



# Customer Insights as an Integral Part of Your Competitive Intelligence Model

by Paul Santilli  
WW OEM Business  
Intelligence & Customer Insights  
Hewlett Packard Enterprise

In a traditional Competitive Intelligence model, analytics are often only focused on a) data accumulation from gathering intelligence directly from stakeholders with knowledge of the subject matter in question, and b) from publically available source information (think Google and the like), commonly known as Secondary sources. Additionally, even though organizations may have a Customer Insights element (think NPS, Customer Feedback, Surveys, and Customer Satisfaction assessments), this function usually resides as a separate analysis and is often a separate organization unlinked to influencing market and intelligence strategy. For the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Intelligence Practitioner, this is a fundamental gap that needs to be addressed in order to effectively gather a comprehensive overview of those factors that can ultimately determine your strategic and tactical operations to compete in the marketplace.

## Overall Modeling

First off, the effective Intelligence Model needs to consist of both a functional element and an organizational element towards a successful execution of a strategy. The Functional element contains that information that is collected from all sources, with corresponding data

compiling and analytics. The Organizational element refers to the methodology on data interpretation, organizational structure, CxO engagement, and Intra-company communication efficiency. Only when these two elements are seamlessly integrated (Figure 1) can effective Decision Making Insights be achieved; Insights that inevitably leads to learnings not only from customer generated content, but for all relative Intelligence information.

## Customer Insights Modeling

First off, it is obviously highly desirable to have a very good understanding of your customer needs. On one hand, this includes understanding buying patterns, technology feature sets and trends, business applications, supply chain requirements, and such. This information can be collected both in an automated and manual fashion that yields content that enables one to better service the needs of the customer. However, if used solely, this is somewhat inadequate. Therefore, on the other hand, extremely valuable information on competitive offerings, market requirements, and related

