

CI Survivability Tactics

Monique Eddleton

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The past year has been a precarious one for competitive intelligence practitioners. Many saw their departments fall victim to budget cuts and layoffs, resulting in fewer resources and larger workloads. However, the need for insightful intelligence has never been greater.

We spoke with several companies with CI departments that are not only surviving, but thriving amid the current environment. They share five reasons why their departments continue to receive top-level support.

1. *CI efforts are tied to high-priority strategic objectives.* Effective CI departments are well-informed on the strategic goals of the company and the initiatives supporting those goals. Gerry Ducharme, Director at Vaisala -- a global leader in environmental and industrial measurement -- says, "For us, the key has been linking CI activity to strategy-driven questions, which are always valued at the senior level." Now is a great time to ask whether your company's strategic goals have changed, and what intelligence gaps prevent the organization from reaching those goals.
2. *They deliver value by using effective analytical tools.* High-performing CI teams use the right tools and models to analyze competitor and market information. Melanie Wing, Director, Environmental and Competitive Intelligence at The Whirlpool Corporation, is in the process of standardizing the analysis tools her company is using. She is developing standard processes for Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) analysis, competitor profiling, and competitor response modeling, to provide analytic consistency across all of Whirlpool's global business units.
3. *Network effectively -- both internally and externally.* How familiar is senior management with your CI team? How involved are you with the CI community at large? An extensive internal network makes it easier to gain support for project funding, resources, and executive access, while an external network provides opportunities to learn best practices and keep on top of the latest CI techniques. Whirlpool's Wing believes having both strong internal and external networks is invaluable. "Building a personal network provides

access to multiple points of view for your analysis and helps to 'sell' projects internally."

4. *"Brand" the CI function.* Developing a brand for your department sets high expectations and creates consistency across deliverables. Sally Farag, Manager, Business Intelligence and Corporate Analytics at Sara Lee, tapped into the company's creative resources to add imagery to CI reports, workshop invitations, and other activities to make the company's CI efforts stand out. Wing worked with her company's communications department to ensure her CI deliverables were consistent with the company's reporting format, and developed a unique, recognizable "look and feel" to her reports.
5. *Build an early warning process.* Assessing the impact of recent competitors moves is helpful, but developing hypotheses about future competitive developments provides senior management with insights needed to develop contingency strategies. Monitoring for market indicators tied to competitive hypotheses provides the evidence management needs to pursue a contingency plan, affording flexibility and nimbleness to your company's strategic execution. All CI managers we spoke with acknowledge that early warning is the key between a run-of-the-mill CI program and one that truly adds strategic value.

Today's uncertainty provides a strong case for investing in the CI function. However, CI has to demonstrate value. Vaisala's Ducharme sums it up best. "Due to the increased exposure of the CI teams, CI work needs to be proven and acknowledged as an asset throughout the organization." What are you doing with your CI program to earn this acknowledgment?

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