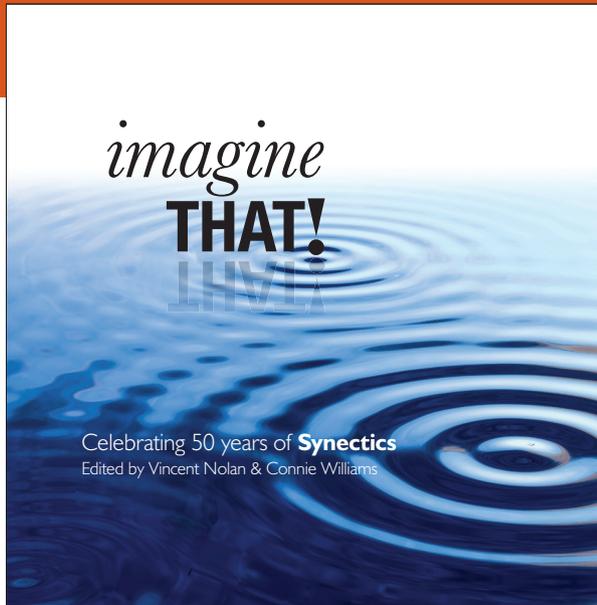


# Synectics in Marketing

An excerpt from:



## ***Imagine That!***

Celebrating 50 years of Synectics  
Edited by Vincent Nolan & Connie Williams

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ISBN 978-0-615-41377-8  
First Published 2010

***Imagine That!*** celebrates the first 50 years of Synectics, a set of highly specific innovation techniques and behaviors that help individuals and teams work together in creative ways that are positive and action-oriented. Elements include strong collaborative approaches that invite speculation, fun, courage and idea development.

They originally derived from observational analysis of thousands of audio and videotape recordings of live invention sessions and meetings. They have been used successfully around the world in a wide variety of situations over the last 50 years.

The book is a collection of stories and articles from current and former staff members, clients and other associates.



# Synectics in Marketing



## Context

The application of Synectics techniques to marketing opportunities is at the heart of Synectics work over its history. Whether it was working with consumer packaged goods with some of the most recognizable names such as Colgate, Unilever, Kimberly Clark, Gillette or Coca Cola, or business to business situations, the skills, approaches and models have been applied extensively to marketing opportunities over the years.

The development of the next generation of the Body of Knowledge around consumer and customer insight has propelled this even farther ahead, with the development of Synectics proprietary iPower5™ Insight Model. Although many companies and researchers talk about the value of insight, Synectics pioneered the creation of a replicable process that can be taught with

powerful insights created by and with client teams. Insight is defined as real motivation – what the consumer or customer wants or needs or believes that can be capitalized on for growth, not just good information or data. It is no longer the province of agencies, researchers, outside consultants or a magical process that waits in a dark room for the light bulb to come on.

The creation of this insight model is consistent with our heritage and continuing legacy – making creative work operational

through specific approaches, so that it can be accomplished with the application of specific thinking, climate and actions. It builds on academic theories, observation and action research to make insight something that is available and accessible with the appropriate inputs and skills. Furthermore, because it discovers unarticulated motivation, it becomes the focus for invention of all sorts of applications, from new product and service development to brand positioning, organizational change and even business process innovation.

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## I A Pioneering Approach: Creating with Consumers

Vincent Nolan

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George Prince was a director of an advertising agency (in Rochester, N.Y.) when he first heard of Gordon's work in the Invention Unit at Arthur D. Little. He was attracted by the challenge of applying creativity to the development of physical products for the large corporations which dominated U.S. industry at the time. From conversations with him many years later, I have the impression he shared Gordon's view that these companies "constitute the laboratories where new (Synectics) insights are tested in a functional environment"; they provided a much more demanding one than the world of advertising, where translation of a creative idea into practice required little more than the craft skills of graphics and copy-writing.