Figure 1

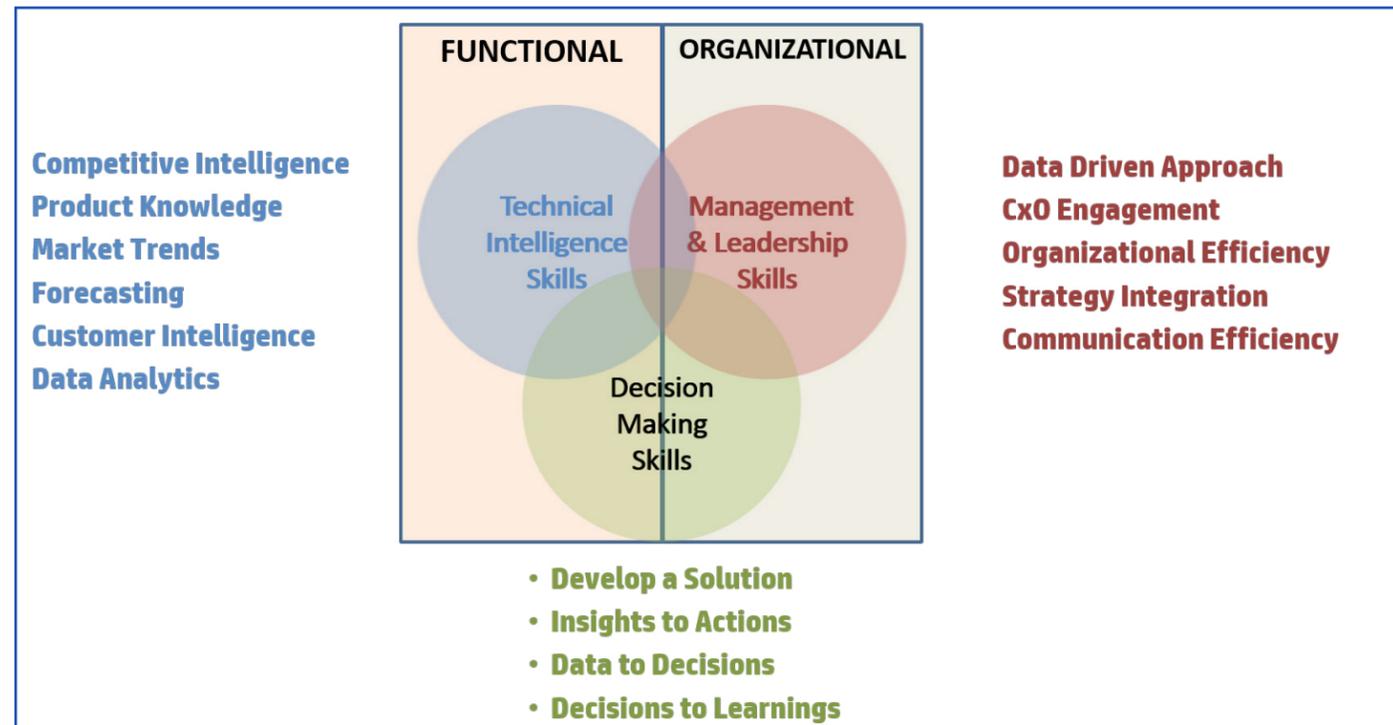
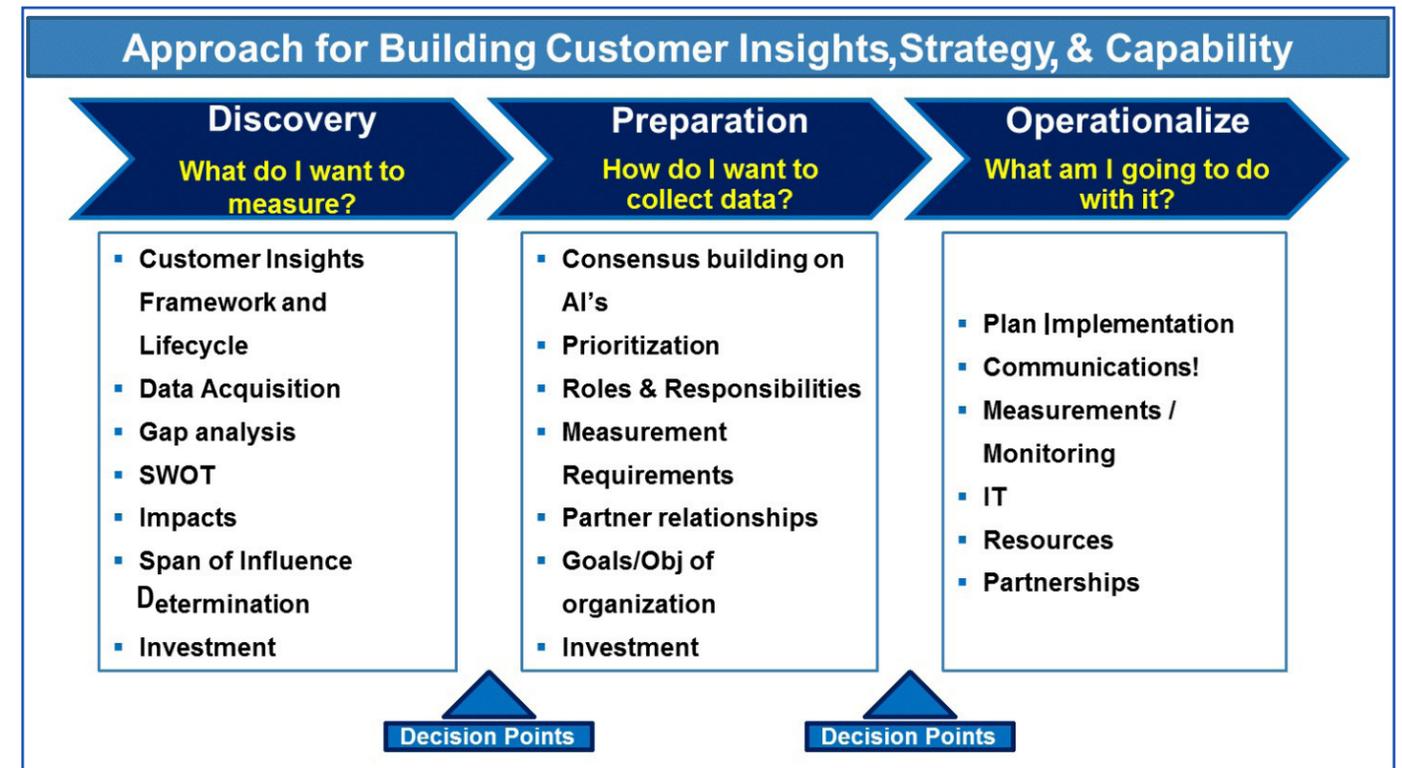


Figure 2



company details can be acquired that is directly tied to the Competitive Intelligence modeling of an organization. This is too often overlooked because the objectives of this effort are usually based on “Customer Satisfaction” and company performance to customer expectations, rather than acquiring strategic information on comparison of your customer performance data with market competitiveness and industry direction.

This gap can be bridged by revisiting and reexamining, in detail, the information one wants to collect from a customer. In this approach (Figure 2), there are 3 distinct areas to address:

- 1) Discovery – what do you want to measure? This can include specific product, technology, delivery / experience, and most importantly, how your company performance compares to the competition.
- 2) Preparation – how do you want to collect the data? There are automated methodologies (web-based surveys, SoMe, etc) or through CxO and related engagements with customer executives.
- 3) Operationalize – what are you going to do with the findings? This includes communication, strategy, prioritization, and resource assessments.

