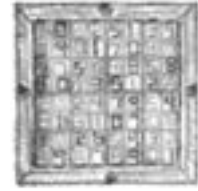


RESULTS-DRIVEN INTELLIGENCE: MAPPING TECHNOLOGY TO THE CI VALUE CHAIN

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At the end of the day, competitive intelligence (CI) is about delivering the right answers to the right people so that the organization as a whole can be more proactive and stay ahead of the competition. The format and delivery of the end result – the intelligence deliverable – is crucial. It does not matter how well the facts have been sifted through and how the analysis has been compiled if the end results just “sit on the shelf.”

Whether or not the competitive intelligence deliverable is actually used is dependent on the quality of its content – its relevance, timeliness, accuracy, and depth. Management expects a certain level of quality from the reports professional research analysts generate.

It is not only the quality of the analysis that matters, however. Researchers also must adhere to guidelines dictating format. Management expects reports to look a certain way and processes them accordingly.

Consequently, quality and format are key ingredients to delivering results-driven intelligence or, in other words, actionable deliverables. This would be pretty straightforward if every intelligence request was similar and the analysis framework applied was consistent. This is not the case.

THE CHALLENGE

In typical corporate environments research analysts must provide ongoing updates to standard market indicators while also responding to many ad hoc requests. In both cases they are constantly monitoring a large volume of unstructured data across their respective industries. They are tasked not only

with transforming this vast amount of information into a meaningful framework that meets both quality and formatting standards but also with delivering it in a timely manner. And they are expected to do so consistently.

Unfortunately, there is no magic formula to accomplish this great task. But when pieced together in the right combination, there are several technologies that can make analysts' jobs easier and their end results more effective. With this in mind, this article challenges CI technologists to automate the “CI value chain” associated with the delivery of some of the most common analytical and reporting frameworks while also maintaining the required level of quality and consistency.

Mapping technology to the CI value chain means identifying the areas where automation will facilitate the intelligence process rather than trying to take it over completely. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that the analyst's role is still key to creating ultimate meaning out of the data.

But technology can provide powerful tools along the way. Here we will consider four examples:

- 1) KIT- KIQ framework
- 2) company profiles
- 3) market assessments
- 4) SWOT analysis

KIT-KIQ FRAMEWORK

The Key Intelligence Topic (KIT) and Key Intelligence Question (KIQ) framework, used in CI for many years is particularly effective when working with strategic topics that affect the organization as a whole. It sets the stage for instilling a common framework

for defining the scope of the research and assessing the implications of specific topics. However, it is also very rigid and difficult to implement in an organization with limited time and resources to dedicate to competitive intelligence.

A combination of technologies now makes this framework accessible to even small groups of analysts. For example, XML facilitates the collection and manipulation of data. Relational database technology supports the categorization, indexing, and mapping of key findings. And the integration of these technologies with messaging and office productivity software allows for the full automation of the required workflow including the secure delivery of actionable end results to decision makers.

While the KIT-KIQ framework provides a more all-inclusive approach to the intelligence process, the remaining examples here consider specific commonly requested deliverables.

COMPANY PROFILES

Analysts across all industries spend a good amount of time preparing company profiles in response to ad hoc requests. These profiles provide management a snapshot of a single competitor's key capabilities. Most profiles focus on the same attributes defining the overall capabilities assessment: management, financials, operations, etc.

Here again, technologies can be combined to automate much of the process. Database and data parsing tools allow users to quickly retrieve, select, and organize facts required to complete a capabilities assessment. A structured

XML template document can serve as the finished profile for accepting relevant data points that have been selected.

An integral piece of this solution is an advanced search engine that can retrieve information from internal sources, subscription news feeds, and the web. All of this coupled with a text summarization feature means you can go from request to end result in a matter of minutes rather than hours.

This flows smoothly for publicly held companies, but private company profiling information may need to be entered directly into the system by the analyst rather than automatically pulled from available information sources. Fortunately, this model still applies as the quality and consistency of the final intelligence deliverable can be maintained through the use of the common templates. Further, information gathered through the system itself may serve to refute or validate facts uncovered personally by the analyst.

MARKET ASSESSMENTS

Market assessments also consume a significant amount of analysts' time. Like the company profile, the framework for market assessments is pretty standard. It focuses on some of the key areas that affect the valuation and the level of financial attraction associated with a specific market including its key players, key technologies, and regulatory environment. While this information is typically publicly available, it is often buried in a wide variety of sources and rarely structured in a common format across content.

The real challenge here is to distill and aggregate the relevant data to complete the market assessment report. The system needs to integrate the right mix of information with a well-designed template to automatically organize and process the overwhelming volume of information available.

Current data extraction and parsing tools can provide research analysts with a significant edge by automating the majority of the production of the finished report. Advanced unstructured data management technologies can facilitate pulling relevant facts together regardless of their content format. The analyst is then simply tasked with validating the results and refining it to meet required quality and consistency standards.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis framework is probably one of the most versatile and widely applicable frameworks available to business analysts today. The good news is that matrix and OLAP parsing technology can easily be implemented to allow users to quickly search, retrieve, select and *drop* information into a SWOT-like template. And document management technology is ideal to build an effective and easily retrievable electronic documentation trail for auditing purposes.

The real challenge here is to design the SWOT template so that users – especially decision-makers – can simply click on an item to *drill down* to the key findings supporting the placement of a given element. This links the logic and relevant key findings directly to the conclusions depicted on the final SWOT display without complicating the look of the deliverable on the surface.

CONCLUSION

Analysts will continue to be obligated to maintain ongoing research projects while responding to ad hoc requests. Unfortunately, many companies are spending a lot of money trying to automate the whole process rather than allowing the analyst to drive the ultimate solution. Some companies are banking on the capabilities of

technology alone rather than tailoring technology to support proven processes and that produce actionable intelligence deliverables.

This can be reconciled by designing a system that uses standard templates and workflow to guide users through the intelligence process. This system should also remain context sensitive based on the type of request and the most appropriate framework available. In this article I shared some examples of how this might work.

There is a common thread throughout the technologies used that can be knitted together to create one system that ultimate fulfills the requirements for each type of deliverable. This sets the stage for the next generation of the system to support more advanced analytical formats including the Boston Consulting Matrix and Porter's Five Forces.

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