

SPARKS!

Igniting
new ideas

Another in a series of occasional sparklers

Immersion

The artist, completely focused on a creation, gets into the Zone. The runner, with breath and muscles aligned, gets the runner's "high." As creative catalysts, working with business clients to solve tough challenges, we often find ourselves coaxing our participants into different realms of perception by creating experiences beyond their business as usual. We call these **immersions**, and that is the focus of this, our third issue of *Sparks!*

No, we don't ask our clients to ingest anything weird! But sometimes we ask them to step a bit outside of their comfort zones in order to achieve a deeper, richer appreciation of a different consumer reality, or a new process or technology.

Why do we create immersions?

Because we have learned that members of organizations tend to see the world through the particular set of lenses of their organization. That's useful for many things, and it keeps a team running efficiently within the bounds of the enterprise. But, if your mission is to do something different – create a new line of products or develop a whole new way to expand business – you need to be able to see the world more fully. We help our client teams "see the world through a new set of lenses" and go even deeper into understanding a culture, language, marketplace, set of needs, etc. These custom-designed immersion experiences enable client team members to attain a visceral appreciation of something that is new and different for them.

Of course we don't just leave clients with the raw material produced by the immersions. We guide them through the steps to transfer what they've experienced to address the business issue they are confronting.

If all this sounds intriguing, read on. We'll share a range of stories and offer tips for you to create your own immersions.

Laurie, Reva & Marcia

Two Tasty Tales of Immersion

Or, this is no time for dieting!

Mint Magic

THE CHALLENGE

The new products team of a global foods company had two objectives: gather a richer understanding of the "world of mint," and use that knowledge to develop a portfolio of unique confectionary products with real consumer excitement.

THE IMMERSION

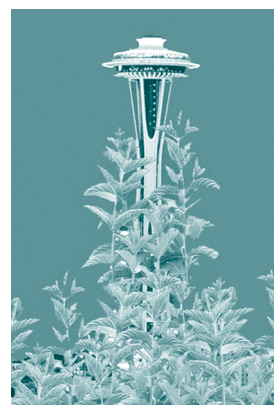
We trekked to a place where mint grows wild! We traveled with clients to Seattle where, greeted by our local chef and guide, we toured Pike Place Market. We drank mint lattes, explored the mysterious world of Tenzing Mo Mo Herbal Remedies, got skin tingling sensations from a visit to Aveda Aromatherapy, and wandered the Seattle countryside to visit The Herb Farm. We gathered aromas, tastes, and product samples, struck up conversations with locals along the way and kept diaries of our experiences.

We continued our journey with four qualitative "Concept Inspiration" sessions with teens and grownups to uncover more about what makes mint so appealing. Chef Kelly fêted us in the back room with exotic dishes from different cultures including mint and walnut stuffed eggplant and mint salsa. Inundated with our rich experiences and quotable quotes from the marketplace: "Mint is the universal flavor of a kiss" and "Mint is smart food... a thinking person's candy..." we returned home. Converging with

the clients, we shared our discoveries and developed a slew of concepts. Six product platform ideas and 14 developed concepts were brought to six new groups of consumers.

THE RESULTS

The client has drawn upon the tremendous learning of the mint immersion. Mint has become an important dimension in several line extensions and new brand development.



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Create External Environments to Enhance Inner Creativity!

“The marvelous envelopes and saturates us like the atmosphere, but we fail to see it.”

Charles Baudelaire
Poet

Unless your company has a separate, “sacred” place designed for creative inspiration, the first rule of thumb is to get away from the office, the distractions and routine of the normal workday. Over the years we have seen a direct correlation between a distraction-free, comfortable, idea-friendly environment and a team’s creative output.

Cool places we’ve worked in:

- A cozy inn, with fireplace, gardens, and gazebo
- Boston Children’s Museum
- Roger Williams Zoo
- A rustic hunting lodge
- Culinary Institute of America

PROVIDE CUES THAT SAY NOT “BUSINESS AS USUAL”

- *Dress up your meeting place with decorations and props that reflect the theme of your session.* We’ve created Christmas in September for a team charged with developing new holiday confections. For focus groups on the topic of gift-giving, we gift wrapped participants’ notepads. Posters and photos on the walls, product samples strewn around, stacks of magazines, and assorted toys

all help inspire ideas and put people in the right frame of mind to view their task in a new light.

