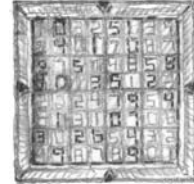


CREATING AND MAINTAINING A GLOBAL EXPERTS DATABASE

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In the November-December 2007 issue of *Competitive Intelligence Magazine*, my colleagues Eric Badertscher and Kathy Reese discussed some of the unique challenges and barriers to establishing a global network of subject matter experts (SME). Here, I will expand upon their work by describing the six requirements for creating and maintaining a global expert network.

WHY DO YOU WANT TO USE EXPERTS?

As Eric and Kathy noted, the first action is establishing the “compelling need” for using industry experts. You might want to develop your experts database for many reasons, but in my experience I’ve found that the three listed below are the most common:

You’d like expert knowledge to add value to analysis in reports. This is of particular use if you are looking into a new geographic region or emerging market.

You’d like to facilitate a direct interaction between your internal client and an expert, serving as third party in the interaction. This makes you the internal expert—“If you want to get the right information fast, talk to John: he knows just whom to call.”

You’d like to outsource an analysis function to the experts. This is particularly useful if the subject you’ve been asked to research falls out of your usual line of expertise or industry.

If any of these reasons represent situations that might assist your

competitive intelligence (CI), then establishing an SME database makes sense. Developing a sound experts network requires the following six activities.

1. EXPERT IDENTIFICATION: UNDERSTANDING THE REQUIREMENTS

Identifying experts is the major task when creating and managing an experts network. Several valuable sources make this job a little easier.

- **Job portals** such as Monster.com, CareerBuilder.com, and Hotjobs.com both for current and former employees.
- **Data aggregators** such as ZoomInfo.com for former employees and Hoover’s for current employers and moving executives (retiring, resigning, etc.).
- **Professional associations** for people with specific qualifications such as Certified Public Accountant (CPA) or specific levels of expertise such as a doctorate in psychology.
- **Social networking websites** such as Xing.com, LinkedIn.com and Viadeo.com can be used to search for experts. When contacting experts from these networks follow the guidelines set by the networking sites.
- **Google** for confirming most of the information.

Social networking is key to expert identification and recruiting. For expanding and growing your experts network, one of the better approaches is tasking the experts who are already members of your contact circle to

approach or bring in additional experts. For example, if an expert you’ve used before has produced good analysis or reports, ask that individual to provide recommendations for others in his field who may be helpful.

It can work something like this: If you have a project related to an oil and gas company based in Eastern Europe, and you had an expert who has done a good analysis in that region, ask him if he knows another expert who could assist you with a project in the chemical or fertilizer industry. Chances are he might, or at the very least be able to give you some other “leading lights” in his own industry.

When a recommendation leads to a new relationship, consider offering a nominal “thank you” fee to the person who supplied the recommendation once the relationship is established. That will increase the likelihood of future quality referrals. After all, the existing expert just saved you time and effort.

2. ESTABLISHING THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RELATIONSHIP

Once you’ve identified an expert and before you begin developing a working relationship, establish an appropriate legal framework to cover the entire process of expert communications, in terms of sharing of information, ideas, and data. Generally you will be paying the expert for his time, so make sure both you and he understand the rules of engagement before your first consult him.

For instance, establish a clear ‘compliance framework’ to interact effectively with experts from different industries. Many expert consultants we engage have full-time jobs, and each

SIDEBAR 1: EXPERT BIOGRAPHY FORMAT

This short biography (not exceeding 1000 words) should include:

- **Corporate/job experience** over the past five years and/or three job positions, whichever you prefer.
- **Professional degrees** obtained by the expert.
- **Short coverage of the expert's knowledge on the relevant topics**; such as, pediatrics, nanotechnology or medical devices.
- **Additional data** that the expert has mentioned in the resume or public profile. For example, a leading expert in the field of public health might have worked with different renowned organizations such as the United Nations.

employer has a different set of rules regarding employees' externally paid consultation opportunities. Ensure that these individuals do not transgress their employers' rules when doing work for you.

