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Relevance of Competitive Intelligence (CI) in Library Services in Nigeria

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Abstract

Librarians' work environment is becoming challenging and at the same time exciting. The constant change in the organizational, technological and information environment is becoming increasingly complex thereby placing a demand on librarians to keep up with new technologies and systems, new information sources, new forms of information and new tasks and roles. They have to constantly justify themselves and their services and demonstrate their value to the parent institution. This paper looks at the relevance of competitive intelligence on the improvement of library services in Nigeria in accordance with one of the seven sins of library managers. The paper attempts to study relevance of competitive intelligence in library services in Nigeria and proffer means librarians need to take for their services to flourish.

Keywords: *Competitive Intelligence, Library services, technological environment, information analysis, business strategies.*

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Concepts of competitive intelligence

Competitive intelligence is capitalizing on the weakness and shortcomings of a fellow organization or company to out ride them. In a world in which knowledge is power, what you do not know can hurt you. Competitive intelligence uses many of the same techniques as market research but deploys them to answer highly targeted and specific questions, rather than to gain insight into broad market trends. Fuld (2006) defines competitive intelligence as the process of collecting and analyzing information about competitors' strengths and weaknesses in a legal and ethical manner to enhance business decision-making. Competitive intelligence activities can be basically grouped into two main types:

- 1) Tactical which is shorter-term and seeks to provide input into issues such as capturing market share or increasing revenues;
- 2) Strategic which focuses on longer-term issues such as key risks and opportunities facing the enterprise.

Competitive intelligence is different from corporate or industrial espionage, which use illegal and unethical methods to gain an unfair competitive advantage. Investopedia (1999) explains that competitive intelligence means different things to different people within an organization. For example, to a sales representative, it may mean tactical advice on how best to bid for a lucrative contact. To top management, it may mean unique marketing insights to gain market share against a formidable competitor. The ultimate end goal

of competitive intelligence is to help make better decisions and enhance organizational performance. Investopedia went on to analyze that while most companies can find substantial information about their competitors online, competitive intelligence goes way beyond merely trawling the internet on the premise that the most valuable information is seldom-if-ever-easily accessible online. A typical competitive intelligence study includes information and analysis from numerous sources. These include the news media, customers and competitors' interviews, industry experts, trade shows and conferences, government records and public filings. In acknowledgement of the growing importance of competitive intelligence, the Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP) was formed in the U.S.A in 1972. It underwent a name change to Strategic and Competitive Intelligence Professionals in 2010. Nikolaos and Evangelia (2012) define competitive intelligence as a systematic and ethical program for gathering, analyzing and managing external information that can affect your company's plans, decisions, and operations. One reason for so much competition is because the world is now one single market place. As a result of increased competition, the rate of change taking place in business is increasing exponentially.

Competitive Intelligence (CI) is critical for organizations to stay abreast of changing market conditions and avoid costly mistakes. Competitive intelligence is not a new phenomenon but can be traced back to the writings of Sun Tzu a Chinese military strategist, who several centuries ago wrote, *The Art of War*, which provided a detailed description of how to develop intelligence for military applications: 'If you are ignorant of both your enemy and yourself, then you are a fool and certain to be defeated in every battle.' 'You know yourself but not your enemy, for every battle won, you will suffer a loss!' 'If you

know your enemy and yourself, you'll win every battle' (Sun, 1988) in Calif and Wright (2008). For any organization to keep-up and survive in this fast paced competitive environment, they must know what the competition is doing. According to Helm (2011) *competitive intelligence is a process whereby you collect, analyze and transform information into intelligence you can manage in the future. The overall objective of competitive intelligence is to identify events, trend, and other issues that will impact your organization.* He went further to say that the best way to implement competitive intelligence is to focus on critical questions confronting your organization. For example, how will this regulation change our business or how will the introduction of a competing product impact our business? You must continually monitor critical issues if you expect to compete. If you fail to implement competitive intelligence then you run the risk of operating in a reactive mode. And nothing changes a company more than having to survive.

To date competitive intelligence has gathered much momentum as a valuable strategy to provide valuable knowledge rather for making decisive decisions... Oder (2001) mentioned that competitive intelligence has long been practiced in some form and its increasing importance may be seen in the growth of the society. Equally vital is library services that has dramatically been changing due to competitive intelligence. This work endeavors to discuss relevance of competitive intelligence in library services in Nigeria.

