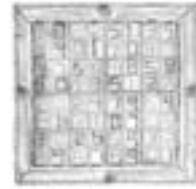


# THE RIGHT RECIPE FOR NEXT GENERATION CI SOFTWARE

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There is quite a bit of *noise* surrounding best practices in competitive intelligence (CI) software today. Several industry surveys make an attempt at identifying and evaluating the prevalent CI tools available. The results often reflect a cookie cutter approach to rating software based on traditional requirements.

At the same time, several CI scholars articulate the specifications of *next generation* CI software based on their academic perspective of user requirements. But the information available does not always translate well into prescriptive advice.

## THE CI PRACTITIONER VIEWPOINT

The piece missing from most software studies is the viewpoint of the CI practitioner. The individuals who actually design and implement CI software and the users who rely on it are the only ones who can accurately relate real world user requirements for next generation CI software. And only they can determine how well developing technologies truly live up to these expectations.

CI software practitioners with established track records in design, implementation, and supporting CI technology are ideally positioned to make these software evaluations. They have their fingers directly on the pulse of their CI client needs and have the wherewithal to map the user trends and critical requirements expressed by business professionals.

Think about it. The first step associated with CI software development is identifying and analyzing the primary technology

requirements expressed by active business users across industry sectors. With this in mind, let's consider some emerging CI software requirements.

Based on hands-on market experience, in the next section of this article I'll provide a trend-driven view of the technology specifications that are already being expressed by business professionals. The final section highlights surfacing CI practitioner productivity requirements.

## THE BIG PICTURE: REQUIREMENT TRENDS

One of the key challenges faced in CI software development is building an application that can meet the wide range of unique requirements and expectations expressed by intelligence professionals. Looking at the big picture, the trends in top software and technology support requirements can be organized into four distinct categories.

### Managerial Requirements

CI managers desire tools that are capable of facilitating their analysis, from a top-down perspective, for all ongoing CI assignments among their staff and throughout their organization.

And they want technology to help them address day-to-day managerial tasks, such as:

- defining and assigning projects
- establishing and tracking deadlines
- monitoring and evaluating progress
- assessing the overall productivity of their staff

### Productivity Requirements

CI software has several tactical requirements imposed on it. Research

analysts are essentially focused on the productivity aspects. They are looking for technology to help them process the most amount of information in the least amount of time. This user requirement category includes the search, extraction, analysis, reporting and dissemination of a wide array of information. Deliverable requirements range from recurrent news reports to in-depth customized analyses for decision-makers across their organization.

### Industry Requirements

The specifications and required capabilities of CI software are impacted by the information requirements ubiquitous to a given industry. In particular, the sources for relevant information vary drastically from sector to sector. The format, volume, quality, accuracy, and versatility of each information source must be evaluated closely and be translated accurately into the CI system.

### Technical Requirements

In spite of on-going efforts to standardize operating systems and database management platforms across industries, the implementation of CI software in an individual organization is still limited by the technical standards already in use by the organization. CI technology must be compatible with the more mainstream operating systems to allow integration with the greatest number of applications.

## THE FINER POINTS: PRODUCTIVITY

In the end, the long-term adoption and usage rate of CI software depends primarily on its ability to enhance the

productivity of business professionals. For effective system implementation, several emerging CI practitioner productivity requirements must be considered.

**Content Extraction**

Searches retrieve information presented in various formats, such as html, pdf, and Microsoft Office attachments (MS Word, Excel and PowerPoint). Business professionals are no longer satisfied with simply searching for information across a wide variety of sources and formats. They also expect the capability to extract, summarize, and report details found through their searches. And users want to be able to automatically turn the selected information into an *analysis friendly* format to more rapidly complete the analysis production cycle.

**Dynamic Reporting**

For the most part, the traditional software technical challenges associated with *static template reporting* have been overcome. But CI practitioners now demand the capability to dynamically create and update a wide range of customized report templates ranging from Dynamic Competitive Profiles to Value Chain Analysis.

Delivering true dynamic reporting requires tight integration with html and Microsoft Office technology as well as a stable, user-friendly work environment. But the systemic challenge goes far beyond technology. Effectively implementing dynamic reporting capabilities requires an in-depth knowledge and solid understanding of research and analysis functions in use among leading organizations.

**Interactive Analysis**

Technology can never completely take the place of analysts. But levels of skills and experience vary greatly both within and between individual CI professionals in business organizations. CI software should allow users to dynamically select, customize, and insert the most relevant analytical

templates within ongoing assignments or pending research questions.

To this end, CI professionals require access to comprehensive, intuitive analytical template libraries and criteria-based requirement definition questionnaires (e.g., report wizards) to guide in template selection. Individual end users want the capability to insert graphical representations of their analyses to substantiate key findings uncovered during the search and extraction phases of the research process.

**THE RIGHT MIX**

Using both academic and CI professional best practices studies with hands-on market experience creates the

right recipe for next generation CI software. In fact, leading software providers are constantly working on technologies to meet emerging requirements.

Some components designed to meet these challenges are available on the market today. But delivering a single comprehensive, easy-to-use and affordable CI solution is still on the horizon.

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