Hey New Members (and old as well)!

Want a Good Return for Your CI Dollar? Consider Event Intelligence

A SCIP Toolkit by Jonathan Calof

It has been a heck of a year for SCIP with 20% growth in membership this year and 32% growth in membership over the past two years. With this impressive growth, in addition to the normal turnover that exists within our profession, it means that many of you reading this issue of Competitive Intelligence Magazine are relatively new to SCIP, so it’s time to give you, our new members (and also remind our older members), about what I think may be the best competitive intelligence tool you can have in your CI arsenal, the one that has a great ROI and the potential to get you noticed quickly and positively in your organization – trade show and event intelligence. In this issue’s column on event intelligence, I will provide you with a bit of background on event intelligence and why it is a big theme for SCIP. To help you in developing the necessary knowledge and skills for this growing and “profitable” area, I will also provide you with references to a lot of SCIP material in the field.

CI practitioners have been aware of the enormous value of event intelligence for a long time, and in fact, early SCIP articles wrote about the high value of using events as a key piece of intelligence programs. Shaker and Kardulia in a 1996 issue of Competitive Intelligence Review (one of SCIP’s first publications) wrote:

“Conferences furnish the greatest potential for collecting intelligence in the shortest span of time, for the least amount of money. Many formal and informal activities take place at conferences that can furnish a plethora of collection opportunities. . .too few people approach these situations as collection opportunities, especially in a systematic, pro-active way.”

Similarly, Vernon Prior, in the same year, wrote something very similar:

“Properly organized, a competent well-briefed team should be able to gather more useful information than they could ever hope to collect in a full year in any other set of circumstances.”

Over 10 years later, one of CI’s senior practitioners and a former SCIP President, Joe Goldberg echoed the same core belief in the value of event intelligence:

“Conference and trade show events are the most concentrated, productive and cost-effective means to spotlight strategic trends, and they often go unnoticed in normal intelligence activities. Trade shows, conferences, and seminars furnish the greatest collection potential in the shortest span of time for the least amount of money. The many formal and informal activities at the event provide a variety of collection opportunities. Over the years, a small community of business intelligence (BI) experts within Motorola has made the most of trade events as a primary collection opportunity” (Goldberg and Barak, 2007).
What SCIP members and senior CI practitioners recognize is that trade shows and conferences provide many benefits to intelligence programs; they bring together the people that intelligence units wanted/needed to interview for their intelligence needs and presentations and other materials that were critical to the information required by intelligence programs. Events were a unique opportunity to interview customers, suppliers, competitors and others, to watch and learn from what they were doing, all in an environment where everyone was there to talk, to exchange information. Call this an intelligence friendly environment. No wonder Prior noted that more could be collected during the event than in an entire year. But also as Prior wrote, these benefits could only arise if the intelligence practitioner was properly organized. Events, I have found (and I have attended many), are overwhelming and, without proper organization, the opportunity could be lost. Alison Bourey (another prominent SCIP member and a former chapter chair) also agrees with the need to be properly organized. She wrote “companies waste 30-50% of their entire trade show budgets by not having a collection plan” (Bourey 2007). Fletcher/CSI, in one of the most comprehensive studies on event intelligence programs ever done, had a similar conclusion. After analyzing the survey results from 408 organizations, they concluded that most saw value in their trade show CI efforts and that formal planning and management at the trade show produced better results. Effective units attended in fact provided CI training to their staff.

Thus, the cornerstone of a good event intelligence program, that can get the kind of advantages that Prior and Goldberg, and Shaker wrote about, requires good planning and organization.

SCIP EVENT INTELLIGENCE RESOURCES

SCIP has recognized that in order to get the kind of returns that Prior talked about requires careful planning and execution, skills and knowledge consistent with the new body of knowledge 2.0, and as result, has made available to its members a lot of event intelligence materials. For example, in 2007, the Competitive Intelligence Foundation published a book on conference and trade show intelligence. This book, edited by myself and Bonnie Hohhof, is available to order through SCIP and includes over two dozen articles by leading CI practitioners designed to help you run a successful event intelligence program. The book provides readers with checklists/forms, planning ideas, to help before you get to the show. At the show, articles provide information on how to be an effective event intelligence interviewer, how to run a plan at the event, and even how to effectively use secondary information at the event. It even provides advice on what to do after the show both to enhance the value of the intelligence developed at the recent event as well as to lever the experience to help in other aspects of your intelligence program. Special topics provide advice to the reader on, for example, how to achieve significant event intelligence returns,
even when you are a sole practitioner or the only person from your company sent to the event. Exhibit 1 provides the table of contents for this book and I hope the reader is struck by the breadth of its coverage and the impressive list of authors.