At that time, advertising agencies with their Creative Departments were unique in business in claiming to deliver 'creativity'. It was believed they were able to attract artists and writers because of the informal environment they

offered – 'beards and sandals' as opposed to the 'suits' of the account managers who dealt directly with the clients and the clients themselves. It was also a time when it was thought that only a very small minority of adults (2% according to one study) were highly creative. Synectics discovery that everyone could be creative tends to conflict with the agencies' *raison d'etre*! So marketing and advertising of fast-moving consumer goods (fmcs) was not an obvious direction of development for the company in the early years.

Nevertheless, by 1970 they were running a joint program with the Gene Reilly Group, an early qualitative research agency, in which Synectics facilitated creative sessions with consumers, with the brand manager as client, while the researchers observed through a one-way mirror and interpreted the underlying significance of what the consumers were saying. This approach flew in the face of the deeply held belief in the marketing world that consumers were not

creative and also the reluctance of most brand managers to engage with individual consumers. Prince believed that they produced better quality information than conventional focus groups, because the consumers were more deeply engaged doing something more purposeful than simply providing information. They also produced valuable ideas.

Even though the sessions were a success and the approach was reported favourably in the professional marketing press in the US, the program did not take off at that time. In the UK a distinguished researcher, having read about it, decided to experiment with the approach (without any training in the special Synectics techniques). Unsurprisingly, his sessions were not a success, from which he concluded that

conventional wisdom was correct – consumers were not creative. He published an article on his findings in the prestigious Journal of the Market Research Society, thereby setting conventional wisdom in stone!

Subsequent history has proved that Synectics was on the right track, though ahead of its time. Gradually, in subsequent decades, Synectics worked increasingly with FMCG companies like Gillette, Coca-Cola and Unilever. Today, 'co-creation' with consumers has become a common practice in the industry and the FMCG sector provides a significant part of Synectics business, as is illustrated by the cases described in this chapter and also in the separate chapter on Unilever.

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## 2 The iPower5™ Insight Process

Connie Williams

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By far the most important development in the Synectics Body of Knowledge over the past 15 years has been the iPower5™ Insight process (iP5). This process builds on the basic foundations of Synectics – the intersection of the behaviors that support a positive climate, the creative thinking approaches that open up new possibilities and actions and processes that help take raw ideas to truly fresh concepts. It helps clients discover the deeply held but unarticulated needs and wants – the motivators of behavior – of consumers, customers, employees and stakeholders.

The Synecticsworld iPower5™ framework is designed to systematize the process of

developing breakthrough product, service and other business applications. This process, as with Synectics discoveries that support creative teamwork and collaborative innovation, extends the Synectics legacy of making creativity operational, to making insight a replicable and powerful foundation for all types of Innovation initiatives.

The origins of Synectics iP5 process began with a phone call from Diageo in 1997. "We are working on a major initiative called the Diageo Way of Brand Building (DWBB). We are working on how to train our managers in an approach to real consumer insight. We know it is a creative process as much as an analytical process – but

**iPower5™**  
stages & deliverables



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we don't know how to teach our people to do it. We know you at Synectics are known for developing ways of training people and companies in creative processes. Can you help us?"

I was relatively new to Synectics and had previously been a client while working for Heublein for nearly 15 years. Heublein became part of Diageo through an acquisition – so I knew the company and realized this opportunity was significant. But where to start? So, I began by talking to long time Synectors about Insight – what did we already know? Rick Harriman, Pam Webb Moore, Jan Peterson, Claire Sokoloff, even George Prince (who was retired but always willing to offer his help on any issue) generously

offered their thoughts and ideas. George and Pam both talked about Code Cracking™, the technique that had originally been developed for Nestles in the 70's, when they wanted to get more out their focus groups. Code Cracking™ turned out to be a critical piece of the mix.

