

scip.online

Wednesday, August 22, 2002

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 14

This week's *SCIP.Online* articles:

[Creating Actionable Intelligence](#)

[CI Lessons from WorldCom and HP/Compaq](#)

[10 key sources of competitive data. -- Featured Article](#)

[Early registration discounts.](#)

[Corporate earnings conference calls.](#)

[CI profile: Dale Fehringer.](#)

[Services for managing information overload.](#)

[Getting the most out of VC investments.](#)

[FYI: new and noteworthy.](#)

Complimentary Article

10 key sources of competitive data.

Russell Secker, Executive Vice-President Marketing, Hoover's rsecker@hoovers.com

Summary: An effective marketing strategy requires keeping close and constant track of competitors' plans and actions. At Hoovers (and before), Russell Secker has been perfecting the tedious process of gathering company intelligence, and shares his list of the ten most important resources he's found for 'getting the low-down on the competition.'

It happened at the school science fair. I arrived with my static display of the solar system, only to be met by Gerald McChesney and his meticulously crafted, highly functioning interactive display on gravitational pull. I was proud and confident until the strengths of my classmate's project, my "competition," quickly served to highlight my weaknesses.

Looking back, I realize my crushing defeat was really a hard-won lesson on the importance of gathering competitive intelligence early in the product development process. In the weeks leading up to the fair, I could have attended the project workshops and group lab sessions. I might have caught a glimpse of Gerald's prototype. I might have noticed the titles of the library books in his satchel. With some competitive intelligence, I might have exited the fair that fateful night with the shiny blue first place ribbon instead of a pale, mimeographed "honorable mention" certificate.

Thirty-five years later, I'm now in charge of marketing and product management for Hoover's, Inc. (you may be familiar with our Web site, Hoover's Online) and I'm still constantly reminded of the important

lesson I learned that day back in school. Not only because an effective marketing strategy requires attention to my competitor's moves, but also because my company's products are designed to fulfill the need for quick, easy access to company and industry intelligence.

How do we do this? Hoover's maintains a database of information on more than 18,000 public and private companies in 300 industries. Our editorial staff continually updates these records, which include information about a company's history, its products, and its strategic direction. This means we're constantly scouring the news, public filings, and any other source we can get our hands on to determine what's really going on at the companies our users are following.

Over the 12 years that we've been in business, we've perfected the tedious process of gathering company intelligence. Here's a list of the 10 most important resources we've found for getting the low-down on the competition:

1. **Receptionists:** simple inquiries and requests for information made via mail and telephone can often yield surprising results. For example, when tracked over a period of time, employee headcount can tell you much about the company's direction.
2. **Salespeople:** another great source of information, salespeople are often all too eager to tell you about current and future products, even how they think they stack up against yours.
3. **Human resources:** If you can get past the receptionist, human resources personnel are especially helpful when researching private companies. Obtain a list of executive names and then plug them into news and Web search engines to learn the background of a company's leadership team.
4. **Local news outlets:** Many local city business journals, newspapers, magazines and television news stations now maintain fairly comprehensive and searchable Web sites that contain a wealth of helpful information. Executive moves are often reported here, as are early reports of location changes, layoffs, and other corporate events that may not make the national newswires. Check sources where the company is headquartered as well as at branch and subsidiary locations.
5. **10-Ks and 10-Qs:** An obvious choice for information on public companies, a company's SEC filings are especially helpful when considered not as a snapshot in time, but as an evolving story over a period of years. In addition to financial trends, read between the lines by noting changes in how a company describes its activities.
6. **Annual reports:** Although less useful in terms of hard data, annual reports can reveal subtle changes in the way a company presents itself to shareholders. The number of pages, paper quality, use of color and special printing techniques will often change in relation to its financial condition. (Another fun way to check a company's mood is to look at the expressions on faces in the executive photos.)
7. **Press releases:** Press releases are another obvious source, but again, take a few months or years of these to get the 10,000-foot view of how a company is changing its focus. Look closely at the choice and tone of the words used, not just their meaning, to see how a company may be evolving the messaging that's driving its marketing campaigns.
8. **Trade magazines:** many of them aren't available online, but if you're serious about gathering information on industry trends and key players, trade publications are invaluable.
9. **Vendors/partners/customers:** using the above resources, you're sure to come across

information about the companies with whom your competitor does business. Follow the same steps to research these businesses to learn even more about where your competitor is spending its time and financial resources.

10. www.hoovers.com: Of course, if you don't have the time or the budget to do all of the above, Hoovers.com does. Our editorial team of 80 researchers uses all of these sources and more each day to ensure that our database contains the most comprehensive and current information on companies, industries, and the people who lead them. Of special value to competitive intelligence professionals are our editors' handpicked lists of competitors for each company and the Competitive Landscape pages (these provide a detailed financial comparison of a company vs. its top three competitors, its industry and the market as a whole). Or use our Advanced Search tools to plug in your own criteria and find lists of companies that may not already be on your radar. Then sign up for our News Alerts and we'll deliver breaking news about your competitors right to your e-mail inbox.

With the ever-expanding universe of competitive intelligence resources, and more and more Gerald McChesneys out there competing with you for first prize, gathering the information you need to beat the competition often leaves little time for analysis and reporting. With the key resources listed here, you'll be able to obtain the knowledge you need sooner, rather than later, and first prize can be yours.

Background:

Russell Secker is executive vice president of marketing, with additional responsibility for product development and management for Hoover's, Inc., a leading provider of business information. Secker joined Hoover's in June 2000 as Chief Operating Officer for the company's London-based subsidiary, Hoover's Online Europe Ltd. Prior to this, he served as Marketing Director for Dun & Bradstreet Europe. Secker joined D&B in the U.S. in 1986 as Development Manager, and was responsible for introducing PC technology to the data gathering and reporting function. He later held more senior technology positions, with responsibility for both collection and marketing systems. Before repatriating to the U.K. in 1995, Secker worked on a project designed to enhance the global position of D&B, most notably the design, development and implementation of the world's largest business database, WorldBase. He holds a Master's degree from the University of Warwick Business School, England.

Hoover's publishes authoritative information on public and private companies worldwide, and provides industry and market intelligence. Hoover's business information is also available through corporate intranets and distribution agreements with licensees, as well as via print and CD-ROM products from Hoover's Business Press.

Copyright 2002 Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals SCIP.online, volume 1 number 14, August 22, 2002.

Copyright 2002 Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals. SCIP.online, volume 1 number 13, August 5, 2002

Like this article? [Join SCIP](#) today and receive this informative biweekly e-newsletter filled with more CI articles delivered to your desktop.

2002 Copyright by Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals

