LEVERAGE HACK DAYS FOR TEAM COLLABORATION & INNOVATION

Why Consider a Hack Day

Do you have a new product, service, or offering in need of innovation but can't seem to set aside time for undisturbed creative thinking? Consider a Hack Day.

A **Hack Day** allows teams to designate time to solve problems that might otherwise go unsolved. Originally pioneered by engineers at tech companies to "hack" programming problems, other industries have adopted this practice to foster proactive innovation. In some cases, team members are encouraged to pick a problem to workshop independently and then report back on their creation. In others, the Hack Day can be all-hands-on-deck, with the entire team coming together on one task. KNow Research conducted this collaborative iteration of the Hack Day at our 2022 company offsite, and we're here to encourage other teams to take advantage of the method to elevate, improve, or design deliverables or offerings as a team.

Before the Hack Day

You've set aside time, now what? For a Hack Day to be successful, start by aligning on the day's goals. Find ways to get your team invested before the day arrives so you can really "hack it out" once you come together.

1. **Align on a clear, realistic problem to solve.** Think about an item that's been on the to-do list a while, especially something that would benefit from the entire team's input. It's also important to choose something that can realistically be workshopped in one day. One Hack Day may not be the opportunity to restructure the entire company workflow, but there are always initiatives that can be completed with devoted problem solving.
2. **Outline agenda and objectives.** Before you get to "hacking," your team needs to understand the *why* of the goal and be given some set of parameters for contributing their part. Hack Days are designed for free-flowing thinking, but providing structure to that brainstorm helps teams stay on task.
3. **Get buy in from the team.** Getting team members excited about and invested in the Hack Day at the outset can make the day itself more productive. Consider assigning pre-work and sending reminders to make sure team members effectively block off the time.

Bonus: An all-hands Hack Day is also an opportunity for collaboration amongst colleagues who don't usually get to work together. Never been paired on a project before? See what happens when you put your heads together on something entirely different!

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For KNow's Hack Day, we aligned on our **podcast deliverables**, something we knew would benefit by dedicated time and a creative approach.

- Our objective: Taking KNow's Audio Deliverables to the Next Level
- Our goal: Our clients want something more/better/different than the usual PPT and/or video deliverables. How do we wow them with our options and deliver audio excellence?
- Purpose: Use our time together to define our sound including our podcast "pitch," options and deliverables
- Desired outcome: Create our 1) sonic brand 2) music selections, 3) podcast deliverable flier and 4) podcast deliverable website description
- Buy-in: Everyone brought samples of their favorite podcasts and came prepared to describe why it was their favorite

Think Outside-the-Box

Hack Days strike a balance between free-flowing brainstorming and successful output. You need to stay on task to accomplish your goal, but you also want to give team members time and space to approach the problem in creative ways and think about it from different angles.

Pro Tip: Even if your team is working in-person together, consider using **collaborate virtual whiteboards** for brainstorming. They're useful tools for keeping everything in one place, allowing your team to pull together images, links, and notes *and* build seamlessly on one another's contributions.

At KNow, we leveraged a collaborative Miro board to log our ideas throughout the day. In this brainstorming time, we took a step back to talk about who we wanted to be sonically and what it meant to have a **sonic brand**. Taking components from the examples team members supplied for their pre-work, we thought through what makes a good podcast in the first place. This time was important. When else would we have been able to sit in a room together, listen to an intro sound, and unpack *why* that assortment of cords sounded most like us? The Hack Day provides teams a space for this kind of creative discussion.

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Sonic Brand Platform / Mood Board

Working Mood Board Name: Uplifting, Newsy
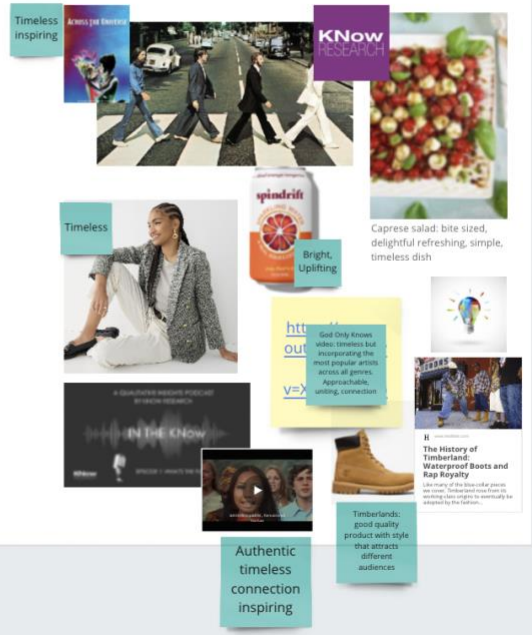
Foster Accountability

Each team member should be able to see their contribution within the final product and be held accountable for next steps. Group discussion can produce great brainstorming and assigning follow-up roles and tasks while hacking helps even the most daunting of to-do list items feel more manageable.

Pro Tip: Break into even smaller teams (three to four individuals per team) to encourage active participation and have "share-outs" of what each team came up with.

Once everyone has come together, broken out, and reconvened to share out their progress, work together to align on clear next steps. How do you take all the good work you've done that day and make sure the final product is seen through?

- Create an accountability structure going forward
- Consider using the breakout teams as accountability partners for one another
- Be sure to set clear deadlines for follow-up responsibilities!

Our Hack Day got the whole team on the same page, with a shared vision for our optimal podcast deliverables. We aligned on our sonic brand and the key elements and flow of our two podcast options. Most importantly, we got everyone on board with their roles and responsibilities in the process of bringing our ideas to fruition.

Over the next few weeks, we saw an uptick in the feedback in our #podcast Slack channel as our team members collaborated on the final product. After some healthy rounds of collaboration and iteration, the to-do list item finally got crossed off with the help of the Hack Day and we got to see our new **deliverable sample** come to life!

In Summary

We had a blast at our Hack Day, relishing the opportunity to think outside-the-box, collaborate and problem-solve together with a meaningful and productive outcome. Here are our key reasons for implementing a Hack Day of your own:

1. Hack Days are a great way for your team to come together and work toward proactive innovation that you don't always have time to address.
2. They provide your team the opportunity to collaborate with people they may not ordinally get the chance to work with.

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3. They allow you to reap the benefits of dedicating time and space to think creatively and critically, approaching your business problem in unique ways.
4. They're fun! Hack Days can take your team in exciting directions and bring you closer as collaborators and coworkers.

Ready to Plan Your Hack Day?

Once you've decided on a problem your team can solve (or at least effectively brainstorm how to solve and set a path for) in a single day, set aside the time and honor it. Keep the day free of other agenda items and distractions. Consider using your next company offsite or team building gathering for your Hack Day when everyone's concentration is focused.

Let us know what you've hacked lately: admin@knowresearch.com