

Why Market Researchers Make Natural CI Practitioners

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Introduction

Close to 90% of the clients we work with on competitive intelligence (CI) studies are either directors of marketing research, research managers or research consultants. This begs the question, 'why does marketing research, as opposed to corporate affairs, sales or another department end up being the designated conduit for CI in many corporations? Is this by chance or does management recognize that market researchers are the natural choice, because they already possess many of the skills inherent in CI? We, at Market Alert, believe that market researchers possess the necessary instinct and ability to become excellent CI practitioners.

How Would You Define CI?

CI is an information science, integrating market research, sales data, reconstructive analysis and forensic investigation. Similar to medical investigation, detective work and military intelligence, CI pounces on fragmented data from a variety of sources, consolidates this data, verifies the findings and then provides direction to make a decision. Whether you use CI to uncover intrusions by foreign competitors, examine best practices among competitor product offerings, reconstruct competitor marketing platforms, fine-tune sales plans or locate customer service gaps, CI challenges you to visualize your competitor's gaps and hypothesize what the competitor's counter-attacks will be.

What About Library Science?

Could an argument be made that someone with a background in information investigation, such as library science, be equally capable to carry out CI on a marketing issue? It's doubtful, because if one doesn't work in a marketing environment, how could they be as effective as someone who does? Market researchers typically concentrate their support and direction to marketing related issues including sales, branding, advertising and customer services. A corporate librarian, on the other hand, is more focused on being available for whoever within the company (whether it be accounting, finance, HR or marketing) requires assistance.

Bear in mind that CI is made up of 2 components, *competitive* (i.e. investigating competitor activities) and *intelligence* (i.e. bringing your experience, expertise and intellect to analyze the data and make meaningful decisions with it). Librarians, are excellent at sourcing information, but unlike market researchers, their duties do not include analysis, summary and recommendations.

Finally, Primary CI (information from customers, competitors, in house personnel and 3rd parties) typically lies outside the domain of corporate librarians, whereas market researchers are very capable through their skills in interviews and group discussions to source primary CI. Secondary CI (information uncovered by searching websites, articles, industry reports and other publicly available sources) can be easily accessed by market researchers just as easily as by a librarian.

Using medicine as an analogy and falling under administrative support, library science personnel would maintain and retrieve patient files. CI personnel would be in charge of a number of patients, whereas market research would run a specific department such as orthopedics and, like CI has a medical designation.

Mini Case - Which Requirements Would A Market Researchers Likely Have?

The table below is broken out into 3 columns. The first column contains a standard career ad from the website of SCIP (The Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals) for a CI manager. The second column identifies 10 requirements for the position, cited in the career ad. The third column is for you to fill in, with either a 'yes' or 'no'.

Career Ad	Requirements For The CI Manager's Position	Does a MR Mgr. Have This?
<p>The CI Mgr. will coordinate the activities and studies of the CI team and be responsible for its output. This will involve working with senior management to identify the CI needs of the company; developing and leading a team of skilled professional analysts; being responsible for the quality of CI output; presenting findings to senior management; managing the efforts of the CI team in conjunction with other data-gathering units of the company to limit overlap and optimize the information-gathering of the company as a whole. You must be an excellent motivator, with a high energy level. Qualifications include Bachelor's degree (MBA preferred). Experience in competitive analysis and marketing, experience as a project leader or supervisor. Excellent written and oral communication skills. Superior analytical mind. Excellent computer skills, including experience with word processing, Lotus 1-2-3, and Microsoft Access. Knowledge of World Wide Web and research experience with on-line databases essential.</p>	1. Coordinating activities and studies of team	?
	2. Be responsible for the team's output	?
	3. Developing & leading a team of skilled analysts	?
	4. Presenting findings to management	?
	5. Bachelor's degree	?
	6. Knowledge of WWW and on-line databases	?
	7. Excellent written & oral communication skills.	?
	8. Superior analytical mind	?
	9. Excellent motivator with a high energy level	?
	10. Experience in competitive analysis & marketing	?
WHAT IS YOUR SCORE? (Ours was "yes" for all 10).		

Conclusion

The simple yet profound difference between a library science professional and a market researcher is this: librarians are trained to assess a book by its cover, whereas market researchers by nature leave no page unturned in their effort to uncover what is not apparent. Market researchers and CI professionals alike, are able to compile large amounts of data, summarize it and then make recommendations, which is used as a foundation for strategic market planning. While we have all utilized the vast knowledge of a library science specialist from time to time, we need the depth and creative insight that comes with a skilled market researcher in order to fully realize success as CI specialists ●