



CI Corner

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Dear CIC: There has been a longstanding debate over which research methodology is best, traditional market research (quantitative/qualitative) or competitive intelligence. I have both market researchers and CI people in my company, and there are internal clients who support the methodology of one over that of the other. Taking into account that your view may be biased towards CI methodology, how would you resolve this debate? – *CI Manager*

Dear CI Manager: I fully understand your discomfiture with regard to this debate. The present writer has been to conferences where speakers declared that a CEO should not make a decision unless the VP of Market Research signs off on the decision – and other conferences where speakers declared that the VP of Competitive Intelligence should sign off on a decision.

There has been a realization that such absolutism overlooks the needs of the end users, the decision-makers who depend on research findings to make critical decisions affecting their companies.

As a result, there has been an evolution towards the idea that the objective is to provide key insights and actionable intelligence to decision-makers using the most cost-effective research method-

ology possible. This is often dictated by turnaround time, budgetary constraints, and complexity of the research required.

What research is required? First of all, any research requirement from an internal client should be in writing, detailing what information is required, how this information is to be used, and why. Having the research request in writing ensures that the client requesting the information will take responsibility for the expenditure of time and money required to conduct the research – and that such expenditure will not be squandered on frivolous, flavour-of-the-week issues.

Identifying the most cost-effective and timely research method. Whether there is an economic downturn or not, careful consideration should always be given to the most cost-effective way of obtaining the information requested, whether in terms of time, money or company resources.

For example, there are some types of information – such as customer satisfaction, consumer decision-making, and market share – that can be best achieved through traditional market research. The decision then becomes whether to spend money on custom research or buy research that has already been completed and is available for sale.

If there is a need to understand the business practices of competitors or to gauge how a new technology will impact your industry, then competitive intelligence would be the best methodology. Primary data gathering is best for CI, but secondary research can be used to provide leads or fill in any information gaps.

If there is no budget for primary research, then the services of the corporate librarian could prove invaluable in uncovering the best possible secondary research available.

Conclusion, Whether your favoured research methodology is competitive intelligence or traditional market research, you must never lose sight of the fact that the interest of your internal clients is what is most important. You should be open to the idea of using the most appropriate research methodology to meet the information needs of your internal clients and, ultimately, your company.

TIP: Successful competitive intelligence professionals incorporate data and insights from a gamut of information sources to develop a profound understanding of the industry in which they are working and of the ways in which internal and external dynamics impact that industry, today and in the future.

A monthly column devoted to answering questions relating to competitive intelligence

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