

## New Years Resolutions

Kenneth A. Sawka

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What a year it's been. As the US economy emerges from the worst recession in generations, how should strategy and competitive intelligence practitioners prepare to contribute to their company's growth and performance in the new year? While I'm not a big fan of new years resolutions (why commit to a resolution to, for instance, eat healthier foods that I'll inevitably break by President's Day?), here are five ways to improve CI and competitive strategy in 2010.

1. *Commit to providing perspective, not precision.* It is not the job of competitive intelligence to know, with three-decimal-place accuracy, competitors' market share, profitability, or cost structure. Nor is it the job of competitive strategy to tell the CEO that his company will achieve 12.46% CAGR over the next five years. It is our job to provide perspective on the types of competitive challenges and market opportunities likely to emerge in the months and years ahead that will directly impact your organization's growth strategy. Leave the quantitative precision for the guys in accounting. You should be speaking the language of strategic goals and objectives, competitive plausibilities, and future threats and opportunities.
2. *Adopt a scenario mindset.* It is downright dangerous for competitive intelligence providers and strategic planners to portray tomorrow's market conditions as a unilateral prediction of a likely -- or, worse, desired -- future. Corporate strategists should embrace scenario planning, under which strategies are set based on multiple, plausible future conditions, all stemming from today's market variables and drivers. Likewise, competitive analysis should communicate their perspective on likely future competitive forces, but at the same time discuss the conditions under which those forces might change. Doing so enables strategic flexibility and avoids the difficulty of adjusting a hard-wired strategy when market conditions change.
3. *Focus on early warning.* If we've learned anything from the Great Recession, it's that uncertainty is a fact of life. By identifying and monitoring early warning indicators -- diagnostic signposts of future market and competitive conditions -- strategic

planners and competitive analysts can increase their organizations' decision flexibility by warning of the emergence of these conditions well before they occur. Doing so gives executives more time to prepare and execute a response.

4. *Ditch the competitor profiles.* Well, don't ditch them completely, but keep them to yourself. Competitor profiles -- and, for that matter, CI newsletters and in-depth market assessments -- are static, not actionable, and rarely read or used by top management. They should not be disseminated to senior managers with the "competitive intelligence" label slapped on them. Instead, use them as the basis for CI and strategy teams to provide judgment, context, and commentary on competitive and market developments as they happen. Your deliverables ought to enable the organization to act, not simply inform them of competitor details that few senior executives really care about.
5. *Commit to further developing your skills.* Let's face it. Even though the economy is showing early signs of improvement, you're not getting the budget to hire three more competitive analysts in 2010. You will be asked to do more with less. Make sure your strategic planning and competitive intelligence programs have the latest tools, methodologies, and best practices. Efficiency and demonstrated value-add will carry your CI and strategy functions in the coming year. Do you have the skills and know-how to succeed?

With the recession hopefully fading in the rear-view mirror, I believe 2010 will be a year of growth and recovery. By committing to these five ideas, your intelligence and strategy function can help your organization thrive. Happy holidays and best wishes for prosperity in the new year.

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