

# Synectics

## A Powerful Innovation Tool

Synectics is a creative problem solving methodology. It is based on a body of knowledge derived from research into the innovation process. The approach uses a tightly structured participant session which employs practices designed to enhance and/or accelerate the process of creating new products/services, brand/positionings and business strategies.

Generating new products, services and marketing strategies can be a daunting process in today's competitive marketplace. Synectics sessions provide an environment for creating/revitalizing strategic thinking and shorten the development cycle for bringing new products to market. As an invention tool, Synectics facilitates the development of innovative approaches for differentiating a product, service or brand.

## How Does it Work?

A Synectics engagement consists of three steps: 1) consultation with a client and preparation of the Task Statement, 2) facilitation of the ideation/strategy session and 3) delivery of a Management Summary. The Task Statement guides the selection of proven, specially designed exercises. The session(s) are led by a Synectics-trained facilitator whose task is to lead the group and:

- Foster creativity and innovative "breakthrough" thinking
- Identify and evaluate relevant product/service/brand/strategy solutions
- Enumerate key action steps and team assignments

## What Are The Deliverables With Synectics Sessions?

Following sessions of this kind a document entitled "Easel Notes of the Proceedings" is prepared that serves as a transcript of the workshop's activities and output. Included in this document is the facilitator's Management Summary which outlines salient insights, implications and suggested next-steps for the client. This document is delivered within 3-4 days time after the session is conducted.

Based on listening to client needs, we develop a Task Statement that is a succinct description of objectives. This is a critical step in the process and is generally co-authored by the client and facilitator. Once it has been approved, the statement is sacrosanct and the day's activities and exercises are planned around it.

In the programs we offer, there are three key participant roles:

**The Spokesperson:** It is customary that one member of the management team agrees to accept this role, being defined as the person who has called the meeting...who is most directly affected by the outcome.

**The Facilitator:** S/he assumes the group leadership role and guides the team as an experienced problem solver.

**The Participants:** A critical body of eight to ten people who, by virtue of their disciplines and/or their expertise, may be expected to contribute generously to the content. Our programs have been successfully used by representatives from marketing, advertising, management consulting, promotion, packaging, industrial design and engineering, to name a few.

While many sessions include participants from within the client company only, we also offer a “Creative Consumer Workshop”. In this scenario, specially recruited consumers are brought in to work with the management team *in the same room* to generate new product ideas.

## The Applications

Dialogue innovation programs have been used by our clients successfully for a variety of business growth objectives to:

- Create new products in particular categories
- Position products/services
- Build market-focused growth strategies
- Extend product/brand lines
- Develop advertising and promotional concepts
- Provide direction for organizational development
- Define corporate long-term goals

Some specific examples of individual engagements include:

- A credit card provider was able to identify specific initiatives and research needed to minimize credit losses and add long-term value to the division.
- A direct marketer explored ways to leverage catalogue sponsorship via merchandising, distribution, positioning and market targeting.
- A national brewing company outlined a new marketing strategy for one of its leading brands.
- A mutual funds provider generated services custom-designed for the wealth segment.
- A national foods manufacturer was able to create new ideas for an integrated line of vegetable juice, diced tomatoes and salsa.
- Three different units of a financial services company determined how market dynamics could be leveraged to support near and longer-term strategies for the overall business.
- A financial services firm redesigned its website to maximize competitive differentiation and promote unique customer benefits.

## Synectics Integration with Market Research

One of the most powerful applications of Synectics is to use the technique following a round of qualitative research. In this scenario, a workshop is organized and directed by a Synectics-trained facilitator, who can be, but need not be the moderator. Participants include those who observed the focus groups. Key hypotheses are identified and an action plan of next steps is articulated. While it is not designed to take the place of a final report or presentation of findings, a Synectics-style debriefing is a powerful way to heighten client interest and involvement in the qualitative process— especially one that is strategic in nature.

Quantitative research also benefits from the ideation process. One of the most useful ways in which this technique can be leveraged is to include it as a “Discovery Day” lead-in to a round of quantitative research. In this scenario, the researcher(s) and client team identify what’s been done to date, what knowledge is accrued, what needs to be accomplished in the quantitative study, what new questions need to be asked, etc.

## The Net Out

In these facilitated sessions, company people (and appropriate outside parties such as ad agencies, package design, R&D consultants, consumers, etc.) experience a permissive and creative environment that promotes “out-of-the-box thinking” and higher levels of information synthesis.

**Dialogue Resource, LLC.** is a marketing research and consulting firm located in Boston MA.

