

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES FOR COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION

TONI WILSON and CHRISTINE WUNDERLIN, *MarketSmart Research*



Services

Welcome to the inaugural column on publicly available sources and related tools and techniques for competitor information and intelligence collection. In this series, we focus on the advantages of using competitor information available through career websites and resume databases. Examples are related specifically to the theme of this issue — competitive technical intelligence.

Often overlooked as competitive intelligence (CI) information sources, resume databases and career websites are primarily used by individual job seekers, corporate human resources departments, and professional recruiters. However, they can also be very productive and efficient sources for competitive intelligence collection.

WHY RESUMES?

You can search information within resume and recruitment databases, such as Monster.com or CareerBuilder.com, and derive several distinct types of information about competitors and their activities. For example, subscribers to Monster's *SmartFind* resume service can search for their competitors' recent and current employees' resumes. This provides insights about a job-seeker's current and past activities at the competing company.

Engineering and product development professionals often describe their projects or products in great detail to emphasize the breadth and depth of their professional experience. Competitive intelligence researchers can use the information from these resumes to learn about forthcoming product initiatives or to gain details regarding recent projects.

Resumes of your competitors' employees or other potential knowledgeable industry participants can also provide names of other individuals you might contact for additional insights. In addition to the job-seeker's name and contact information, resumes contain professional references with names and contact details, which can also be useful.

Resume research can help you identify patterns of recent organizational changes at competitor companies. When you find an unexpected number of engineers with specific expertise looking for new jobs, it may indicate that a competitor is moving away from a particular technology or product line.

SPECIALIZED CAREER WEBSITES

Check job postings on a competitor's website to determine the types of jobs they are recruiting for and where the jobs are located. This can help you:

- identify a specific new focus for the company.
- gain insights regarding relevant job requirements.
- understand where a competitor may be establishing a new office or production facility.

Career websites supplement this source of competitor information in several ways. Competitors may not list their open positions on their own websites, but they may be posted on one of the many career websites, such as Yahoo! HotJobs, Monster, or CareerBuilder. In addition, several

specialized career websites are focused on the specific needs of job-seekers.

One example is the executive- or management-level job-seeker, who is typically assisted by a professional recruiter. Executive and higher-level management positions are not usually posted on a company's website or on the traditional career websites. However, a source such as 6FigureJobs.com may contain executive- and management-level professionals and open positions affiliated with competing companies.

Career websites focused on professionals within a specific industry include BiospaceJobs.com, which offers resume services for job-seekers and employers in the biospace industry, and TinyTechJobs.com, which is focused on positions in nanotechnology, microtechnology, biotechnology, and information technology.

A unique career website, Vault.com, provides information about the recruitment and employment "experiences" at various companies. Detailed information about jobs and careers also contains references to the interview process, respective corporate cultures, opportunities for advancement, and salaries and other forms of compensation. This type of information can provide you important insights regarding a competitor's operations.

Be mindful that web sources of this nature are continually being developed. If a specialized career site that meets your research needs doesn't exist today, one may appear tomorrow. Existing sites are always expanding their sources and may soon offer information that supports your competitive intelligence requirements.

SIDEBAR: EXAMPLES OF RESUME FINDINGS AND THEIR APPLICATIONS

Systems Software Engineer:
“Co-author of patent for test automation software”

Mechanical Engineer:
“[Over 25] patents in design and function have provided...key intellectual property”

Referenced patents may be helpful in understanding the unique manner in which the competitors are designing and testing their products.

R&D Software Support Engineer:
“Instrumental in reducing test process cycle time by approximately 40%”

In context, information would contribute to insights regarding competitor’s process improvements.

IT Engineer:
“Working on the CRM project that includes customizing and migrating CRM applications from legacy products to J2EE and Microsoft platform...project for customers in North America, Latin America, EMEA and Asia Pacific”

May provide insights regarding technology platform and reach of competitor’s CRM system.

IS Support Supervisor:
“Managed up to 18 software technicians, engineering systems support technicians and technical analysts”

Control Room Supervisor:
“...In direct supervision of 15 alternating shift employees and shifting supervisory position of up to 75...”

Would contribute to understanding of competitor’s organizational structure.

Manufacturing Development Engineer:
“Lead engineer for co-development of newest products that will hit the market this summer”

In context, would help anticipate new competitor product offerings and the timing of their release.

NARROW, BROAD, AND DIVERSE COMPETITOR INFORMATION

Beyond collecting unique types of information regarding competitors, another key advantage of using resume databases and career websites for competitor research is the broader company coverage. While traditional information sources typically focus on large public U.S. companies, several of the resume databases and career websites contain information on:

- public and private companies.
- large, medium, and small-sized companies.
- companies within and outside of the U.S.

