



CI Corner

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Dear CIC: I am interested in taking a CI workshop. I have checked out the few offered through university executive development programs but have found them to be pricey. I also looked at some continuing education courses in CI, but these focus on online research, whereas I want to get a bigger picture of CI and learn about primary sources, setting up a CI program, etc. What about “Competitive Intelligence, Competitor Benchmarking and Mystery Shopping: Essentials,” which MRIA offers this February. Can you tell me what the course covers and who it is targeted to? *Eager To Learn*

Dear Eager To Learn: The MRIA workshop you mention is designed for the market research community, so it typically attracts research suppliers, research buyers, business analysts, and business information managers.

In terms of content, the workshop has three sections.

The Basics. This section of the workshop examines what CI is, its applications, best practices, ethics and sources. It goes into the planning of your first CI study, how to leverage your marketing research skills to maximize your CI output, conducting CI interviews, developing a network of sources, analysing raw data, using financial ratios to pinpoint your competition's weaknesses, reconstructing competitive sales messages, producing actionable CI reports, conducting accuracy checks, incorporating templates to streamline your efforts, war gaming, predicting competi-

tor threats, and developing strategies to counter these threats.

Managing Your CI Program. Here, the workshop delves into the development of your CI plan, tips for setting up your CI program, the pros and cons of CI software, recruiting colleagues to collect CI, the do's and don'ts of outsourcing CI, managing your client's needs, defensive CI (eliminating information leaks within your company and preventing competitors from gathering intelligence on your company), putting together a CI newsletter, and evaluating the effectiveness of your CI program.

Special Applications. The final section of the workshop looks at mystery shopping, competitor benchmarking, using CI to assess new market opportunities, and marketing CSI.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Dear CIC: I have been asked to set up a CI program. My first step will be to do a needs assessment with our stakeholders. Can you suggest some questions for the survey? *Needs Assessor*

Dear Needs Assessor: Below are the questions we would ask.

What is the biggest gap you'd like to see filled in the CI you receive?

What decisions do you make with CI?

Which competitor poses the greatest threat to your company?

If you were to identify one key goal (e.g., to formalize a process for finding out competitor pricing, develop a CI plan, set up a CI intranet, develop a CI mission statement) for the first year of the CI program, what would it be?

What sources do you contact for CI (e.g., buyers, suppliers, your employees, databases, Internet, trade reports)?

What sources would you like to contact but have been unable to?

What has prevented you from doing so?

Do you use a formalized approach in reporting CI, or is it mostly anecdotal information?

How do you currently store research on your competitors (e.g., hard files, databases, intranet)?

Would you like this changed? If so, how?

Do you find it easy to access CI from other areas within our company? Why or why not?

What roadblocks, if any, are preventing CI at our company from being fully acted on?

Have you needed to outsource CI?

Would there be any value for some CI training?

What one suggestion do you have to improve how CI is collected and used at your company?

A monthly column devoted to answering questions relating to competitive intelligence

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