INTEGRATED INTELLIGENCE
AN EXCITING DIRECTION FOR SCIP, CI, AND TRADE SHOW INTELLIGENCE

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The front page of the SCIP web page (www.scip.org) says “SCIP Integrated Intelligence.” Nan Bulger, CEO of SCIP, talks about the importance of Integrated Intelligence in many venues. For example, the webinar, “The Evolving Role of Intelligence,” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5HN0QvHF9i0) and in a presentation to a SCIP chapter, “Integrated Intelligence in the Health Care Industry” (SCIP Spain presentation). Even this year’s annual conference headlines SCIP’s focus on Integrated Intelligence with, “Four days of focused development in strategy and Integrated Competitive Intelligence” (http://www.scip.org/news/273897/31st-Annual-SCIP-International-Conference---Exhibition.htm).

Integrated Intelligence is perhaps one of the biggest developments seen within SCIP and in my opinion is a very important step forward in ensuring competitive intelligence professionals maximize their contribution as decision support professionals for their organizations. In this issue’s column I will be focusing on what Integrated Intelligence is and it’s implication to event intelligence programs. As well, given the importance of this evolution in intelligence thinking, I have included as part of my article the majority of the transcript from Nanette Bulger’s presentation about Integrated Intelligence. The transcript is provided at the end of the article.
The starting point in understanding the concept of Integrated Intelligence, and its implications for event intelligence in particular, is to look at how intelligence has evolved over the past 30 years (since the inception of SCIP). When asked in the interview how intelligence has evolved, Nan points to the early days of CI as being rooted in understanding competitors.

“Now, today, it’s really evolved into understanding not just competitors, but really putting the customer at the center of the intelligence you collect so you can determine how best to help your customers compete in the market and help your customers make money and looking at how there’s a competitive effect from the competitors, how the political environment affects decisions that customers make, how the market dynamics affect the customer, and so forth. It’s really evolved into a more sophisticated discipline, where it’s not so much about collecting data anymore, but it’s about conducting sophisticated analytics so that you can help your company make decisions about the market in order to help their customers.”

Many event intelligence programs are routed in the concept of understanding competitors which is consistent with the early days of intelligence. In fact, in 2012, Fletcher/CSI conducted a study entitled, “Trade Shows as Sources of Competitive Intelligence” which proved this. With 408 respondents from around the world it remains one of the most comprehensive event intelligence studies. Amongst their many findings was that “the most common goal of CI collection at trade shows is to learn more about competitors’ new products.” The second most common response was, “General competitor insights.” This response is consistent with the older view of competitive intelligence as a domain focused on competitors, but with this evolution, in intelligence inherent in the Integrated Intelligence concept, two major changes in focus are envisioned:

1. Topics will have to be broader than competitor insights and knowing about competitors’ products. While trade shows do have an abundance of information on competitors they also have the kind of information needed to address what Nan Bulger brought up, market information (market dynamics), political environment, and so forth. The broadening of topics beyond competitor profiling to include customer insight, market dynamics, political environment, technological environment, and other areas that were mentioned in the interview, will also have profound implications to the skill set that trade show intelligence practitioners will need to have (this will be mentioned in more detail in the next section).

2. Customers will become the focus for event intelligence programs. It was Peter Drucker who in the 1950’s wrote “the objective of a company was to create and keep a customer”. Nan Bulger in her interview in 2015, makes it clear that the objective of an intelligence program should be to develop the intelligence that will help your customers compete more effectively. This means that the customers themselves must be at the center of your event intelligence program. Events, by the way, are great places to connect with your customers to find out what is on their mind, to learn about the intelligence needed to help them be more competitive. Even the concept of competitor profiling, which as mentioned has been very popular at events, would then shift from “How are my competitors impacting me?” towards being, “How are my competitors helping my customers be more competitive?” What do they know about my customers that I don’t know? This evolution of intelligence towards a customer focus has profound implication on how all intelligence teams will need to view their intelligence needs in general and the focus of event intelligence specifically.
When asked to describe what Integrated Intelligence was, Nan Bulger provides the following description:

“Integrated Intelligence is really...we touched on it a bit. I spoke about how, originally, we looked at competitors. Now what we’ve done is actually integrated skill sets into the intelligence discipline. When I’m looking at an economic situation, I have a certain skill set that I need in order to understand economics and political situations in a regulatory environment. When I’m looking at competitor intelligence and market intelligence, I need a skill set that really enables me to understand marketing, understand how to segment markets, understand how to build a competitive landscape, and understand competitors.

When I look at customer insights, we’ve often siloed market research and customer insight separate from intelligence. Today we want to bring that together so we understand not only competitors, as I said before, markets, but really synthesize that with the information we have about customers. And then, of course, pulling in the other aspects like competitive technical intelligence, where I understand white space and adjacencies and products of the future.

