



# CI Corner

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This issue looks at how to manage the crossfire of internal politics.

*Dear CIC:* After presenting the report for a major CI project to senior management, I found myself being questioned about the results. A number of senior managers had made certain assumptions about the competition, and when they found that the report contradicted their assumptions, they immediately called into question the results of the study and methodology used. I know the methodology was valid. We had double-checked the data and the sources of the data, and we removed all misinformation. It's just that these senior managers made the wrong assumptions. How do I deal with the crossfire of internal politics? *CI Manager*

*Dear CI Manager:* There are three things to keep in mind: (1) recognise that this is all part of being in research; (2) know your client's biases; and (3) be prepared.

*It's all part of the game.* The situation you're facing is one that most research professionals face sooner or later: Your client has a strong belief regarding the anticipated results of a study, and when that belief has been proven to be inaccurate, the client questions the results and those involved in the research.

In a recent study we did on wind turbines, for example, a client questioned the results for a specific North American manufacturer, which indicated a high level of quality, high customer sat-

isfaction, and praise from industry experts. We ended up doing further research to convince the client that the information was accurate and that, indeed, the manufacturer produced a high-quality product that was making strong inroads in the North American and global markets.

*Know your client's biases.* When interviewing a client, it is important to understand not only that client's information needs but also the client's information biases. All clients have a somewhat skewed view of the world based on their responsibilities within their company, their professional background, and their experiences. As a research professional, you should note these biases so that you will be able to address them during your research.

**Tip:** Understanding clients' biases helps you prepare the information required to answer their questions and win their support.

*Be prepared.* When collecting and analysing data, be prepared to respond to tough questions, especially if the information contradicts any set beliefs held by your clients.

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Assume that the results of the study will engender criticism from clients. On the basis of this assumption you should

1. gather information from as many reliable and verifiable sources as possible
2. get more data than you usually need so that you can call upon a wealth of data to support your findings
3. think about some of the questions that may be asked, and answer those questions in your report
4. know your data and your sources thoroughly, because you may be asked a question you did not anticipate.

You will never completely eliminate the possibility of criticism of study results, but you can minimize their impact.

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A monthly column devoted to answering questions relating to competitive intelligence

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