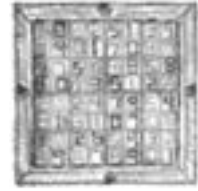


# THE PERFECT CI SOFTWARE — IS IT A MYTH?

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People often come to us asking if the perfect competitive intelligence (CI) software exists in the marketplace today. Is there one solution that really does it all?

This is a tough question to answer. Based on a sample of over fifty Fortune 100 companies, it is clear that the definition of perfect varies greatly not just between industries but also from company to company. These differences are generally conditioned by two sets of factors: 1) organizational and cultural, and 2) system-centric. (See Sidebar 1.) These factors shape what a company wants and needs to facilitate their intelligence process.

## THE MYTH

*There is a perfect one-size-fits all solution.* The bottom line is that there is no one perfect solution that meets the needs of every organization across every industry. The right solution must meet a unique set of requirements and be individualized to each organization's specific needs.

This can be accomplished through a customized mix of technologies designed to meet the requirements of a pre-established competitive intelligence blueprint. The blueprint maps technical components to the cultural and organizational, and system-centric factors already detailed rather than force-fitting technology.

## THE REALITY

*Software falls into technology verticals that can be pieced together for an optimal solution.* After defining the critical success factors in your organization, the best way to draft the blueprint for the optimal CI software solution is to think in terms

of technology verticals. Each one plays a logical role in the production and sharing of CI and market research that can then be mapped back to your unique requirements. Your unique organizational factors serve as the basis for the rest of the plan as depicted in Figure A.

Here is a quick breakdown of the most prevalent verticals with examples of leading technology providers in each area.

## Clustering and categorization

Most organizations have a need to aggregate their leading competitive intelligence and market research information sources in one central database. This database becomes an information warehouse of both structured and unstructured data that needs to be mined for meaning.

To this end, most companies also require the ability to quickly and

## SIDEBAR 1: FACTORS AFFECTING CI SYSTEMS

### Organizational and Cultural Factors

**Corporate culture.** How much value does management attribute to market or competitive intelligence as a whole? Is the decision making process synergistic with the collection and analysis of information? Does the company strive to instill an information sharing culture across its organization?

**Industry sector.** Some industries such as health care and high technology are inherently more dependent on competitive intelligence than others.

**Organizational structure.** Large companies with a decentralized business model naturally suffer from "information clustering" and are therefore dependent on technology to instill a common process for CI collection and analysis and to disseminate information across the organization. Smaller more centralized companies, on the other hand, may be less reliant on technology for information sharing.

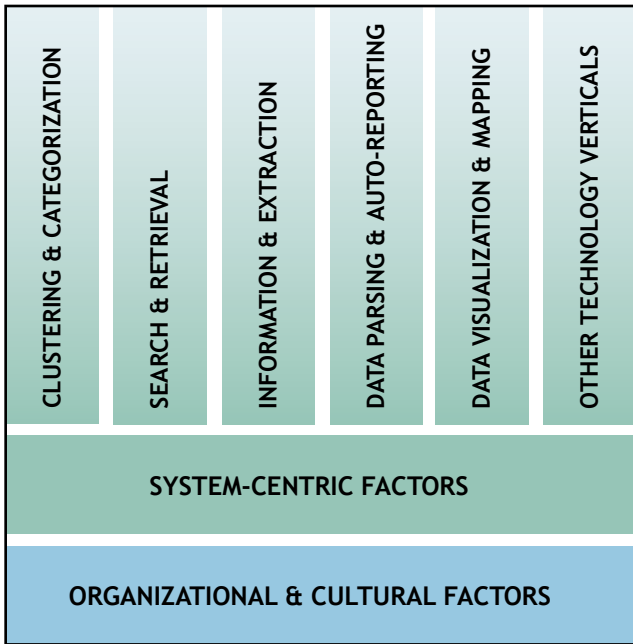
**Tactical research requirements.** The number of resources (or often lack thereof) allocated to competitive intelligence, the nature of established CI processes, the characteristics of the end-of-the-day deliverables, the level of interaction and accountability of the CI staff in relation to management, etc.

### System-centric Factors

**System purpose.** Is the system expected to support the entire CI cycle or will it be used as a web-based billboard to share and disseminate information across the organization? Or both?

**Budget and ROI measures.** The resources allocated and expected ROI impact the ultimate system. Logical measures include: optimization/cost reduction of the total cost of CI-related content in the organization, % of workload reduction, % increase in deliverables production, rate of information dissemination.

**IT requirements.** The architectural requirements and the IT policy of the organization often dictates the general technology direction for any project. These may include server platform requirements (e.g., Oracle vs. SQL, vs. UNIX, etc), policies towards the implementation and maintenance of web-based applications, IT security requirements, etc.



**Figure 1:**

easily organize the information into logical clusters and categories. Here again, customized clustering and categorization schemes usually generate the best results. A sample of technology players with solutions in this vertical includes Autonomy, Applied Semantic and Vivisimo.

**Search and Retrieval**

Straightforward keyword searching is the key to an effective search and retrieval mechanism. In spite of all of the bells and whistles that can be added in, most users actually stick to simple Boolean queries. Keep this in mind when evaluating your options.

Depending on your budget and the level of information technology (IT) support available in your organization, you may consider implementing one of the following proven search platforms to meet your search and retrieval requirements.

**Customized Microsoft SQL Searching**

A key benefit of Microsoft SQL lies in its direct integration with Microsoft Office. This allows users to not only search titles and content of documents residing in a database but

also the content of MS Office and PDF attachments.

Other heavy duty enterprise search engine options include solutions from Convera, Inteliseek and Verity.

**Information Extraction**

Information extraction is probably one of the leading challenges for professional competitive intelligence analysts today.

This technology component is critical not only to find information but also to extract and retrieve selected data points from unstructured content sources.

Some of the information extraction technologies available on the market include:

- customized extraction technologies (built based on VB script and XML technologies)
- enterprise extraction engines such as Inxight, SRA, Nstein and Inteliseek

**Data Parsing and Automatic Reporting**

Turning unstructured search results into formatted deliverables is extremely labor intensive. Many professional analysts still waste precious time everyday cutting, pasting, and summarizing business intelligence related information into finished deliverables.

Today, automatic-reporting platforms such as HMT Technology and Crystal Reports help automate the production of finished deliverables by parsing the information into predefined report templates.

**Data Visualization and Mapping**

Often the value and the specific return on investment generated by

visualization and mapping is difficult to justify, at least among corporate customers. Data visualization and mapping technologies are usually best suited for users who spend significant time scanning large amounts of unstructured text-based sources to monitor high level trends in a specific marketplace.

Since the cost involved in these technologies is rather high, you must first determine if this type of technology matches your unique requirements as defined in your blueprint. If this is in fact a requirement, you might consider these vendors: Clearforest, Kartoo and Inxight.

There are more critical components that fall into other technology verticals such as workflow support, taxonomy management, data mining and others. All of these areas need to be considered when developing your blueprint of the optimal competitive intelligence software solution for your organization.

Ultimately, each of the components identified in your blueprint will need to be incorporated in a common architecture to constitute a complete and effective system. Both your budget and the level of IT support available in your organization will obviously gate the resulting solution.

Since none of the off-the-shelf solutions available on the market can cover all of these requirements, following this approach is the most effective method of developing the best long-term system for your organization.

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