

ANSWERS TO YOUR CI QUESTIONS

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Q. There is a major trade show coming up for my industry in a couple of months. What should I look out for when attending the show?

Trade shows are one of the best sources for information on competitors. At trade shows, there are the obvious opportunities to collect competitor brochures, as well as free pens and enough candy to keep your dentist busy for another year. But if that is all you collect, then you've missed a major chance to learn more about your competitors.

You should view trade shows as an easy way to update your knowledge about the overall competitive landscape. For example:

- Who is doing what and when, where, how and why?
- What new technologies are being offered?
- How are competitors marketing themselves?
- Who is going up, and who is failing?
- Who is allying with whom?

BEFORE THE SHOW

You cannot answer these questions by just turning up on the day and briskly walking around the show, picking up the freebies. You need to plan your visit – several weeks in advance. Find out which companies are planning to exhibit. Have these companies exhibited before, or is it their first time?

Trade shows are an important way of identifying new competitors, so spend some time researching first-timers. Why are they exhibiting? Are

they new entrants into the industry, small companies that have grown and wish to grow further, or what?

Also look at the repeat exhibitors. Get a copy of the show floor plan. Where are the companies of interest situated – in a prime position, or at the back or sides where visitors spend less time? Has this changed from the previous exhibition? As well as looking at who is attending, consider who is absent. What does this say about their current market position, or marketing emphasis?

Look for associated seminars, product demonstrations, and workshops. Many of these will be free to pre-booked visitors – so pre-book those of interest as soon as possible to guarantee yourself a place.

Think also about your intelligence collection objectives. What do you aim to achieve by visiting the show? What questions can you ask, and what should you be looking out for? Find out who else within your organization plans to attend, and coordinate with them to avoid duplication and maximize your opportunities. Find out who can't attend, and ask them what they would like to learn from the show. Incorporate all these into your plan for attendance.

DURING THE SHOW

Generally, you will not have access to the exhibition hall until the show actually starts, unless your company is also exhibiting. But you may overhear competitor employees talking about their plans in the delegate hotel prior to the event – so look out for this opportunity. Of course, the same can be done to you, so make sure that your people are briefed on the importance of keeping their eyes open and mouths

shut, and that they protect your company data.

Aim to arrive when the show starts to get a feel for the layout and atmosphere. Have a look at the competitors and other companies you identified. Who is staffing their stands? What does the stand look like? You should also watch for how visitors to the stand are treated, and how many visitors they get. What is the morale of the sales agents on the stand – and how senior are they?

Watch out for when the company's senior and board level managers visit. How do their staff react? Senior management often visits on the first day of a multi-day show, especially if they plan to make a press-release or product announcement in parallel with the show. So take advantage of this and make sure that you are present to observe the company dynamics.

Conversely, on the final day of the show you are more likely to get junior staff in the booth out to impress. They are less likely to temper their conversations, so you can visit the stand and ask awkward questions that get answered. Also visit the competitor while they are showing potential clients their wares. What approach do they use, and what do they offer?

AFTER THE SHOW

Just because the show is over does not mean that your job is. Write a report on what was learned, and pass on the relevant intelligence to those who need it. Confer with the other attendees. Are your experiences paralleled by theirs, or are they different? If so, why? Combine the knowledge gained and use it to build up your overall competitive knowledge, so

that all who need the intelligence have access to it.

FINAL COMMENTS

The above is necessarily brief – trade show intelligence is an essential part of the CI process, and a lot more can and should be done. There have been several good articles in previous issues of *CI* magazine on the topic.

In summary, remember the following:

- In the same way that you are collecting intelligence on your competitors, your competitors will

be looking for information on you. So protect it!

- Attending a show without pre-planning virtually guarantees that you will fail to find out all that was available.
- Consider your key intelligence needs prior to attending. Then think of how and what could be obtained at the trade show that would contribute answers to these needs. Make collecting this information a priority.
- Following the show, make sure that intelligence gathered is communicated, and used to aid your company strategies.

Arthur Weiss is managing partner with AWARE, a leading UK competitive intelligence consultancy. The answers given do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of either CI Magazine or SCIP. For more information, visit the AWARE website at www.marketing-intelligence.co.uk. Part of the AWARE site includes a free online consultancy, where AWARE answers questions posted on a variety of marketing and business related topics. ●

2004 Highlighted Events

April 25-28

The Business of Marketing Strategy
Boston, MA

May 16-19

IIR/PMI Risk SIG-Project Risk Symposium
Anaheim, CA

May 24-26

IIR/PDMA Managing the Front End of Innovation
Boston, MA

June 21-23

PRICEX Conference
Chicago, IL

June 27-30

Youth Marketing Mega-Event
Anaheim, CA

July 12-14

IIR/SCIP Strategic Planning CI
Chicago, IL

August 25-27

IIR/PDMA Enterprise Metrics
Colorado Springs, CO

September

IIR/SCIP Competitive Intelligence for Financial Services
Location TBD

September 8-10

Return on Marketing Investment
Location TBD

September 12-15

IIR/PMI Risk SIG-Project Risk Symposium
Washington, DC

September 26-29

IIR/Innovation Network Innovation Convergence
Minneapolis, MN

October

IIR/SCIP Competitive Technical Intelligence
Location TBD

October 12-15

The Market Research Event
San Francisco, CA

November 8-10

Future Trends
Location TBD

December

IIR/PDMA Voice of the Customer
Location TBD

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