I have four specific recommendations for this activity. First, no employee should exchange non-public information, under his best knowledge and understanding. Second, all interaction with the experts shall meet the criteria of the third party—in this case, the expert's employer. The expert's regular employer must know that the employee is receiving income from an external engagement. Also make it clear to the employer that their employee, within the scope of the engagement with you, will not be asked to reveal anything confidential or non-public information about their employer.

Third, all the information and analysis provided by an expert becomes the property of your company, and you have complete authority over the information. And lastly, the expert has complete authority over the decision of terminating the consultation if she is not comfortable in revealing the information asked or if it results in any infringement of her contract terms with her employer.

3. CREATING A SEARCHABLE DATABASE

Whatever the client or internal requirement for the expert management

process, a solid database is the most important tool for managing subject matter experts (SMEs). Effectively engaging and managing SMEs requires that you develop relationships with them, and therefore you will have repeated references to their profiles. This demands software with filter and search capabilities.

At Cipher, we utilize an internally-developed system, part of our Knowledge.Works™ enterprise competitive intelligence product. We have also developed experts-specific databases for clients as SharePoint web-based portals. But the software you use isn't the issue: the key point is to make sure you have something easily searchable and *scalable*.

4. CREATING AN EXPERT BIOGRAPHY

Once you have your database established, create a template for an 'expert biography.' This document serves the function of an executive summary about a subject matter expert. For example, you can do a quick search for an expert who works in a particular company and serves in a certain post. It also provides the means to make a quick comparison between different profiles of similar types. This biography indicates the kind of experience and knowledge the expert has. Have a look at Sidebar 1 for more information on what to include.

Along with this background information, the expert biography should include contact information and additional information covering (at minimum): job title (specific), company name, industry type, company type, department, job category (generic) and expertise area.

5. INCORPORATING EXPERT INPUTS INTO DELIVERABLES

Various limitations apply to consulting an expert for some topic analysis. For example, you may find profiles mentioned on search engines like Google, or public web sites like Hoover's or ZoomInfo.com. When you look for certain experts through resume databases like Monster and CareerBuilder, you may find individuals whose expertise listed in their resume might be fitting for the analysis but when you contact them, they might sound doubtful about the topic or they might be completely uneducated about them. On other occasions these experts might say that they have complete knowledge, but the reports or analysis they produce might not be adequate.

When using a new expert source, cross-check their report or analysis with at least two other experts. Consider the background and profile of these 'cross-check' experts and under what situations these experts would have done previous analysis. Check if these experts actually provided valuable insight in their reports, or if they were just interpreting public information available on any company or industry.

Cross-checking isn't only a good way to verify report results you're unsure of. In cases when certain experts provide particularly valuable information, it is worth the effort to analyze why only that person could develop such information and not others. Is the expert revealing anything which is non-public or finding information that others overlook, and is he adding value to the final deliverable with quality analysis, or just repackaging that which others have reported on?

Here are some best practices concerning the use of experts:

- Gather information from more than one expert.
- Check relevance of information by making comparisons of expert profiles.
- Analyze why some results from different experts are common but some completely different.
- Cross-check results with available public information.

6. MAINTAINING FEEDBACK

As you build up your interaction with various experts, incorporate a feedback field in your experts database and keep that data current. This helps identify future prospects to consider or indicates caution before consulting with that expert again. This feedback

could be on anything which later helps determine if you should contact the expert again, as a reference.

Feedback could be structured along categories such as:

- type and quality of analysis.
- payment pattern of the expert.
- time associated with the generation of report.
- time availability of the expert.
- if the expert helped in finding more experts for the database or not.

Creating and managing an experts database can be time-consuming, especially at the beginning of the process, but done correctly the project should pay off handsomely for you and your business. Ultimately, they will help you and your CI department be viewed as an information center of excellence,

where you'll be providing real insights of value to your decision-makers.

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