## Customer Insights Acquisition

Once this has been established, the acquisition sources need to be assessed. For example, there are specific source content that has relevant data based on the objective of the investigation. Acquiring customer information from direct, indirect, and peripheral sources can enhance the overall quality and variety of the data which in turns leads to a more comprehensive insights conclusion.

However, to minimize cost and resources, the natural tendency to “collect everything we can” and then figure out what to do with all of the data should be avoided. This can not only take time and costly resources to acquire and process, but can often lead to results that may not be in direct alignment with the initial objectives defined at the beginning of the analysis.

Specifically, delineating the research group objectives with the kind of data required will help segment the results accordingly. Figure 3 indicates an example of the Acquisition sources based on the type of information being collected within each of the collection methodologies, identifying resultant business information.

Figure 3

Customer Insights Acquisition				
	Individual	Group	Super-Group	Peripheral Groups (Channel, Events, Sales Ops, Support)
Research	1:1 Customer Engagements	Multiple Data Points	Big Data	Multiple Data Points
Analytics	Single perspective	Individual Business Perspective (Vertical, Product, Segment)	Overall Perspective (Industry, Market, Channel Partners)	Competitive perspective
Measure	Individual feedback loop	Group of Customers Responses, Segmented, Pareto'd	Business Disruption, Strategy Changing	Increased knowledge on Competition, +

While each vertical category above can provide some real insight into customer expectations, the Peripheral Group-based acquisition practice is highly desirable and can yield very significant results – polling those in the channel or across organizations that have experience with not only your products and services, but to those of your competitors as well. This is an ideal situation and allows you to gain some real performance experience across multiple scenarios from one source group.

### Applications:

As mentioned earlier, there are many different performance metrics that are widely available for organizations to use to measure Customer Satisfaction, - and to list each and every one of them with detailed explanations and use cases is not the objective of this paper. Rather, the purpose here is to identify those Insights that are useful towards the Competitive Intelligence of your organization - what follows are some examples of customer insight-gathering techniques that have been proven to enrich the overall intelligence methodology for both tactical and strategic purposes.

#### 1) Peripheral Group Surveying Assessment

This concept focuses on those organizations that have

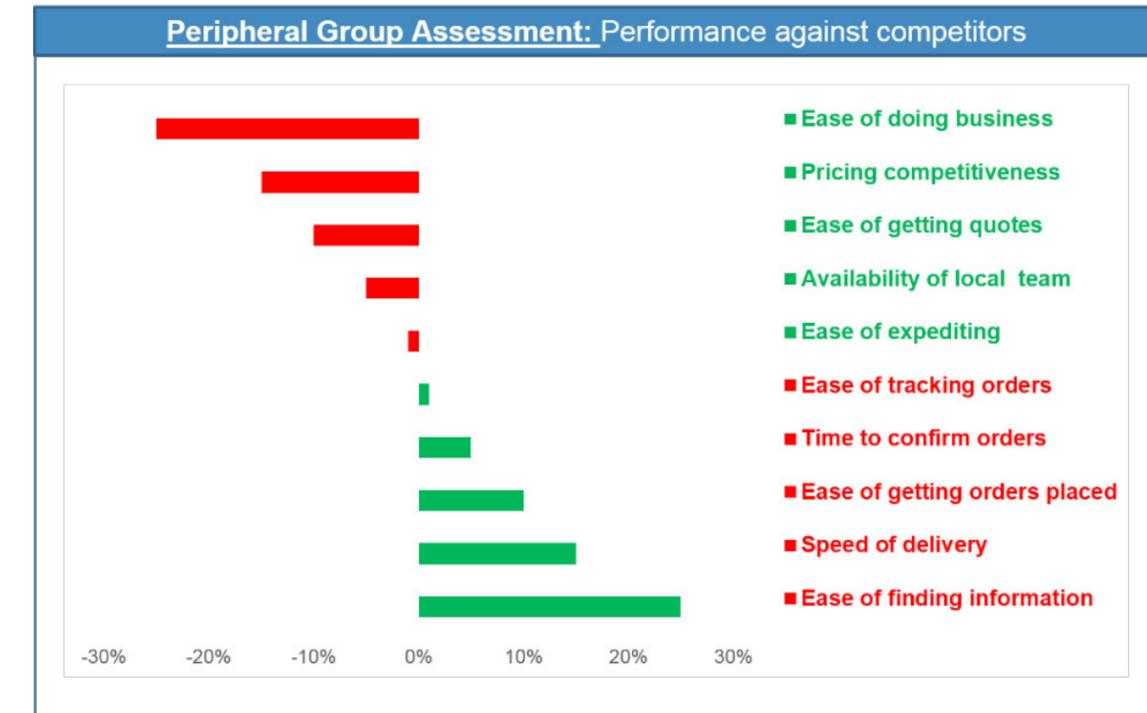
access to customer feedback on your products and your competitor products and services as well. This can usually be through channel partners, alliance organizations, vendors, and ultimately direct customers of your products and services. The important point here is that these sources can provide insights on your products as compared to those of your competitors. And with that insight comes information about services, performance, technology, and industry direction. Figure 4 gives example data on how your product or services can be measured against a competitive product or service through a peripheral group assessment.

