Defensive Competitive Intelligence In A Web 2.0 Environment
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All firms (large and small) must set aside the time to execute some defensive competitive intelligence strategies. In short, defensive competitive intelligence addresses the availability of strategic information about companies and their activities in the public domain. A clear example is a company assessing the amount of strategic details made available in its respective corporate press releases.

Web 2.0 allows individuals to connect and publish information in various forms such as text, photo, video and audio.   From a defensive competitive intelligence point of view, these applications can be a cause of concern.   As a result, competitive intelligence practitioners must be vigilant on what is available in this new part of the web.

You may ask yourself, 'How can one control what is available in the public domain when it comes to Web 2.0?"

It is not a question of controlling what content is placed online, it is an issue of knowing where it is and monitoring the content. Let's take into consideration three cases.

Case #1: Facebook Group

A fan of your company's products has created a group to discuss and share information. On the discussion board, you discover that there is an exchange amongst members regarding a product defect. The discussion threat is lengthy and points out several aspects of the product that must be improved upon in the future.

What should you do?

a) Ignore the fact that such a group/page exist.
b) Acknowledge that such a group exist and monitor the group's activity. This entails joining the group.
c) Join the group and participating in the discussion to give positive input using another identity.

If you selected choice c) from above, we recommend that you review the code of ethics that governs the practice of competitive intelligence.
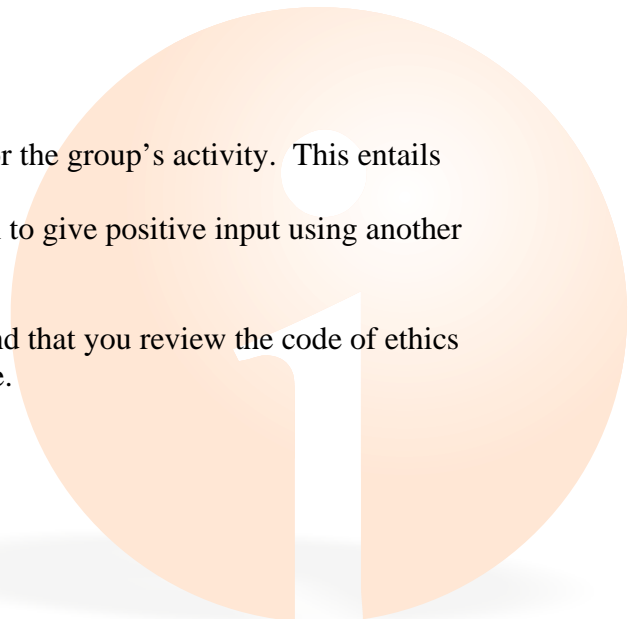
If you selected choice a) from above, you run the risk of competitors collecting information as the group / page expands with usable intelligence.

If you selected choice b) from above, you will be in the best position to know what is being posted and available for competitors to use against your company.

Always place yourself in the shoes of your counterpart at the competing company and think what valuable information can be gathered and analysed to gain further insights.

Case #2: SlideShare Content

While conducting a routine web search using the name of your company as a keyword, you come across a recent PowerPoint presentation that was given at a recent marketing conference. The presentation was posted by the conference organizer on Slideshare to save on printing costs. The presentation contains a detailed case study which includes financial data from 4 years ago, an overview of a creative strategy for an ad for a top selling product and a biography of the presenter.

What should you do?

a) Do not be concerned about the availability of the presentation because the financial data is out of date, the details regarding the creative strategy are rather vague and the biography is easily accessible elsewhere on the web.

b) Speak to your colleague who gave the presentation and urge he or she to modify the file, resubmit the new version to the organizer and have it placed back on SlideShare.

c) Insist that the presentation be removed immediately from SlideShare.

If you selected choice c), you are eliminating a great avenue for exposure for your company on and off the web via an very insightful presentation.

If you selected choice a), you are welcoming analysts from the competition to piece together information offered in presentation to use against your competition. Outdated financial details are an excellent basis for projections, especially if industry costs are known, very good assumptions can be made from vague statements about a creative strategy and biographies are not that current on the web.

If you selected choice b), you are on the right track. It is a fair balance between options a) and b). The slide with the financial data could remain blank or the slide with the creative strategy maybe replaced with contact information if the reader wishes to obtain more details. (It is suggested that you provide a phone number and not an email address.)

Case #3: Twitter Tweets

Among your colleagues, you have someone who is very active on social networks. An hour does not go by without "Michel" updating his status. One day, you decide to check Michel's Twitter page and see that some of his Tweets alludes to what he is doing at work. The tweets refer to his frustration with searching the U.S. Patents database regarding a ball meant for street hockey and reading patent #7,520,830. Knowing that your company is presently working on the creation of a new design for a street hockey ball, you are surprised that these tweets have been posted.

What should you do?

a) Assume that these tweets will never be found by competitors and there is no need to panic.

b) Ask Michel to delete the tweets in question.

c) Explain the important of not blogging or tweeting on topics regarding work-related activities

If you selected choice a), you have made the wrong assumption. You will be surprise how people can stumble onto content on the web.

If you selected choice b), you are just addressing apart of the problem. Michel has to understand the potential problems that his tweets may cause.

If you selected choice c), you have to be prepared to provide a primer regarding defensive competitive intelligence.

Conclusion

Web 2.0 is a growing source for information that should not be ignored. Knowing what is being published on platforms such as Facebook, SlideShare and Twitter about your company is an essential part of preventing competitors from gaining a strategic advantage in terms of gathering intelligence.
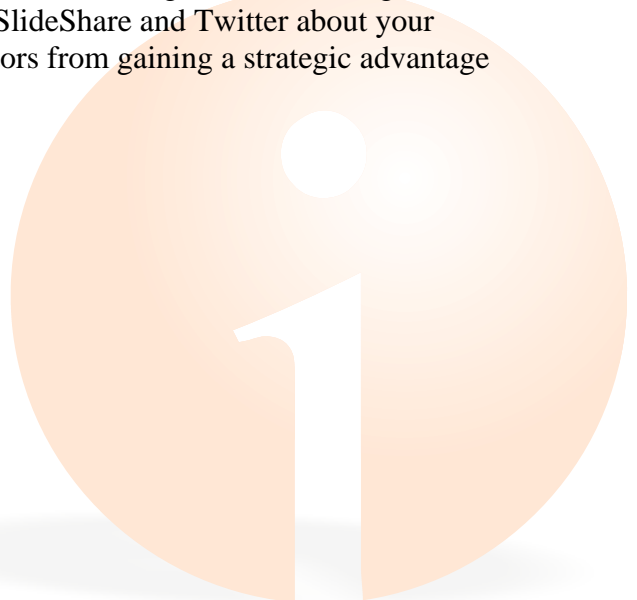
About The Author:

Ian Smith has more that 10 years of experience in the field of competitive intelligence. Ian has written several articles on competitive intelligence research methodologies and analysis frameworks. In addition, he has authored articles dealing with internet searching applications for efficient research initiatives. You can read his blog posts at [Tools For Thought](), or follow him at [www.twitter.com/citweetz]() .

If you wish to improve your competitive intelligence researching skills on Web 2.0, call Isabelle Poirier, +1 (514) 276-1700 Ext, 104