But there was something missing. That missing link was filled in by studying what the academics said about insight – the theory of how the mind gets insight – and figuring out how to take that theory, combine it with Synectics existing Body of Knowledge and build a replicable process. The source for that link was through the publications of Robert Sternberg (whom Claire called “the Titan” of Cognitive Psychology). By studying Sternberg's writings on insight, and applying

what was called “Three Process Theory”, we were able to build a process that created the conditions under which real insight was likely to occur. A small team of us, including Jan, Claire, Pam and myself started working with different design approaches, to include Three Process Theory in our approach: (1) “Selective Combination” which is pattern making and seeing new combinations of data, (2) “Selective Encoding”, which is seeing something that was irrelevant become relevant, so looking for what is hidden to us, and (3) “Selective Comparison”, seeing a new connection with something we already know, so using metaphors became a critical component.

We first developed a kind of a crude process that used the spectrum of thinking to force fit bits of data; we also created a little system that used interesting inputs in data about consumers, designing and producing some different colors of laminated cards that could be wiped on and off. The card system evolved to writing on different colors and sizes of index cards to become a way of allowing the different bits of data to be manipulated in the 3 ways that make up the Three Process Theory of Insight and to help facilitate the ability to put the puzzle pieces together in new combinations.

We did the design work for Diageo and worked with them in a couple of iP5™ workshops, but the first significant consumer-based insight work was done on a small project for long time client, Colgate, who was willing to be experimental with Synectics in using this new process to develop insights in oral care. One of the big AHa’s or insights that emerged from that work was that *consumers believed that the mouth was the ‘gateway’ to health.* This was a significant

finding, one that got to a profound but virtually unarticulated belief. Colgate used that input and other research work to ultimately connect their oral care brands with overall health, beyond just dental hygiene.

Once we had some early success with insight, we realized it would be valuable to extend the work into our European office in London so that we could build on our successes and better serve global clients. David Walker and Brian Smyth, along with Harry Barrett, had participated in the initial workshop with Diageo in Dublin so had some knowledge of the emerging process.

I made a trip to London to talk with Roger Neill and David about making iP5™ Insight a key piece of the Synectics offerings. Roger, who was head of the Europe office at that time, was reluctant at first, owing to the language. As he rightly pointed out, insight is something every focus group moderator and researcher promises, it’s a term that is thrown around indiscriminately as a substitute for good information – and that was not what we meant. What we had discovered was the ability to get to deep motivation, true empathy for the needs and wants of consumers and customers. So, that was an impetus to work to define and refine *our* insight process in ways that gave dimension and gravitas to what we were helping clients accomplish. David Walker used his extensive knowledge of consumer behavior to help bring many invaluable refinements to the process as well as ways of explaining the approach to prospective clients and it became an important part of the offerings on both sides of the pond.

Over the past 14 years, we have worked with many clients on insight issues and used iP5™

Insight in the majority of our invention work – whether in the creation of new products, services or other areas. Elements of the iP5™ approach have been applied to other Synectics work in strategy, business process improvement and organizational change. We have trained teams in the iP5™ Insight process at some of the largest consumer packaged goods companies, e.g. Coca Cola, Kraft, Burger King. We have used the process in many other contexts, from many different business-to-business and business-to-consumer industries and functions – insurance, banking and financial services, media, industrial products and transportation.

We trained over 19 business teams (around 450 people) all over the world for Gillette with a customized approach we created called ASTRA, to help them be more “consumer-centric”. I like to think that the impact that was made from that work contributed in some small way to positioning Gillette for a record-setting price, when Procter & Gamble acquired Gillette in 2005. Gillette ultimately recommended our iP5™ Insight training program to P&G as one of their ‘two best’ training programs. This led to another significant post acquisition project in shave care that was a showcase for illustrating the power of putting the abilities of the two companies together. A number of the iP5™ inspired new products from that initiative are now flowing to the marketplace, such as Gillette Thermal Care – a pre-shaving self heating facial application, which came from an insight focused on men’s beliefs about the therapeutic properties of heat and cold.

What is most rewarding about working with iP5™ Insight with clients is the transformation

that happens when we help them get to a real insight and the engagement and commitment to that insight’s veracity and power. You see a real, visceral reaction – one that is beyond an intellectual or analytical finding because they have seen something in their minds’ eye and felt it in their physical self – something that is new to them, a genuine discovery.