For example, Monster currently offers databases that contain resumes for individuals who work at companies in more than two dozen countries,

from Austria to Wales. Vault now offers services for nearly 20 total countries in the North America, Europe, and the Asia/Pacific regions.

In addition to expanding its non-U.S. focus, Monster is also offering services for job-seekers and hiring companies at local levels. For example, in April 2007, Monster and Internet Broadcasting formally agreed

to offer career sites for 120 of Internet Broadcasting’s local TV websites, including those serving the top 20 markets in the U.S. As a result, CI professionals seeking information about local companies and job-seekers can focus their research in a narrower area.

TABLE 1: WEB INFORMATION SOURCES

- www.biospacejobs.com
- www.careerbuilder.com
- www.monster.com
- www.6figurejobs.com
- www.tinytechjobs.com
- www.vault.com
- <http://hotjobs.yahoo.com/jobs/>

ACCESSIBILITY

The availability of resume databases is the product of the recent explosion in web-based services for job-seekers and the related needs of employers and recruitment professionals who are willing to pay for the information and insights contained in resumes. In addition, you can pay a premium for those services with value-added search features and functionality that provide more efficient resume searching.

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success stories (p. 49). These are lessons too often ignored by those advocating the extensive reliance on “case studies” in competitive intelligence training.

The authors also point how to use (and how to misuse) strategy. Taking nothing for granted, they show how research demonstrates that strategy may in fact explain differences in performance between companies in the same industry niche. On the other hand, they note that implementation, and in fact even the ability to implement strategy, is so overlooked at the master of business administration (MBA) level that it calls the “business school industry...very much in question” (pp. 138–158). Thus, strategy is overlooked at the business level as well.

When discussing the need to make decisions based on real data, they perceptively point out that

sometimes this means acting on the “best data [available] at the moment.” This sentiment echoes the still-critical observation of the difference between intelligence reports and scholarly research: “[I]t is often true that some completeness and accuracy [in an intelligence report] must be sacrificed to timeliness” (Washington Platt, *Strategic Intelligence Production: Basic Principles*, Praeger, NY, 1957, p. 22).

The alternative is to face the following: “[B]y the time you have completed an in-depth study, the issue may have passed, all the executives may have been fired for inaction, and the company may be dead.” This observation can be applied to all too many competitive intelligence research assignments.

All in all, this is a provocative read. If you cannot now see some of the half-truths and total nonsense that

the authors identify in the world where you work, then you have not fully understood this important book.

*John J. McGonagle is the managing partner of The Helicon Group, a Blandon, Pennsylvania, competitive intelligence research, analysis, and consulting firm. He is the 2007 winner of the SCIP Meritorious Award, and previously won the SCIP Fellows Award. The most recent of his six books on CI is *The Manager's Guide to Competitive Intelligence* (2003). He can be contacted at jjm@helicongroup.com.*

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Accessing the full-text resumes of employer and recruiter databases can be costly, depending on what service you use. For example, Monster charges from \$450 for a two-week subscription or 400 “views” (whichever comes first) for resumes within a 100-mile radius of a specific ZIP code. It also offers a \$9,400 annual subscription with 60,000 views of any resumes in the U.S. In contrast, Vault charges from \$29 per month for a three-year subscription to \$49 per month for a six-month subscription.

Your company’s human resources department may already invest in resume database subscriptions, and often you can take advantage of them. Make sure you check out the internal availability of such subscriptions before investing in them yourself.

IN SUMMARY

As the web and related database capabilities continue to accommodate broader and more sophisticated online services for job-hunters and recruitment professionals, you can take advantage of the wealth of information and insights about competitors available in them. You can search traditional and specialized career-oriented websites for information regarding competitors, their employees, operations, strategies, capabilities, and more.

These offerings are based on comprehensive details provided through posted resumes and by vendors focused on gathering and making available broad and comprehensive sets of information and on the search tools that accommodate more efficient and cost-effective searching. They should be part of every CI practitioner’s source checklist.

Toni Wilson is founding partner and principal consultant at MarketSmart Research Services. She was an intelligence practitioner at LexisNexis for 15 years, where she developed unparalleled expertise regarding intelligence sources, tools, techniques, and CI collection processes. She can be reached at twilson@marketsmartresearch.com.

Christine Wunderlin is partner and principal consultant at MarketSmart Research Services. Her expertise in intelligence sources and process development was established through her previous employment as a business consultant at LexisNexis and her 12-year career as a CI practitioner at Lands’ End. She can be reached at cwunderlin@marketsmartresearch.com.