Competitive Intelligence Magazine has also devoted a significant amount of space to educating members about event intelligence. Exhibit 2 provides examples of the topics covered in my event intelligence column. Members can download any of these articles free of charge. The column looks at the basics of event intelligence. Consider these articles as a primer on the concept along with some tips in how to run a successful event intelligence program. There have been many columns providing readers with advice on how to develop successful intelligence plans, how to gather information, protect information (counterintelligence) and even how to handle some of the ethical challenge that arise at events. Something that I have tried to do with the column that I thought would help CI practitioners was to broaden the domain of event intelligence, defining event as anyplace were people gather. Accordingly there are columns that look at how to use the office Christmas party as a place for event intelligence, as well as using others' parties for event intelligence. Social media has also been a topic covered as it is seen as “event” based. I even wrote one column around the theme of convincing management to give more money for event program. Event intelligence is a great way to get your intelligence initiative noted. This is brought up in several articles along with ideas on how to lever that recognition for getting increased investment in your intelligence program.

The SCIP book and articles in Competitive Intelligence Magazine should provide those interested in learning how to conduct event intelligence with a vast amount of material to help educate yourself and others in your organization. But there are also webinars that can help in your event intelligence education process. Shortly after Conference and Trade Show Intelligence was released, SCIP held two webinars on trade shows. The first looked at planning before the show and the second at executing the plan. These webinars were led by several of the seasoned practitioners that contributed to the conference and trade show book. SCIP archives webinars and makes them available. More information on ordering archived webinars can be found at https://www.scip.org/WebinarsAndArchive.php. SCIP/Frost and Sullivan also did an ebroadcast on event intelligence called “Trade Show Competitive Intelligence: Understand the Types of CI that can be Obtained Through Events. This ebroadcast/webinar can be found at http://www.frost.com/prod/servlet/ebroadcast.pag?eventid=264550103. But SCIP is not alone in providing webinars about event intelligence. It is a popular topic and as a result several CI practitioners have given event intelligence webinars, the most recent being an Aurora WDC Webinar titled, “How Five Key Concepts Maximize the Value of Conference Intelligence Coverage”.

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The webinar was broadcasted in December 2014 http://aurorawdc.com/how-five-key-concepts-maximize-the-value-of-conference-intelligence-coverage-intelcollab-webinar/.

FOCUSING YOUR EVENT INTELLIGENCE PROGRAM

I hope this issues column will be an important one in your event intelligence library and that you avail yourself of some of the resources outlined in it. But before I close this column off, I want to leave you with ideas on what to focus your event intelligence program on, call this the beginning of your planning for the next event.

#1 THE CLASSIC COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE EVENT FOCUS:

The Fletcher/CSI study did look at the focus of the 408 respondents event intelligence program. They found that learning more about a competitor’s new products was the top event intelligence focus followed by generating competitor insights. This result is not surprising given that trade shows bring together lots of competitors. What a great place to learn what they are up to. You can observe their booths, their activities. You can interview competitors, their customers, suppliers, everything in one place to complete those important competitor profiles. Efficient and cost effective. Before you go to your next event, look over your competitor profiles. What needs to be updated? Are their new competitors that you need to profile? What insight do you need to develop on these competitor’s. After you compile the list of what information is needed on the competitor’s look over the event program including list of exhibitors, speakers, workshops, presentation etc. to identify the people and places at the event that will have this information.

#2 THE CLASSIC COMPANY EVENT FOCUS:

While the Fletcher/CSI survey showed that CI professionals go to conferences and trade shows to learn about the competition; This is not why companies go there. Hyunjeong Hans and Rohit Verma in a recent (2014) study on why companies attend trade shows, found that exhibitors are primarily focused on business and contact development. Kirchgeorg et al (2010), in a comprehensive review of trade show studies and in their survey had a similar result. They noted from past studies that exhibitors were generally at events to make contact with potential customers, to make sales, to explore/learn about the market, to meet new customers, promote/launch new products. Their survey had make new contacts with potential buyers as the most frequently cited objective (69%) followed by promoting the company’s image and improving its reputation (58%) and securing orders or generate sales (50%). Competitor based reasons was near the bottom of their reasons for being at the event with only 5% of the respondents indicating that it was an objective (5%). Several of my past columns have been about how these company objectives (e.g. contacting potential buyers) can be enhanced with the proper intelligence (for example profiling) and that intelligence workers need to help develop the intelligence at events to support their companies event objectives. Before your company goes to their next event, talk to whoever is in charge of the booth/company participation. Ask them what their objectives are, how they will define success. Find out what they are at the event to learn. You can even take it broader. Find out what is important to your company/organization for which the event provides a good place to develop the needed intelligence. With this knowledge you can start to work on an intelligence plan that will produce the kind of intelligence that is needed to support your organizations event attendance objectives.
EXHIBIT 1

Conference and Trade Show Intelligence table of contents

*Introduction, Jonathan Calof and Bonnie Hohhof*

**Overview**
What is Competitive Intelligence and How Does This Relate to Conferences and Trade Shows?  
*Jonathan Calof*

Trade Show Intelligence: Making the Most of It,  
*Vernon Prior*

Engineering Engineers: How to Develop a Trade Show Intelligence Process, *J. P Ratajczak*