While working with the health insurance provider, WellPoint, on a project that explored insights with an uninsured population that had the income to purchase health insurance but chose not to do so, the project started with the client team believing that the consumer was not making rational choices, that they were essentially irresponsible. In working through the process, there was a profound transformation in the way the team saw those consumers. The clients realized that these uninsured consumers were actually making good choices for their own belief system. They believed that the hassle of health insurance was not worth the benefits. This profound transformation in how the client group viewed the consumer helped them see that they needed to figure out much more radical new ways of simplifying their offerings and services to make it much easier to do business with WellPoint and make health care more valuable to them.

I have come to believe that nearly all Synectics offerings can and should involve an aspect of iP5™ Insight. Learning the motivations of consumers, customers, employees and other stakeholders is the secret sauce that enables new, breakthrough ideas to be developed even more meaningfully than before.

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### 3 Dixie Foodservice Gets Out of the (Styrofoam) Box

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Dixie had been a long time client of Synectics, including its predecessor companies such as James River and Fort James; Dixie Foodservice was one of North America's largest and oldest manufacturers of cups and other disposable packaging for the food-service industry. Jo Fuller had trained literally of hundreds of people there. In her frequent contacts with the company, she discovered that they were struggling – struggling to find new sources of profitability in their food service packaging area. It was a mature business with little differentiation other than price (consisting of disposable containers and other packaging for restaurant and other food-service operators). So, Dixie brought in Synectics (Jo Fuller and Connie Williams) in 2002 to help them look for new-product opportunities through the iPower5™ Insight process.

The project started with skepticism. Many of the Dixie team members had been in their business for years, some even for decades. (Dixie itself had been in business since 1908.) What great new insights into customer needs could possibly be discovered that would lead to breakthrough new products?

Synectics helped Dixie assemble a cross-functional team that included participants from marketing, sales, market research, promotion and finance. Synectics then trained the Dixie team members in approaches for enhancing their creativity and in depth interview techniques. Synectics tapped the fertile imaginations of Dixie Foodservice employees by giving them new tools for unearthing hard-to-discern but

profound and untapped customer needs. After gaining these skills, the Dixie team facilitated six “creative discovery” sessions in three U.S. regions with professional food service customers from the casual dining, lodging, hospital, convenience store, quick-service and other key food-service segments. They had food and beverage managers creating visual collages and answering creative types of questions about the role that disposables played in their food operations.

Some of the inputs were really fascinating, such as images of cosmetics and lipstick – which were not the expectations of a very price competitive commodity business perspective that Dixie expected. Synectics then held an “insight” session with the Dixie team in which they identified and developed a core set of fundamental customer needs. Instead of asking for pure price and convenience products, the nugget inputs led to some surprising discoveries.

The images of cosmetics and fashion pointed to an interesting perspective – the restaurateurs looked at “take out” packaging as “sex appeal” for their food presentation. That led to an insight on how the restaurateur wanted to transfer the magic of the dining experience to the take home dining situation. In all, the session led to eight new insights on the so-called “to-go” segment. (Dixie estimated that 52% of prepared meals were made to go, and annual sales of takeout food at \$161 billion.) These eight insights served as guideposts for new products and marketing ideas.

At a subsequent Invention session of 35 people, Synectics helped the Dixie team translate those eight insights into new product ideas. In all, the Dixie people created nearly 40 concepts. Today, about 30 have been fully developed, with five launched in 2003 and others following in the pipeline. Less than six months after launch, sales of the new products were running two to five times initial projections.

“We have enough ideas to keep us busy for

at least a couple of years,” said Joe Pounder, Dixie Foodservice vice president of R&D. “Our initiative with Synectics formed the core of our product development activity for all of 2002.” Leone Stangle, a business communications manager added: “Perhaps the biggest payoff was the creation of the customer insights. We have returned to these eight insights on almost every project since then.”