- *Add color!* Markers for doodling, colored paper for note-taking, and sticky notes in an array of hues add spice and playfulness to the proceedings.
- *“Virtual decoration” can enhance a less-than-perfect meeting space.* Stuck with a dark, windowless conference room? Use easel sheets to draw windows looking out onto trees and flowers, and hang these on the walls.
- *Introduce music, aroma, and tactile materials to engage the senses.* We played lullabies to get our sleep aid consumers in the right mood, and brought in an array of scented candles and incense to talk about aromatic cleaning products.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SERENDIPITY

If something unexpected happens during your session, use it to trigger new ideas. While working with a team at a country inn, we were startled when one of the inn’s goats suddenly appeared at the window. That goat inspired a bunch of beginning product ideas!

Reva Dolobowsky

“I Was Dreaming in French!”

When she was in 7th grade, my sister opted to go to French immersion school – her entire curriculum was in French: math, science, even gym. We shared a room back then, and one night Ronna woke me up with a shout – “I was dreaming in French!” she said.

To understand what your current and future customers are looking for, try to immerse yourself in a different culture. That’s what archaeologists do... and it’s a great way to come up with a whole raft of new ideas.

Using artifacts – some pottery fragments, a stone tool, a couple of beads – an archaeologist must reconstruct a history, a lifestyle of a civilization long buried. The ability to create a story from a few material remains gives an archaeologist the fluency to devise new products. How so? Without the constraints of a cultural framework, the archaeologist is free to decode what people needed and how they made products to solve certain problems. Is that metal hook for fishing? For trapping? For decoration?

The archaeologist creates the use based on the evidence left behind, an exercise your team can do as well. Just take a pile of assembled “artifacts” – a collection of everyday products taken out of everyday context – and use them to generate new ideas. Imagine what someone from another culture may do with them. How would someone from a different era use a fork? A set of keys? The answers your team comes up with will be illuminating.

Marcia Mogelonsky



Harvey Ehrlich



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Two Tasty Tales of Immersion

A Taste of Italy in New York

THE CHALLENGE

The business manager of a major ingredients supplier and the new products team leader from an Italian food chain wished to develop new growth opportunities while forging a deeper, collaborative relationship.

THE IMMERSION

In an initial planning conversation, the project team leaders speculated how valuable it could be to hold the program in Italy, but budgets and timing precluded that. We created the next best thing: an immersion into the tastes, sights and sounds of Italy in New York City.

We guided the team leader through “Little Italy” where we sampled appetizers in one trattoria, main dish delicacies in another, and desserts in a third. We continued our walking tour through the West Village’s old Italian neighborhood, tasting and photographing goodies in a cheese store, olive oil emporium, meat market, and bakery. Not a trip for dieters to be sure, but the wealth of insights, novel ingredients, tastes, shapes and textures inspired a multitude of ideas.

The work continued with the team coming together to develop ideas in the extraordinary Culinary Institute in Napa Valley where participants played with their food and literally brought their ideas to life.

THE RESULTS

Over 300 ideas were generated; more than two dozen were crafted into detailed concepts and taken through research and evaluation.

Laurie Tema-Lyn

Mother’s/Step-Mother’s/Other Mother’s/All Mother’s Day

The 2000 census gives a summary of the state of the American family. Married couple households are down from 1990; multi-generational households are up; teen population is on the rise. But how do you really understand the changes in today’s family?

For a much easier answer, go to the greeting card store in early May. That’s when the Mother’s Day cards hit the shelves, and the best way to understand the changing American family is to see who’s getting a Mother’s Day card this year.

Of course, there are a million cards for Mom. There are also cards for Stepmom. And there are cards “for my other mother,” for “my father’s new wife,” and for “my new mother.” There are cards for grandmother and great aunt, and for great-grandmother as well.

