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CI Corner

a monthly column devoted to answering questions relating to competitive intelligence

This issue looks at making a case for training your sales reps to collect CI and offers some words of caution if you go ahead with the training.

Dear CIC: I need to make a case for training our sales staff to gather CI. Right now, CI is being done ad hoc. In addition to the standard “CI training will help us better anticipate our competition so we do not get blindsided,” what are other arguments I can make? *CI Initiator*

Dear CI Initiator:

Four reasons why formal CI training will benefit your company are that it will

- energize more sales reps to collect market information
- give them guidelines to collect CI ethically
- improve their skills so they can provide relevant, accurate, and timely information
- pinpoint weaknesses in your competitors’ product offerings, providing intelligence which can then be translated into more effective sales messaging.

Dear CIC: I have been asked to set up a CI training program, starting with our sales people, and then roll

the program out to the rest of the company. Any thoughts? *CI Trainer*

Dear CI Trainer:

Avoid overly ambitious efforts that include everyone in your training. Receptionists, for example, do not need to be trained. Ultimately, the measure of success will be how many big decisions are made with CI. So it’s the quality of the information, not the quantity, that counts. There is an analogy with corporate sales: Do you want everyone in your company to sell? In theory, yes, because the result would certainly be an increase in revenues. But at what cost? CI should not be an open-ended initiative but should focus, instead, on filling critical gaps. So you need to be very selective as to whom you train. Do a small pilot project to see what results you get from the training, and then develop a strategy for training the rest of your sales force. How much time and effort can you afford without knowing what your ROI will be?

Don’t confuse CI training with other types of training, such as customer servicing. Involving too many people increases the chances of employees’ being unethical, being misinformed, and tipping off your competitors as to what your information gaps are!

THIS MONTH’S THOUGHT

Whenever you do any CI training, you are actually setting up a CI system at the same time. One goes in hand with the other. Factor in time and money for both.

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