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and
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a monthly column devoted to answering questions relating to Competitive Intelligence

Dear CIC: I am a CI supplier and I have a concern about one of my clients, who works as an intermediary between his internal clients and myself. There are times when something is "lost in the translation" and the information sought by his internal clients turns out to be different from what my contact assigns to me. Other times, the information request from his internal clients are vague and my contact has to go back again and again to them to get clarifications. What should I do as a CI supplier to make my contact's work, and my work, easier?

Frustrated CI Supplier

Dear Frustrated CI Supplier:

On your part, for each assignment, you should get the contact and/or his internal clients to fill out a project form or brief indicating the objectives of the project.

The form should specify clearly:

1. the description and background of the project;
2. who requested the project and the reasons for requesting it;
3. who will be reading the report;
4. what will be done with the intelligence gathered;
5. the contact's role in the project as well as the role of the internal client;
6. the objectives of the project;
7. the specific questions to be answered, grouped by 'need to know' and 'nice to know'; and,
8. the deadline.

It would be better to let your contact be responsible for having his internal clients fill out the form, since she is the one who knows these individuals as well as the

corporate culture.

You will find that this form will help the clients to think more clearly about their intelligence needs. It will help them to be more specific about what they are asking for, and also to provide improved elaboration of their intelligence needs.

The use of a project form will inevitably make your work easier and better.

Dear CIC: I am responsible for CI at a financial institution. It has come to my attention that our competitors have been obtaining information on our services and technology by using their clients, or who appear to be their clients, as "trojan horses". What appears to be happening is that these clients sign up for our services and leave after a short while. As clients, they gather information on our services, technology, pricing and bundling of various services. What should I do to halt this suspected intrusion?

Looking to Counter the Competition

Dear Looking to Counter the Competition:

There are several measures you can take to counter such activities, and they will need the coordinated and sustained effort from a number of different departments. The objective is to scare off the "trojan horses", but at the same time not put off legitimate clients.

1. One measure is to have new clients sign a form stating that they will NOT pass information on your FI's technology, pricing, etc. to your competitors. This is where your legal department can step in

to prepare the wording of the form to ensure that it complies with the law and is enforceable. Also, your account managers and customer service reps should ensure that such forms are signed as required.

2. Another measure is to ask the proper questions at the interview stage, when your account managers interview prospective new clients. Along with getting financial and credit backgrounds, they should ask clients about their past and current banking activities: who they use now, for how long, etc. The purpose is to get a handle on their potential loyalty and legitimacy as clients. If there are any strong suspicions, the prospective clients should be "red flagged" as potential "trojan horses".

3. Finally, the IT department can provide information on the activities of "trojan horses". They should be able to provide information on clients who continuously sign up and then leave after a short period of time. So, if these individuals or companies should seek to sign up again, the account manager will be alerted and have the discretionary power to reject their applications.

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