There are cards for babysitters and daycare providers and the people who help keep a family a family – “Because you’ve been like a mother to me.” There are even cards from the family dog and cat. And to illustrate the growing number of single-dad households, there are Mother’s Day cards for Dad.

The greeting card store also provides glimpses into other cultural occasions – drop by in December and check out the cards for Christmas, Chanukah, and Kwanzaa. For a look at the changing role of fathers in American culture, don’t miss the cards for Father’s Day. Make the store a regular stop on your idea-gathering itineraries.

Marcia Mogelonsky



QUICK DIPS: Get your feet wet with “instant immersions”

- Browse stores, magazines, and websites in your industry and related areas, but most important is to look for media that you may think are far afield.
- Watch a movie relating to your industry or target consumer, noting the language and imagery.
- Follow a diabetes diet for a day.
- Interview a friend for their secret tips about cleaning their home.
- Give a baby a bath. If you don’t have a baby of your own, borrow one from a friend or relative.

Reva Dolobowsky

*“Errors, like
straws, upon the
surface flow;
He who would
search for pearls
must dive below.”*

*John Dryden
Poet*

Immerse To dip, to plunge, to absorb deeply, to engross

Reva Dolobowsky

For over 20 years, Reva Dolobowsky has given her clients a rich, in-depth understanding of what goes on inside the minds of their target markets. Through focus groups, in-depth interviews, and idea generating sessions among consumers and management teams, she provides critical insights and innovative ideas in many industries.

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Zen and the Art of Creative Eavesdropping

Sometimes immersion into a different world simply means being attuned to unexpected things right in your midst. Men's shopping habits, for example.

Consider this tantalizing fragment, overheard outside the men's dressing room at Sears: "Oh no, honey! Are you seizing up already?" This long-suffering wife explains that her husband's tolerance for trying on clothes lasts five minutes, max. After that, he just "seizes up", and the shopping trip is over.

Or this tidbit from the snacks aisle of a natural foods store: A woman confides to her female friend that "Fred's a Buffalo wings type of guy. I don't think he'd go for purple corn chips." To which her friend smugly replies that when it comes to her own husband's eating habits, she does all the shopping, so she has "complete control over what he eats." If you were a snack food marketer, this comment could lead to a whole array of marketing insights... that is, if you were paying attention!

Reva Dolobowsky

Thought Leaders Add Spice! Wisdom, Insights, Information & Ideas

No matter how knowledgeable, experienced and open-minded a client team may be, team members invariably see the world through the lenses that reflect their corporate values, beliefs and processes. That's why we have long advised adding a few people from outside of the corporation to complement our client teams. These "Thought Leaders" can offer a new window into the world of customers, open eyes to an array of possibilities, ask provocative questions and bring rich content and raw material to spark creativity.

We involved thought leaders with great success in two recent projects to develop home care products. Interior designer Jayne Pelosi (Renaissance Interior Design) joined us to "immerse our clients in the spirit, the touch and feel, and the emotionality behind home care." Jayne infused us with her insights on furnishings, design and home maintenance from many angles, demonstrated the evolution of home trends and speculated where they are headed in the future. She gave us a taste of her clients' wishes for improved household products, and engaged the team in a visual feast of the newest decorating materials, colors, and textures. We dipped into this tapestry of information throughout

the Innovation Sessions, as inspiration for new ideas. Harvey Ehrlich, a Visual Illuminator, often accompanies us on projects to bring team ideas to life with colorful sketches. Harvey has the unique ability to immerse himself in the stream of client ideation. He selects and faithfully captures the most intriguing ideas, while at the same time connecting with his own world experience shaping, enhancing and offering additional directions for the team to consider. By day, he quickly sketches snippets of ideas; by night he dives further into the work, often giving up food or sleep to complete the drawings for thought-provoking, insightful presentation the next day.

What kinds of experts could enrich your thinking? Here are more examples from recent projects:

- Consumer Trends Experts & Futurists
- Cultural Anthropologists
- Food Experts & Chefs
- Art Historians & Experts in Imagery & Symbols
- Storytellers
- Diabetes Educators/Nurses

Laurie Tema-Lyn