imprints

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Columnists

competitive intelligence corner

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a monthly column devoted to answering questions relating to CI

Dear CIC: A lot of people in my company are doing CI on an ad hoc basis and there is no structure in place, so the system has broken down. I have been asked to do an audit to find out why we are running into trouble. Do you have any suggestions? *Internal Auditor*

Dear Internal Auditor: We'd like to suggest two initial steps:

First thing to do is determine who should be the people:

1. collecting CI;
2. analyzing the data collected and writing up reports; and,
3. reading these CI reports.

Secondly, determine what is preventing people from doing their job.

For those responsible for collecting CI such as sales reps and technical support, chances are some hesitate to collect CI because either they are too busy with other responsibilities, are not comfortable asking questions of a sensitive nature, do not see the value of CI, do not know where to send the information or have become de-motivated because no one is giving them feedback on the CI that they have already collected, so why collect more?

For those individuals responsible for analyzing the data and writing the reports, the breakdown could be due to a number of reasons including the findings themselves (being inaccurate, sketchy, lacking consistency), the sources contacted (not being credible, not large enough sample) or how the report was written (too wordy, not enough tables, little, if any interpretation, or recommendations).

For those reading the reports, in all likelihood, they are either skimming through the findings or not bothering at all. The reasons for this is in all likelihood they either are not the real decision makers, don't see much value in the reports or are simply juggling a lot of other tasks, thereby justifying not making an effort to read the reports.

Dear CIC: I am getting so much CI sent to me that I am overwhelmed. What can I tell people who send me the CI? *Overwhelmed*

Dear Overwhelmed: A first step is to look at what you are asking them to collect for you. The point is if you are leaving it up to your reps to collect CI, then it's no doubt you are getting much too much information. You need to communicate to your reps specifically what you want them to investigate and why. Coming up with four or five must-know questions for them to get answers to works very well. For example, let's assume you work for a pharmaceutical company and you recently heard that a competitor is planning to launch a product that will directly compete with yours. Instead of asking your reps to collect everything they can on what this competitor drug will be, start with asking them to get answers to:

a. Has the competitor filed for notice of compliance to Health Canada?

b. If they haven't yet filed, when do they plan to?

c. When do they expect approval from Health Canada?

d. When do they expect to launch?

The second step is for you to put together a template for your reps to fill in. This will streamline their efforts, ensure some consistency when reading the results and will cut down significantly on your reading load.

CI Contact Report	
Name of Rep:	Date:
1. Who is the competitor?	
2. What threat do they pose?	
3. Why is it important for us to know this?	
4. Where do you find out about this threat?	
5. Has this information been corroborated by a second source? By whom?	
6. What is your confidence in the accuracy of your information?	
7. From what you have learned, what suggestion do you have for us to counter this threat?	

A third step would be to get someone to summarize these reports into an overall table. We find that assigning the must know questions to rows, and the various competitors to columns works well as illustrated below

	Competitor A	Competitor B	Competitor C	Competitor D	Overall
• What threat do they pose?					
• Why is it important for us to know this?					
• How can we counter this threat?					

Tip – Don't leave it up to your sales reps to decide what CI they should send you. Take the lead. Determine which information gaps need to be filled. Decide who you want to collect this CI, and then brief them accordingly.

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