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#### **4 Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines – The ‘5 Ladies’.**

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When Royal Caribbean Cruises decided that they needed a better-designed stateroom they asked Synectics to help them create not just a different look but a radical new standard in stateroom design based on insights and guest-inspired creativity. They wanted to create a new stateroom design that would bring a smile to their passengers’ faces and a “Wow!” to their lips. The conventional approach that the cruise line could have taken would have been to assign the challenge to an architectural design firm but as Kuki, a Cruise Director, wrote in a popular industry guide, *“The challenge is that ship planning and construction can take 3 to 5 years, requiring a vision of the final product long before the ship is unveiled. The vision can also change, depending on which innovations other competitors come up with.”*

The innovative cruise line decided to choose the bold over the conventional approach. Melinda Lehman led the project by designing an innovative customer input methodology that Synectics named the ‘5 Ladies’, using elements of the iPower5™ Insight process. The

collaborative technique selected potential guests, each with different levels of cruise experience and understanding, to work closely with the cruise line’s key personnel, including architects, brand sponsors, shipyard representatives, and ship designers. The design was centered around creative immersion of the ‘5 Ladies’ in various types of “small, comfortable spaces” where they interacted while being observed by the cruise line team. That innovative immersion process, which also included the ladies’ feedback about what made the spaces work for them, allowed the cruise line’s team to obtain penetrating inferences about the needs and wants of the target consumer, in turn facilitating an accelerated, interactive insight and invention prototype design process.

Synectics facilitated Insight and Invention in Miami and during a 24 hour cruise from San Juan to St. Maarten. Together, they researched design trends, conducted shipboard interviews and even travelled to Finland to view a stateroom prototype, all to build their knowledge base

about what worked and what did not. A week was spent in Turku, Finland for consumer enhancement and refinement (where the 5 Ladies and Synectics got to see how the design team turned the ideas into reality – which included a tour of the shipyard and stateroom simulation exercises).

What the Synectics innovation sessions revealed was that cruise ship guests wanted more than additional decks, a wider selection of restaurants, and high-tech fitness facilities. They wanted intelligent functionality in their staterooms, clothes hooks, storage, more pillows, natural decor – namely, the amenities of home. The

Synectics-led team got results well ahead of schedule, successfully creating a stateroom design that has become the envy of every other cruise ship company. Writing about the ship's recent launch, Wallace Immen, a columnist at the Globe and Mail, described the Oasis of the Sea as “the next step in the evolution of the cruise ship-as-a-destination.”

The cruise line's design steering committee was so impressed with the results of the '5 Ladies' project that it launched its own '5 Sailors' project to redesign crew quarters using the skills learned from Synectics.

## “One of the most unique marketing programs ever”

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### 5 Creation of the Republic of Cuervo

Connie Williams

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'One of the most unique marketing programs ever' author/futurist Watts Wacker called The Republic of Cuervo in one of his marketing books. It is an example of facilitated innovation work with a long time client where the Synectics Body of Knowledge was a true piece of the living culture. The Republic of Cuervo was created in a Synectics session by having all of the pieces of Climate, Thinking and Actions come together to create and to develop a powerful, breakthrough idea.

Jose Cuervo Tequila was a small, unique spirit brand from Mexico which began to be actively promoted into Southwest markets in California and Texas in the 60's and 70's. As it developed more active marketing initiatives it literally “grew up” through a synergistic marketing partner of

the emerging sport of “2-man” beach volleyball. They grew in parallel as a small boutique product and a small boutique sport, helping each other. Cuervo was beach volleyball's major sponsor in 1978 when the legendary Ron Van Hagen was the star, as they both begun their launch into the 'big time'. Along the way both volleyball and Cuervo became big successes.

By 1995, as other big companies started promoting beach volleyball (such as the beer companies in the U.S.) with big pocketbooks, the marketing partnership began to lose its uniqueness and power. The brand had to find a new way to bring uniqueness and differentiation in a powerful way to their marketing program. The Cuervo Brand group really knew their consumer well, and this example illustrates the

power of a great insight, along with a bold way of capitalizing on that insight. The Insight was about freedom and independence. But not in the way that this is a universal kind of insight...the JC consumer saw themselves as a true free spirit, and wanted to “do their own thing” without worrying about rules and conventions and the status quo. So, how do you activate an insight about freedom? Well, you *wish for a new country*, where you can have your own rules and pursue your own dreams. Out of this totally absurd idea, “I wish we had our own country”, the Republic of Cuervo was born. Yes, it’s an actual island that the brand leased. Actually down in the Caribbean, not even in Mexico where tequila comes from. It’s just a little spit of a cay.

