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BOOK REVIEW

New Directions: A Competitive Intelligence Tale

By Gary D. Maag and David J. Kalinowski



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Available at Amazon (paper, Kindle forthcoming) or
www.newdirectionsinci.com

As fictitious business executive Jack Turner learns, there's nothing to be afraid of when it comes to competitive intelligence. When conducted properly, CI actually helps reduce risk by uncovering critical information senior executives can use to improve decision making. In today's hyper-competitive business environment, that's something every organization needs. (from book).

If you are looking for a textbook on competitive intelligence or a hard-hitting reference manual on analytic techniques, this isn't it. But if you want a well-written, easy-to-read, and affordable (\$18.95) account of what competitive intelligence is and how it can help an organization, this is your book.

Gary Maag and David Kalinowski, who have long held leadership roles in competitive intelligence, recognized the need for a brief and easy-to-understand document that explains competitive intelligence and its benefits in an enjoyable way. They have filled that need with this book. It provides a guide for those new to intelligence while providing solid reminders to experienced practitioners.

New Directions: A Competitive Intelligence Tale is the story of "Jack Turner," a fictional market research manager in the game console

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industry, who after the death of the company's founder and a management change, learns how to use competitive intelligence to help his company address a challenge from an aggressive competitor. The authors do a nice job of interweaving intelligence jargon and adages with the fictional account of the company's struggles. You'll have to read the book to find out whether Jack is successful and competitive intelligence "saves" the company.

The book offers a realistic and interesting case study that is well-written and easy to follow. Intermixed in the narrative is an explanation of how competitive intelligence works and an emphasis on the discipline and hard work required to obtain and analyze information. Here is a typical passage from the book:

Laurence laughed. "A big part of it is in the approach and the types of questions you ask, no doubt. You can't just pick up the phone, dial Sampson's biggest supplier, and expect someone to tell you what the company's R&D department is cooking up. But you'd be surprised, Jack. When you do the hard work – the primary and secondary research – and do it well, you'll find people who know things and are willing to talk. Once you get one tidbit of information from one person, you can build on it. And that's what real competitive intelligence is all about – find those small pieces of data that are scattered across the supply chain. Over time, you can gather enough of them to see the big picture and create relevant, accurate, and actionable intelligence."

There is also an example of conducting trade show intelligence, a section on elicitation and several intelligence axioms, including a definition of competitive intelligence, the do's and don'ts of CI, the intelligence cycle and legal guidelines. And there are several nuggets for management, including Michael Porter's contributions to competitive intelligence, a discussion of the relationship between CI and decision-makers and the need to "repair the roof while the sun is shining."

Readers should be prepared to deal with a few minor shortcomings, some inherent in the storybook style. It takes a little while to set the stage and get to the essence of the matter and, personally, though it's not common practice in fictional literature, I would have liked an index so I could quickly go back to key sections.

Every serious competitive intelligence analyst and manager should have a copy of this book, and they should read it and keep it handy for occasions when a coworker or executive needs a competitive intelligence primer. It's a quick read (it was designed to be read on an airplane flight), and it could be appropriate to offer it to a key executive to take along on his or her next business trip.

About the author

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Dale Fehringer is a freelance writer and editor. He started and managed competitive intelligence at Visa International and is a past member of SCIP's board of directors. Dale writes a column for Competitive Intelligence Magazine and tries to stay current with the rapidly-developing field of competitive intelligence. He can be reached at dalefehringer@hotmail.com.



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