2.0 Review of Literature

2.1 Overview of Nigerian libraries

The importance of libraries cannot be overemphasized. Libraries are usually the first point of call for information seekers. Library is a repository of information in different format and it is supposed to have

structural representation of the environment in which it is located such that people within the locality are knowledgeable in terms of the content of the environment and also what obtains globally, and these are usually through the print forms, audio visuals, and so on (Adedeji as cited by Majirioghene and Bilenomo, 2008). He also posits that the modern library is a repository of knowledge that is delivered on real time basis through the Internet. More so with influence of the information age, modern libraries have gone factual with some of them providing information in digital formats as well as offering 24hours services for clientele (Ajegbomogun and Okorie, 2010).

The National library was once a pacesetter for other libraries, but its current state is a reflection of the decline of the public library system across the country. Some of the branches of the National library exist only in name. The National library of the 1960s and early 1980s competed well with libraries in other parts of the world. The library subscribed to 30 international journals and got regular supplies of books from Ranfurly Library Services, now Book Aids International, and the Ford Foundation, both based in the United States (Majirioghene and Bilewomo, 2008) but such services are no longer there. In order to improve the Nigerian library's collection development for effective services, the States law was enacted and stipulated that every author is bound to submit three copies of their books to the library, but since the law was established in 1964, most of the publishers have refused to deposit their publications. Most libraries have now become a warehouse for old books, some of which were covered with dust that have gathered over time, with mismatched chairs and tables blending well with the ageing bookshelves. There are computers both in-use and out-of use, none of which is connected to the Internet because the server is down or there is power outage.

2.2 Suggestion on the way forward

Libraries should become more forward thinking in rolling out (new) measures to improve on their services to the uses. It is noteworthy that the library has the responsibility to provide the substantially-available information to the end-uses. Hence, the adoption of competitive intelligence (CI) will go a long way to improve the library services. The concept of competitive intelligence has its root in marketing where it is commonly used to gather data to map marketing plans. Kotler (1988) one of the respected marketing authorities observe that market-oriented thinking is a necessity in today's competitive world, the winners will be those who carefully analyze needs, identify they opportunities, and create value-rich offers for customer groups that competitors can't match. Majero (1993) defines marketing as the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customers' requirements profitably. It is a planned strategic approach of bringing together customers and products. Marketing could also be considered as a planned approval to identify and gain the support of the users by developing appropriate services in a manner that benefits the users and further the aim and objectives of libraries. Competitive intelligence always requires choices of what products should be offered because do institution can do everything. The library's success depends upon the quality and excellence of its products (Weingart and Schwechheimer, 1983). The products that libraries provide are varied and ever changing and consist of core, tangible, and augmented products. Kotler's (1982) definition of product is anything that can be offered to market to satisfy a need. It includes physical objects, services, persons, places, organizations and ideas. Products include all of the goods and services made available through the library. Oder (2001) opined that competitive intelligence involves not only the collection of

information (from both primary and secondary sources) but also analysis of how that information affects the company's competitive environment and communication of that anal to decision makers.

3.0 Relevance of Competitive Intelligence to Library & Information Services

Competitive intelligence provides the environment for repackaging of information on the improvement of library services. Information repackaging according to Oguntuase and Falaiye (2004) is an intellectual process that involves the extraction of information from an information source or data which is then followed by the evaluation of the quality of the quality of information or data, analyzed and interpreted in a broad sense to enable the information expert use the stock of data and information to produce a new package meant for a target group or class. The target group consists of the community, engineers, politicians, scientist and those in different fields of human knowledge who are constrain by time and need the continuous supply of information. Such clients would not mind paying for any prompt services offered them. Feedback from clients on the relevance information will also help librarians to keep abreast of recent information as regards meeting the changing needs of the clients with a view to improve the qualities of information/services provided.

Advertising and exhibition are good media for competitive intelligence in the library. It is a medium for ongoing image or awareness-building. It's an ideal vehicle to encourage attendance to special presentations, workshops or seminars. Advertisement builds interest and motivates readers to take action. Librarians can do things in a better way; it might be costly but very effective. Occasional free press release may be partially helpful. Another alternative to advertising is exhibition, a public display of library holdings, showing the activities of the library.

Such exhibition can be done in the library open place, town halls and be displayed at various places which identified users visit frequently. This competitive intelligence strategy will further strengthen the relationship between the potential clients and the library. According to Kahaner (1996) competitive intelligence is a systematic programme for gathering and analyses information about your competitors' activities and general business trends to further your own company's goals. A more elaborate definition of competitive intelligence was coined by Gilad and Fuld (1998) in Alexandra, Andreea and Anca (2002) to support competitive intelligence in this vein; competitive intelligence is the action of ethically and legally gather, analyze and communicate information about third party players in one's competitive arena-from competitors, to suppliers, customers, influencing parties, distributors and so forth to be used by companies in their planning and decision-making.

