



# CI Corner

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This issue looks at what changes have taken place over the past few years in CI and what changes we can expect to see moving forward.

*Dear CIC:* How has CI evolved over the past several years, and where do you see it going in the next few years?

*Future Thinking*

*Dear Future Thinking:* The changes we have seen in the past three or four years have not been that dramatic. They have been more iterative.

There has been the growth of a greater demand for easy-to-follow CI reports, including monthly activity scans, that is, tables summarizing key initiatives by competitors and the threats they pose. There has been increasing demand for online education among employees, especially those, like sales reps, who are in the field. They are taking 30-to-60-minute online training modules to learn how to collect and report the CI they come across in the market. There has also been increasing demand for mystery shopping to assess the sales and service delivery of call centre support and online customer sign-up.

Over the past three or four years, there has been a growing awareness that dashboard packages are no substitute

for a formal CI program emphasizing human intelligence from knowledgeable sources. There has also been increasing understanding that much of the CI information needs can be met by developing a network of communications within an organization. In other words, the importance of using internal sources of information and synthesizing their knowledge has been gaining traction among CI managers.

In the next few years, we see a number of other changes taking place.

CI will become more streamlined. Tools to see into various social networking sites and professional organizations as well as corporate and government sites will be commonplace. You will be able to key in, for example, “key intelligence topics” – and voila! there will appear a list of twenty people who likely have the information you want. Companies will, of course, exercise greater vigilance to prevent sensitive information from being leaked by their own employees.

There will be a greater push for CI by senior managers, since many in their previous roles as middle managers will have used CI. There will also be a greater embrace of CI by non-profit organizations such as health charities – they might need to know who else is

planning a major gift campaign, for example. Governments, too, will embrace CI – a crown corporation may, perhaps, be expanding into overseas markets.

The years ahead will see an expanding role for competitive information from beyond one’s own country, industry and language. As a consequence, foreign language skills as well as knowledge of developments in other industries and countries will increase in importance. These are signs of the growing interconnectedness of the world.

The average horizon for CI will expand beyond the immediate and near terms. More companies will be looking years ahead to be in a better position to deal with a wider range of possible outcomes in terms of resources (e.g., new sources, shortages, re-use, extraction processes) and market demand (e.g., demographics) as well as technology and economic cycles.

In a process that has already begun because of demand from senior management, information from CI, traditional market research, and other sources will increasingly merge to make information sourcing more cost-effective, thus reducing the rivalry between CI and traditional market research.

A monthly column devoted to answering questions relating to competitive intelligence

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