So if you were evaluating this idea in conventional ways, would you say...but how many Cuervo consumers could actually fit on this island? This kind of reach is pretty limiting. We can’t send all the Cuervo consumers down there to hear our marketing message. Using Synectics principles under the guidance of facilitator Pam Webb, the client was able to courageously select that absurd idea and develop it into a powerful, yet feasible concept. Synectics developmental thinking process helped the Cuervo team realize that the Republic could be both a real place as well as a metaphorical place. As its Declaration of

Independence says, “wherever friends gather for a good time, Cuervo Nation exists”. It’s a state of mind more than an actual state or country. Of course, you can still have some fun with the metaphor...create your own flag, mob the United Nations seeking entry as a new republic as a publicity stunt, or even petition the Olympic Committee to allow the Republic of Cuervo to send in a beach volleyball team to the next Olympics! (Beach volleyball actually did recently become an Olympic sport.) Bars became Republic of Cuervo embassies; consumers had their own passports. Cuervo then launched the marketing campaign globally and spread its culture around the world with nationalistic zeal.

The results are impressive. In the U.S., which was one of the most developed markets when this campaign started, the brand grew in double digits year on year for over 10 years. It has now been executed as a marketing program, all over the world, and it has run for over 15 years. It was accomplished by that intersection of Synectics principles – Climate, Thinking and Process. The secret was having the right climate – to both offer and listen to a new, absurd idea, the creative thinking to push out the idea and the right Insight, developmental thinking and innovation process to make it happen in the marketplace.

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## 6 Wrigley Deprives Consumers

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Wrigley Canada was considering whether to bring Orbit gum or another new gum into Canada. Would Synectics help them figure out the potential and optimal positioning for New Oral Care Products in the confectionary category? Wrigley needed to figure out and prioritize relevant consumer (unmet) needs among target of young and active adults 18-29 and then develop Insights to best position oral care benefits in most relevant way.

Synectics designed an iPower5™ Insight project, exploring the issue from immersion to generating powerful insights, the creation of new concepts and conducting both qualitative consumer labs for concept refinement and quantitative concept screen.

In designing the project, Melinda Lehman and her team took a really unusual approach. They designed a Deprivation Study where consumers spent 3 days *without brushing their teeth!* They could have as much gum, the “test product” as they wanted. They were given an Ipod to record live thoughts about their experience plus a proprietary web site with Synectics Flying Table software to generate descriptions of thoughts, wishes, etc. online. Following being deprived of their toothbrushes for 3 days, they then had 2 days where they were able to brush teeth and have “test product” gum as they chose. They were then invited to a creative discovery session

to share their experiences and provide reactions to concepts for the “test product” they used.

The Insight phase was where the big breakthrough happened. Using Synectics iPower5™ Insight process, the inputs were opened up and explored for Aha’s to synthesize into a number of unarticulated needs and wants. Key insights were developed on *how much breath influences social interaction*, to a greater degree than previously recognized. It was a key driver of time spent (or not) with other people, including family members, friends and even events such as shopping and work. The state of your mouth influences how you feel and the mood you project. In essence one drops out if they don’t feel ready for interaction. Furthermore, consumers want “*to be the author of their own first impression*”. They want to control how they present themselves. This insight was used to create a number of powerful new positioning platforms. The leading platforms were centered around “healthy mouth” and “whiter/cleaner mouth” and the team then developed new gum concepts that explored a range of oral care product benefits including whitening, mouth moistening, freshening between brushings, cavity prevention and cavity reduction. Results were very strong for the “author positioning” in concept testing.