



Fire! Ready, aim

What to do when there is no time to plan

Your competitor has just launched a new e-commerce system that makes it easier and cheaper to order parts.

The acquisition deadline is due next week and everything you've heard is too good to be true.

A distributor is now private labeling consumables to fit your hardware.

Your largest customer wants an exclusive sourcing and service arrangement.

Your market share in Europe just dropped 5 points in the last quarter.

Delivery lead times for your new product have doubled in the last month.

Decision making is often aimed at near-term problems and made with little useful information and even less contemplation. There is a good reason for this less optimal situation.

New market research is slow, noisy, and cumbersome.

Sales network information is anecdotal, incomplete, and often incorrect.

Outside consultants are expensive and tend to put blinders on once the program scope is defined.

Most decisions are directed at tactical problems or opportunities, the strategic fit and implications are assumed to be given and fixed, if not irrelevant.

The parallel processing concept One method to deal with speed, complexity, and uncertainty is to apply the concept of parallel processing to your market and business intelligence function. Parallel processing comes from the electronics industry where multiple computers are assigned

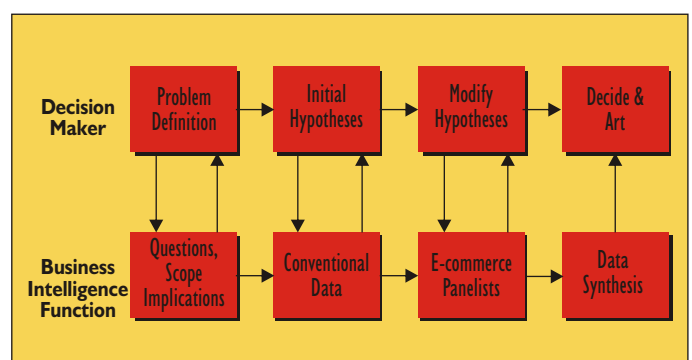
specific tasks. The results of tasks are shared and combined at certain points by all the other computers.

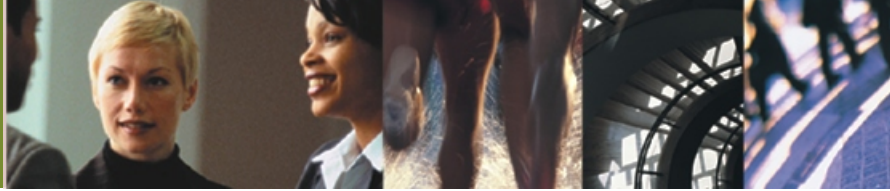
The approach avoids disadvantages typically associated with linear sequencing of tasks. One only has to ask: if your decision making is continuous, why isn't the process for competitor and market information collection and analysis? How can you develop a continuous intelligence gathering and synthesizing process to run in parallel with your decision making process? The answer, until recently, was "you can't."

The parallel processing of business intelligence with the application of business technologies can help leaders make better decisions.

A few elements from competitive intelligence and e-commerce now provide you with the tools to develop your own competitive and business intelligence system. A good reason for this less than optimal situation:

This system can be installed, tested and maintained on a virtual real-time basis for decision makers. This process gives the marketing function a new lease on life and a new relevance as the central point of collection of business intelligence in your organization.





What do I do?

The first step is to decide what you need to know and how and to whom it should be communicated. The problem with market and competitive research today is that there is too much information and virtually no synthesis and rarely any context. It is being collected based on historical needs, often without an immediate purpose or a client. The fact that a market is so many millions of dollars or has grown at so much percent is irrelevant if you operate in a different segment, niche, or through different channels. For a specific decision it may or may not be relevant. For parallel processing to work, the client and marketing department must identify the top 5 or 6 issues that will impact the decision. All extraneous data should be dropped.

Who are my customers?

The other important aspects of this first step are who are your customers and how should the information be communicated to them? The client is not always the requestor so further digging will be necessary. The people with the agenda, the budget and accountability are typically the true clients. Once the system is in place it will be easier to determine recipient groups. The format and form of the information should be a distilled version focusing on the decision issues only. For speed and simplicity, today's business technologies allow you to design screens specifically for your clients' needs.

Practical knowledge management The next step is to determine what you know now and how to find out what you don't. Competitive intelligence resides throughout your organization. This information must be extracted, distilled and/or trashed before any further work is done. Corporate-wide participation has to be compulsory and include incentives.

Next, organization of what you know needs to be put into a data warehouse. These are the key elements of "knowledge management" (now the darling of the consulting community).

Computer technology allows you to collect, organize and retrieve critical competitive information that heretofore has been locked in a filing cabinet or in someone's head.

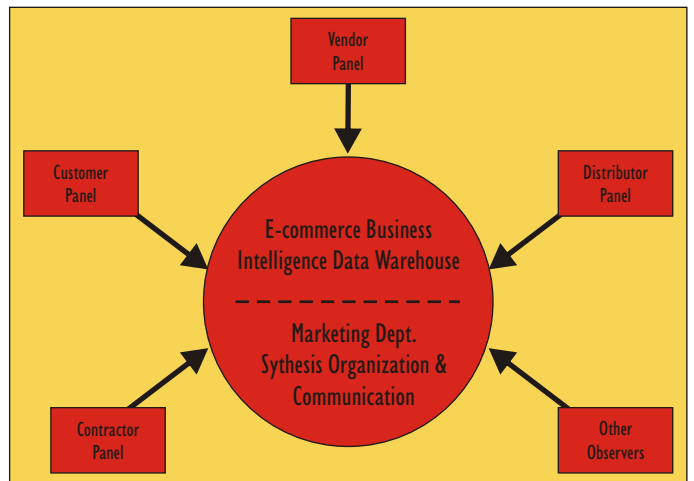
CI and the Internet

Subsequent efforts are then focused on published data collection methods and panels of influential industry participants. Clipping services, on-line databases, company

news releases, filings, announcements and financial community analyses can be combined with panelist inputs to rapidly formulate understanding and insights for the decision at hand. This network can be expanded nationally or internationally.

The panelist concept is one that has been historically used by consumer research organizations but rarely for industrial business-to-business organizations. These panelists are directly analogous to the group of respondents that Cedar and other consulting firms typically use in their fieldwork.

The major difference is that these panelists are connected on-line to your marketing organization. Panelists can include members of your supplier, dealer, distributor, wholesaler, specifier, contractor/installer, customer and competitor employee networks.



The Internet will allow companies to obtain almost real-time primary business information, targeted to a specific decision. The additional benefit with these tools is that they're borderless: the panels and other sources can be global.

Rather than rely on the consultants to provide the data, the consultant can provide the process for learning, adopting and maintaining this critical part of an organization's decision making process.

This approach combines the major benefits of knowledge management with e-commerce technology that will reduce costs, organize external information and sources and result in better decisions.

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