All of these different types of intelligence require you to have specific skill sets that you bring together. It’s the integration of those pieces of intelligence and the integration of those skills. The Integrated-Intelligence professional of today is a very sophisticated strategist and analyst because they have those skill sets and they know how to fuse those skill sets together.”

The integrated nature of what Nan Bulger is describing is significant. It’s the integration of different analytical techniques and subject matter expertise to enable the intelligence professional to understand the total environment. This may require involving different parts of the organization in your trade show intelligence program. In the CI practices study that I am working on, with Nisha Sewdass and Ruben Arcos, we noted that several organizations had multiple “intelligence type units.” Some had a centralized CI unit that was focused on competitors, while also having customer insight in marketing and technical scouting in R&D. One organization noted 5 different places in their company that had intelligence type objectives. At SCIP Europe this year, several presenters spoke about how they had customer insight in one part of the organization and competitive intelligence in another. Many at the conference talked about the need for these units to work together. Integrated Intelligence actually means all these units should work together. For an event intelligence practitioner this means bringing together all of these groups for an event that will take advantage of the integration opportunity provided by the event. For a sole intelligence practitioner, or if there is only one intelligence practitioner from the organization going to an event (which is more the norm according to many past studies) it means that the one person who is going to the event will need broader skills and knowledge such as the ability to conduct interviews with a broad group of constituents from many areas of the competitive arena, including technical, market, political, competitor, and customer interviews. They also must be
able to ask the appropriate questions and to speak the language associated with these areas and understand what they are being told. Add to this the knowledge of appropriate analytical techniques associated with these areas, including classic market assessment techniques (for example Porter’s 5 forces, life cycle analysis, political risk analysis), business analytics techniques (for example word maps and sentiment analysis), and other types of analytical techniques.

Events are well suited for this new integrated view of intelligence, because all the people associated with this broader definition (technical, marketing, political etc.) are at the event, the information is there. But to take advantage of the opportunity within the context of Integrated Intelligence will require a rethinking of the resources being brought to the trade show. Here are two ideas:

1. Broader training for event intelligence practitioners: Given that it is unlikely that event intelligence teams will grow in the near future (SCIP members have not told me that they are getting huge increases in their budget and company officials have not told me that they will be bringing more people to trade shows) it will mean that practitioners will require training in these different areas. You will need a bigger toolkit and be comfortable collecting and developing intelligence associated with this Integrated Intelligence concept. This includes, as mentioned earlier, the political environment, technical environment, market environment, and so forth. The website, voiceofthebusinessacademy.com, does have some courses to help readers learn about different analytical techniques including those in analytics.

2. Increased participation with others from the company: I have been saying for many years that event intelligence practitioners need to partner up with others from their organization going to the event, and according to the concept that Integrated Intelligence puts forth, this is going to be more important than ever. If there is a need to understand the technical environment, and those being interviewed at the event will be technical in orientation (for example R&D personnel, scientists, etc.), why not enlist the assistance of those at the event from your organization that are also technical?
Integrated Intelligence means recognizing that a trade show provides the opportunity for using a broad array of skills and knowledge to develop a more comprehensive picture of the entire competitive arena in order to develop the intelligence that will make your customer’s more competitive and enhance your organization’s ability to succeed.

My challenge to all who reads this article will be to discuss the concept of Integrated Intelligence with fellow intelligence practitioners and talk about the implications of it to your job in general, and to your event intelligence program specifically. Read the full interview below with Nan Bulger to get a more comprehensive view of what Integrated Intelligence is. This is a profound change to how we conceptualize intelligence, status quo really does not apply and with any significant evolutionary step significant consequences ensue. Discuss these with your CI colleagues and with others at your company.

IN BOX:
Transcript: Interview with Nanette Bulger, CEO SCIP, February 2015


Video also available at
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5HN0QvHF9i0

Thank you. Can we start by providing a definition, or can you explain what competitive intelligence is?

Competitive intelligence is actually the supporting decision support for companies to really help understand their markets, understand the market dynamics, the competitive environment, and to help them make decisions to give them a competitive advantage in the market. Competitive intelligence isn’t just about collecting data; maybe 20, 30 years ago, it was about the collection and expertise in collecting information, but now it’s really evolved into sophisticated decision
support and analytics. It involves looking at competition, market environment, market sizing, and so forth for the purpose of really helping people understand how best to compete in a market.

And how has competitive intelligence evolved?

It’s evolved out of an intelligence that’s been used for, really, centuries to strategize both in military environments and politics, etc. Basically, in the beginning, about 30 years ago, competitive intelligence focused primarily on the competitor, as a means of placing that competitor focus at the center of your decisions and understanding the competitive landscape, understanding what competitors were doing to compete, collecting data about competitors in the form of human-source collection, as well as secondary or printed-source collection.

Now today, it’s really evolved into understanding not just competitors, but really putting the customer at the center of the intelligence you collect so you can determine how best to help your customers compete in the market and help your customers make money and looking at how there’s a competitive effect from the competitors, how the political environment affects decisions that customers make, how the market dynamics affect the customer, and so forth. It's really evolved into a more sophisticated discipline, where it's not so much about collecting data anymore, but it's about conducting sophisticated analytics so that you can help your company make decisions about the market in order to help their customers.

