

# Competitive Intelligence on A Shoestring

## **NE2007: Libraries Without Borders II**

4th Northeast Regional Law Libraries Meeting  
Presented by Susan Armstrong, October 18, 2007

## Quote

**“We are drowning in information  
and starved for knowledge.”**

John Naisbitt, Chairman of The Naisbitt Group

## Definition

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### **Competitive Intelligence**

A systematic and ethical program for gathering, analyzing, and managing information about your competitors' activities and general business trends to further your own company's goals

*Competitor intelligence concerns the current and proposed business activities of competitors*

Source: Society for Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP)

## Who are CI Practitioners

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- CI started in the 1970's, and grew rapidly in the 1980's
- Many practitioners came from US military intelligence community
- Used investigative techniques to answer corporate questions
- Researchers, consultants, industry or business experts
- Varies from large, sophisticated CI departments to single practitioners doing it "on the side"

## CI Process

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1. Decide what you want to know
2. Gather the information
3. Analyse
4. Publish your insights
5. Solicit Feedback

## Types of Information

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and how to use it

1. Company Web site/Investor Relations/Public Presentations
  - Tombstone information: size, purpose, history, locations
2. Annual reports/financials/public filings
  - Intentions, self image, successes, failures, profitability
3. Press releases/appointments/executive bios
  - Who are the management team and for what are they known?
4. Credit reports and credit ratings
  - How healthy is the firm?
5. Awards/Rankings/Benchmark Studies
  - How do they compare to competitors, and to us?
6. News & Media
  - Third party analysis of their actions, announcements, financials, etc.
7. Specialized – Patents/Copyrights/Trademarks
  - What is coming to market?

## 1. What do you want to know?

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- Planning process
- Interview your customers
  - Executives – strategic
  - Field – tactical
- Use the key research questions
  1. What do you want to know?
  2. Who do you want to include?
  3. What will you do with the information?
- Build a chart or report headings and fill in the blanks

## 2. Gather the Information

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- Wherever possible, use multiple sources to verify what you learn
  - Authoritative sources
  - Two or more references
- Free and fee based search engines
- Company records
- People
  - Information known by your own employees or already in your files

### 3. Analyse

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- Stop searching when you start to find repetition in new documents
- Use various tools to draw meaning from the information – the “so what”
  - SWOT analysis
  - Porter's Four Corner analysis
  - Financial statement analysis
- Business and Competitive Analysis or Strategic and Competitive Analysis: Methods and Techniques for Analyzing Business Competition by Craig Fleisher & Babette Bensoussan

### 4. Publish

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- Use your analysis to answer the questions you developed during planning
- Take a stand – express an opinion
- Post or disseminate your report/findings
- Spend some time developing the format – then use it consistently
  - Brand your work
- Communicate with your clients to make them aware of your reports

## 5. Feedback

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- Update your reports with new or amended information
- Solicit agreement/contradiction of your conclusions
  - Additional information to support or challenge
- Open a feedback loop for continuous two-way dialogue
- Identify human sources for future research

## Human Intelligence

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- Never forget or underestimate the importance of talking to people
- Context, background and history to give meaning to the information you have uncovered in research
- Culture is important to understanding strategy and is not conveyed as well in print
- Pick up clues that tell you to look for something, or to watch for something

## Community of Interest

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- A group of individuals who share one common goal or interest
- Recruit all the people in your firm who have an interest in CI
  - Monthly meetings
  - Create a pool of information
- Support group
  - Share techniques, tools, resources
  - Especially effective in large corporations