Competitive intelligence approach in the area of database searching and inter-library loan charges is an idealistic way of improving library services. The information explosion coming from the scientific and technological community has changed the way and method through which the society harness and source for relevant information. Chisita (2011) observes that the new information driven economy presents insurmountable challenges to information professionals as they have to rebrand, redefine their roles and titles, developing skills and identifying functions and tasks to adopt and eliminate, developing relationships with different categories of clients and colleagues, establishing a new process and gathering and applying new resources and techniques. Consequently, there are improved choice, convenience and customization which are handled by experts and made available to the end users. This was also observed by Ajegbomogun (2009) that a

librarian with understanding of competitive intelligence is knowledgeable in the identification, location and evaluation of information resources and is in a better position to guide users who are uninitiated in the complexities of information retrieval and evaluation. They will be overwhelming if information is made available to them at a token price. This buttresses the mindset of a competitive intelligent individual which is: 1) to gain customers, 2) to make money and 3) to succeed.

Charges for inter-library loans are extremely important in the Nigerian situation now since most of the materials for research are often out of print or not available because of tight budget. Competitive intelligence makes the interrelationship between libraries competitive in the sense that it causes the weaker libraries to always depend on the strong ones for resources. In other words, it will make the strong libraries to wax stronger because they will be the ones loaning products and services. This service attracts payment. Online database search is another method of reaching out to the clients which also attracts some cost. A working definition by Santos and Corriea (2010) supports competitive intelligence approach to database searching and inter-library loan by saying that competitive intelligence is, " ... the conversion of data and information, gathered by an organization from its external and internal environment, into intelligence that supports the organizational decision making process. ...Process of monitoring the competitive environment and analyzing the findings in the context of internal issues for the purpose of decision support."

3.1 Consultancy services

According to Johnson (2000) competitive intelligence is the purposeful and coordinated monitoring of your competitor(s), wherever and whoever they may be, within a specific marketplace. Your "competitors" are those

firms which you consider rivals in business, and with whom you compete for market share. Competitive intelligence also has to do with determining what your business rivals 'WILL DO' before they do it. Strategically, to gain foreknowledge of your competitor's plans you have to plan your business strategy to countervail their plans. As you might expect, this will involve many methods at the tactical collection level, but it will also require integration into your existing information infrastructure, analysis and distribution of the information, and finally the calculation of business decisions on the grounds of that information and the analysis of same. Similarly, librarians are in a good position as competitive intelligence strategist to identify relevant information sources in their environment (e.g. bibliography, full-text databases or the Internet) and they are also in a better position to help users getting information. The librarians are more exposed in searching the library's indexes and databases, acquiring information from seminars and international conferences. Evaluation of information needs and services are examples of consultancy services. They could as well organize seminars for bankers, businessmen, politicians, and so on. By so doing they are marketing their library services and attracting users from other libraries to theirs.

It can be summarized that competitive intelligence is an ongoing activity that gather intelligence with the aim to categorize it for dissemination to users in an easily interpreted form to influence decision making.

4.0 Seven deadly sins of library managers

In everything we do there is competition. Competitive intelligence is a brain work which has to do with much thinking. Competitive intelligence helps you secure yourself from danger and protect all and void. Rapidly, changing technology and continuous introduction of new products along side

competitive intelligence concept which makes it necessary for libraries to keep abreast of developments and access how the technologies and products can be incorporated and exploited in their services, has brought into view one of the seven deadly sins of library managers. The fifth sin was adopted in the course of this study, which is “Failure to Listen” Asheroft (2004) and Osa (2003) characterized the work environment of librarians or information professionals in the 21st century as one of fast-paced and constant change. They noted that information professionals/librarians have to be flexible in adapting and adopting new skills and strategies for handling them. Failure to pay attention or give consent to the happenings around one's environment can lead to confusion in an organization. For example, the following reasons can cause failure in the library even though competitive environment tend to be available and operational.