What are the basic aspects that make up competitive intelligence today?

I mentioned it a little bit. When you’re looking at a business environment today, it’s much more sophisticated than it was 30 years ago, simply because we’re a global environment. It isn’t enough to look at one particular region of the globe and understand the landscape there, because the landscape changes depending on where you are in the world or on the planet.

Basically, you have to build an environment to understand various global situations. In other words, competitive intelligence, if you were to look at it in terms of a spoked wheel, you do have economic intelligence. That really helps you understand regulatory environments for different governments and different political situations regionally. There are different market dynamics...
and products or services that they’re going to want in the future, what motivates those customers of the future. That’s where you see a lot of technology development, that’s where you see the game changers and things like that happening.

Another thing that really affects you as well is, over time, there’s been an increase in data sources and the sophistication of available information. That’s really also changed the way we operate as competitive intelligence professionals, because we have a lot of data, and we really have to synthesize it in order to make these sophisticated decisions on a global basis for each region.

And the title of today’s talk is “Integrated Intelligence.” We haven’t gone into that much. What does Integrated Intelligence mean? Can you provide a quick overview of that?

Sure. Integrated intelligence is really...we touched on it a bit. I spoke about how, originally, we looked at competitors. Now what we’ve done is actually integrated skill sets into the intelligence discipline. When I’m looking at an economic situation, I have a certain skill set that I need in order to understand economics and political situations in a regulatory environment. When I’m looking at competitor intelligence and market intelligence, I need a skill set that really enables me to understand marketing, how to segment markets, how to build a competitive landscape, and understand my competitors.

How does it help you compete in the marketplace?

Basically, if you can understand your customers, the customers of today - I speak of the customers of today and also the customers of the future. If you can understand what’s motivating your customers today and how you can help them as a company or organization, make money in their business, or to get the products and services they really want and need, that’s going to help you compete.

Those customers change based on several different things. They change based on the environment you’re in, because cultures are very different, economic situations are very different, so it’s understanding that. It also really helps you compete because you can understand the way the dynamics are moving in market so you can really determine who your customers of the future are going to be. Your customers today may not be your customers of tomorrow.

It really gives you two advantages. It helps to educate you as an organization about the environment in which you’re working, who those customers of today are, what motivates them to do business with you or to work with you, and then to help you identify what technologies
When I look at customer insights, we’ve often siloed market research and customer insight separate from intelligence. Today we want to bring that together so we understand not only competitors, as I said before, markets, but really synthesize that with the information we have about customers. And then, of course, pulling in the other aspects like competitive technical intelligence, where I understand white space and adjacencies and products of the future.

All of these different types of intelligence require you to have specific skill sets that you bring together. It’s the integration of those pieces of intelligence and the integration of those skills. The integrated-intelligence professional of today is a very sophisticated strategist and analyst, because they have those skills sets and they know how to fuse those skill sets together.

That's one piece of Integrated Intelligence. Another piece of Integrated Intelligence, which we can talk about in a separate interview, is really integrating what you do as an Integrated-Intelligence professional with other disciplines in the company. I want to have skills as an intelligence professional so I can interface with the finance people, as an example, or the supply chain people, so they work with me to help develop the decision support that's really needed by the company. We’ll cover that. That's really integrating with other disciplines.

A third aspect is really integrating this decision support that you get by understanding these various pieces into the planning cycle within a company. We’ll talk about, in another interview, how we actually take the skills that we have and build the touch points for intelligence decision support into each piece of the planning cycle within a company. Those are really the big pieces of Integrated Intelligence and how you pull it together and you really build early warning systems to help your company make decisions about how to really be competitive in a market.

Thank you. This is a really interesting topic, and I’d like to do further interviews so we can go into more depth on the points you mentioned about integrated intelligence.

Yes; it’s a very sophisticated process. It’s grown, as I said, over the past 30 years. It’s become much more sophisticated and mature. It’s metamorphosed and, really, with the challenges of globalization and available information and really pulling together the most important pieces of information and supporting decision support, it has become quite sophisticated. I very much look forward to breaking down each piece of it and helping people to understand that, because it’s an exciting field, it’s a great place to build your skills, and it’s really needed by companies around the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jonathan Calof is a professor of International Business and Strategy at the Telfer School of Management at the University of Ottawa; extraordinary professor at North West University in South Africa and executive editor of Frontline Safety and Security magazine. Jonathan combines research and consulting in competitive intelligence, technical foresight and business analytics to help organizations develop key insights on their competitive environment. Jonathan received the fellow's award from SCIP and the lifetime achievement award in competitive intelligence from Frost and Sullivan. He has over 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, foresight and analytics and has helped several companies and government agencies around the world enhance their capabilities on these areas. He can be reached at calof@telfer.uottawa.ca.