'll also want to appoint a note-taker to capture the ideas generated throughout the day and to create a report afterward. Even a small thought that might seem inapplicable in the moment could ultimately morph into just the idea that you run with.

Learn more at **howlifeunfolds.com/productivity**

Sponsored by **Paper & Packaging**
How life unfolds:
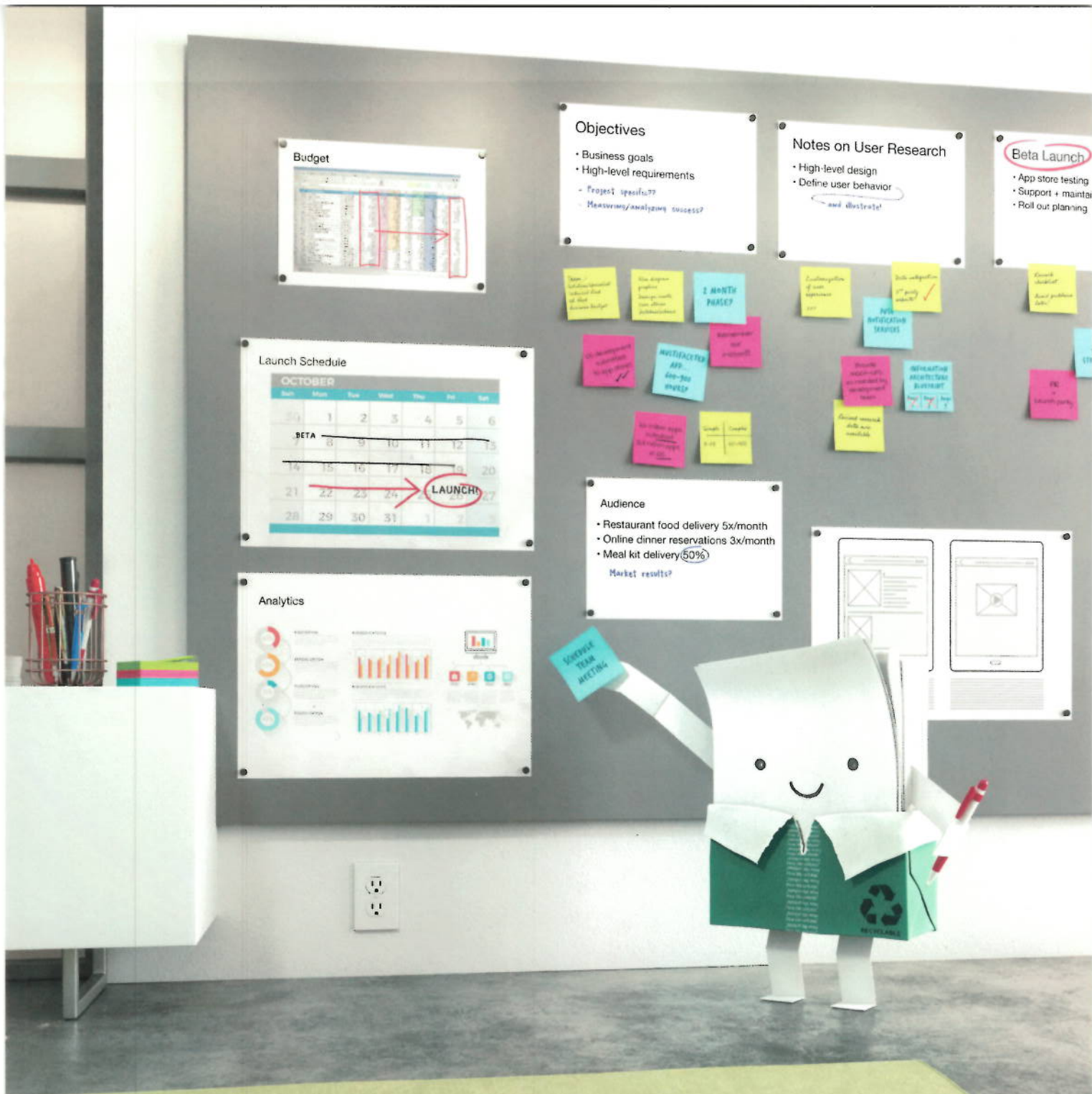
Paper shows you mean business.

Collaboration. Ideation. Innovation. From concept to completion, paper is at the center of it all. It encourages fresh ideas, motivates decisions and helps teams work toward one shared goal. When getting the job done matters, use paper. Learn more at howlifeunfolds.com/productivity.

Paper & Packaging
How life unfolds.

From the Makers of Paper and Packaging