a) Environment: Failure to see changing patterns in one's environment can be a big barrier to moving the library forward. That phrase “this is how we use to do it” keeps libraries in the dark. Librarians should change the pattern of their library services, get to know the users' behavior is changing, and know the economic conditions, the demographics and so on. A library needs to study current events, carry out a systematic monitoring. There should be need for brain storming scenarios, carryout future research and come up with fresh ideas on how to improve their services. Relevance of competitive intelligence has been articulated by Havenga and Botha (2000) that in order for an organization to remain globally competitive, new tools for decision making are required. Of these tools, it is internationally recognized that competitive intelligence is fast becoming a norm rather than the exception to assist management with decision making in the modern knowledge-

based organization. “Foresight is not enough to guarantee a profitable journey towards the future... (But) without foresight the journey cannot even begin”(Prahalad and Hamel, 1996).

b) Monitoring Tools/Resources: Failure to keep up with the new developments or trends in the library context. As the work environment can change rapidly, librarians need to access periodically which new skills they need to acquire and which current skills need to be strengthened. These skills include:

- New information technologies
- New user behaviours
- New processes
- New software available
- New government policies

Chochrek (2000) in Mangemba (2011) opined that competitive is the ability to gather the facts, see into the future, and convince your audience that you hold the key.

c) Failure to focus on the community: the community of any organization is where you are located. A library in a university has the university as its community. So also a public library, wherever it is situated, the people staying around there make up the population of users. So failure to align with and engage the university community in the case of university libraries, especially in the wake of changes will weaken competitive intelligence approach. The library is the hob place of activities in the university. University libraries are instituted to serve the university community in the areas of teaching, learning, research and other recreational activities. Therefore the library cannot work in isolation. They have to be pro-active. Miller (1996) identified that components of intelligence process includes, identification of users and their needs, the collection and analysis of information and dissemination of intelligence to decision makers and for strategist.

d) Information Audit: Every organization

should provide opportunities for and use of information resource for strategic advantage and strategic decision making and for librarians to identify key partnership and develop marketing opportunities. Failure to find out about information use, information needs, information flow, attitudes and perceptions about information, information cost and value, issues and challenges and opportunities will deny the library opportunity to compete. Dysart and Jones (www.dysartjones.com) observed that:

“Vision without Action = Dreams
Action without Vision = Passes Time
Vision with Action = Change
Result = Vision Achieved”

The fact that is shared between the fifth deadly sin of library managers; failure to listen and competitive intelligence is that they recognize information as a critical aspect of life in the 21st century contributing immensely in the knowledge economy. To further buttress the relevance of competitive intelligence in improving library services, Santos and Correia (2010) sees competitive intelligence as an information processing routine that looks forward to prepare the organization to compete (and win) in changing environments, whose dynamism is the result of systematic monitoring. They further maintain that the process of acquiring, and structuring information and knowledge are central as an activity within broader planning process. The practice of modern librarianship can be enhanced through competitive intelligence to enable libraries to “identify new opportunities leading to innovation and ultimately benefitting the competitive status of the (libraries)” (Havenga and Botha, 2000). Miller (1996) identified that the users and their needs, the collections and analysis of information and dissemination of intelligence to decision makers and for strategist.

With the increasing need for information in

organizations, libraries and librarians are required to be competitive information leaders, utilizing competitive intelligence to communicate information for strategic purposes and remain purposeful in their capacities. Analyzing further relevance of competitive intelligence on the improvement of library services, Lindsey-King (1998) in Havenga and Botha (2000) maintains: “Information professionals who are also (librarians) are the individuals who are primarily responsible for harnessing the organization's information sources and information capabilities to enable it to its changing environment. Library services needs employing intelligence to provide information by responding with a sense of urgency to critical information needs.

Conclusion

The ability to respond to client needs in a timely and appropriate manner is given varying value within differing libraries in that improving the availability of specified high demand items or services may be important to some libraries, while providing a greater variety of titles or highly specified services may carry more importance within another library of the same or different type with different client audience.

Libraries should reflect the needs and help to solve the following problems of its services, by looking inward, re-strategizing even as the work environment can change rapidly. Librarians need to assess periodically which new skills they need to acquire and which current skills need to be strengthened. Libraries should play a stronger role in packaging, re-packaging and disseminating information to the public through competitive intelligence strategies. Relevance of competitive intelligence in modern organizations cannot be overstated bearing in mind that the knowledge-based economy require knowledge to remain competitive and for informed decisions. Failure to listen and acquire excellent materials that addresses the

specific clients, community, or market segment of a library will deteriorate rather than expand the library's support base and make it more competitive. If the library fails in engaging an act of competitive intelligence in collection development and information dissemination, it will lose patrons, clients, and eventually financial support. It is incumbent upon libraries to develop excellent materials to improve its services; these materials should also represent the best professional and informed judgments of the library and makes it highly competitive.

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