**Pre-Show Preparation**
Preparing the CEO for a Conference or Trade Show, *William West*

What to Do Before the Show, *Brian Soth*

**At the Show**
Mining Conference Materials – Ways to Strike Gold with Secondary Sources, *Alison Bourey*

On Site Tools and Techniques for Primary Information Gathering, *Anne Barron*

Elicitation – A Critical Part of Your Trade Show Tool Kit, *John Nolan*

The Human Element of Intelligence Gathering at Trade Shows and Conventions, *Krista Davies*

How to Execute a Trade Show Intelligence Plan, *Arjan Singh, Jodie Peake, and Leonard Fuld*

**After the Show**
Multi-Year Trade Show Attendance and Its Impact on Intelligence Gathering, *Daniel Himelfarb*

Communicating the Value of Trade Shows to Decision-Makers, *Joseph Goldberg and Tim Barak*

Build on Show Interactions – Leverage Your Contact Network, *Eric Glitman*

**Special Topics**
Going Solo: Sharpen Your Trade Show Collection Skills, *Ellen Naylor*

Solo CI Trade Show Collection, *Kathrine Hayes*

The Ethics of Trade Show Intelligence, *Toni Wilson*

Ethical Guidelines for Trade Shows, *Richard Horowitz*

Trade Show Counter-Intelligence, *Geary Soska*

Counter-Intelligence at Trade Shows, *Jonathan Calof*

Conference and Trade Show Intelligence for Government, *Jonathan Calof*

Key Intelligence Topics, *Jan Herring*

Competitive Technical Intelligence at Trade Shows and Professional Meetings, *Jay Paap*

Connecting the Dots: Drawing Actionable Conclusions from Conference and Trade Show Intelligence, *Kenneth Sawka*

**Case Studies**
A Conference and Trade Show Intelligence Methodology, *Peter McKenney*

Trade Show Intelligence Case Study, *Kirk Tyson*

EXHIBIT 2

**Jonathan Calof event intelligence columns/articles in Competitive Intelligence Magazine.**

A selection of titles by event intelligence subject matter

*Introduction to event intelligence tips and examples:*

Trade show intelligence: Intensive, exhaustive and fun November/December 2003; Trade Show Intelligence: One year later March/April 2005; Trade show intelligence best practices April/June 2011, Successful trade show project examples April/June 2009

*Planning ideas:*

Creative intelligence at PITTCON April/June 2014, formulating your competitive intelligence plans October/December 2010, Who should you bring to the event November/December 2009, Time to invite your government in October/November 2007; Conferences and trade show committees as an intelligence resource, November/December 2006; Putting R&D into your event intelligence program April/June 2013

*Gathering at the event:*

Working the floor July/August 2006

*Communications:*

Communications and trade show's November/December 2008

*Ethics:*

Ethics and event intelligence, July/September 2011; Ethics and events, navigating the grey zone March/April 2008

*Evaluation:*

Evaluating trade show intelligence performance October/December 2009

*Counterintelligence:*

Trade show counterintelligence September/October 2005

**Special topics**

- Trade show trends: January/March 2014, January/March 2012, April/June 2012
- Preparing for the SCIP annual conference: January/March 2013, SCIP06 how intelligence will you be March/April 2006
- Doing event intelligence at party's/other events: Tis the season to do CI October/December 2013, Party till you learn April/June 2010; Mining conferences through active dialog November/December 2007
- Social networking and events January/March 2011, Trade Show Intelligence goes social networking July/September 2010
- International dimensions of trade show intelligence May/June 2008
- Convincing management to give you more funds for event intelligence, Dear C, please give me more resources, July/August 2007
- Helping your trade show team: Opportunity Alert, your trade show team needs your help July/September 2014; Helping your organization with their event needs October/December 2013
REFERENCES

Bourey, Alison (2007), Mining Conference Materials in Calof Jonathan and Bonnie Hohhof, Conference and Trade Show Intelligence, Competitive Intelligence foundation.

Calof, Jonathan and Bonnie Hohhof (editors -2007), Conference and Trade Show Intelligence. Competitive Intelligence Foundation.

Fletcher/CSI (2012), Trade shows as sources of competitive intelligence: Survey results and Implications.

Goldberg, Joseph; Barak, Tim (2007). “Communicating the value of trade shows to decision-makers,” in Calof Jonathan and Bonnie Hohhof, Conference and Trade Show Intelligence, Competitive Intelligence Foundation.


Jonathan Calof is a professor of International Business and Strategy at the Telfer School of Management at University of Ottawa. He combines research and consulting in competitive intelligence, technical foresight and management insight and co-directs Telfer’s performance management/ business analytics program. Jonathan received the Fellow award from SCIP and the lifetime achievement award in competitive intelligence from Frost and Sullivan. He has close to 200 publications to his credit including co-editing the Competitive Intelligence Foundations Conference and Trade Show Intelligence book.

Jonathan has given over 1000 speeches, seminars and keynote addresses around the world on intelligence and insight and has helped several companies and government agencies around the world enhance their intelligence capabilities. He can be reached at 01.613.228.0509 or calof@telfer.uottawa.ca.