Businesses can also monitor the impact of competitor marketing campaigns, announcements, and events on their overall reputation and take cues from it. This not only enables you to stay ahead of competition but also gives a heads-up on possible crises already faced by your competitors.

#### 2) Social Media Evaluation

Of course, there is a lot of data in the SoMe realm. Harvesting and deciphering are the critical activities needing to be mastered in order to take advantage of the rich informative content. However, it really comes down to two basic principles to gather that which means most to the CI practitioner:

Figure 4



- 1) Collective existing content already being generated
- 2) Extract content that didn't exist thru external stimulus and data generation catalysts

Various listening and trolling techniques are available that can gather an extensive amount of content from customer generated data. Much can be obtained related to Customer Sentiments, technology usage, comparisons with competitive products and features, service and support activities, and general interest in technology and user roadmaps – all critical and valuable to help determine competitive gaps and opportunities for exploiting and growth.

Additionally, introducing stimulus (via dark posts, campaigns, and targeted inquiries) can also provide a lot of responses. But admittedly, there is a tremendous amount of noise in the SoMe data realm. Having the ability to sift through all of that to find those “golden nuggets” of relevant data (through off-the-shelf Knowledge Management tools as well as through new Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning algorithms) is possible and fundamentally critical to the acquisition of competitive information from your customers. This is a highly untapped area that deserves great attention by the CI practitioner.

#### 3) Internal Organizational Feedback

Your internal organization has an enormous amount of customer feedback that is ripe for the application to CI activities! Think about your sales and marketing organization – they have access to (and regularly interface with) customers and their concerns, problems, issues and successes. They also hear about competitive activities – advantages to your existing products, issues they've had with competitors, upcoming new technology, etc.

Additionally, trade shows and events are a prime activity that can generate a lot of competitive content. Depending on the type of show, many times competitors are also present, which essentially gives ample reason to start comparing capabilities and offerings.

Lastly, and most obviously, sales people have structured (log files, databases, CRM systems, etc.) and unstructured (general feedback) customer information that is rich with competitive value. This is often consolidated at the account or market level and can be utilized to direct organizational attention to specific strategic areas to focus on.

## Final Challenges

It is apparent that a significant amount of data exists from our customers that can highly impact the Competitive Intelligence outcomes of the organization. Consolidating and generating Actionable Insights from all of this data is an obvious challenge. But our data-based digitized society is not slow and static – but rather a highly complex and sophisticated network that generates an ever-increasing tidal wave of information that grows exponentially by the second. Therefore, the real challenge facing the CI professional is understanding and managing this level of data generation and being able to respond to the findings as close to real time as possible. Traditional data collection and batch processing of CI information is a thing of the past – by the time a traditional analysis is finished over the course of weeks to a multi-month effort, the data is ancient history. The world has changed tremendously during that period, and by the time your organization attempts to take action based upon the data, the insights become potentially irrelevant and not applicable. Product and technology disruptions happen more frequently than ever, and today's customers are more than willing to stay as up to date as possible of the technology-savvy curve to remain competitive in their own businesses.

Customer data is critical and highly impactful to Competitive Intelligence methodologies and insights. The CI practitioner of the 21st Century will have to adapt and recognize that the traditional ways of gathering and developing CI Action Plans is different from how things were done 20 years ago. Customer information is no longer a fragmented, hard-to-quantify data source. The advent of the digitized society and the readiness of customer/user sharing of information makes this a ripe environment for exploiting customer content and efficiently utilizing it for the benefit of the CI practitioner.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Paul Santilli leads the WW Business Intelligence and Customer Insights Organization for Hewlett Packard Enterprise's OEM Business, and has been with HP for over 21 years. He is responsible for Business & Competitive Intelligence Modeling and Customer Insights analytics, where he is the Chairman of HPE OEM Executive Customer Advisory Boards worldwide. Paul also is on the Strategic Competitive Intelligence for Professionals (SCIP) Board of Directors Executive Committee and has presented worldwide on various topics related to Intelligence and Insights in both keynote and workshop forums. Paul has a Bachelor's degree in Engineering from the University of Michigan, and earned a Master's degree in Engineering and Business at Stanford University. Write to him at [paul\\_santilli@hpe.com](mailto:paul_santilli@hpe.com).*



Do you have Healthcare expertise and want to share your knowledge with your SCIP member colleagues? We are looking for contributors to CIM Healthcare Section.

To learn more, contact [memberservices@scip.org](mailto:memberservices@scip.org).