



STRATEGIC PLANNING &
IMPLEMENTATION ASSOCIATES, INC.

Why Market Research Is Something I Should Do

An article for the Lowell Sun

by

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Market research? Isn't that something that only BIG companies do? Why in the world would I want to do that? I can't see how it could help me?

Why should it be VERY important to you? Because keeping your company aware of positive or negative trends in your industry/profession can make the difference between prospering and something far less desirable.

Remember KNOWLEDGE IS POWER and the more "power" you have, the stronger will be your company/firm. So what can market research do for my company? It can:

- Keep me informed about competition – what they're doing and how they are doing it.
- It can help me learn from others as to successful strategies that are being used by others in my industry – especially important in retail when one is competing with the big box stores and multi-location competitors
- It can help me adapt my product/service offerings to correspond to new opportunities that help distinguish me from my competition.
- It can help me re-engineer my company so that it keeps on the leading edge of those organizations that are competing effectively and growing revenue on a profitable level.

First: A good example of how market research made a BIG DIFFERENCE might be the office products dealer in Hasbrouck Heights, NJ who, when faced with Staples - the OP Super Store coming to town, decided to compete with them by opening up a micro-super store – eventually one of 10 that he opened over the following 3 years.

This same dealer protected his market by recognizing what competition and creating a strategy that allowed him to compete. And his sales climbed through the roof. So how do I get started? The first thing that's needed is to define what information do I want to gather? If I want to know about competition, I need to quantify the specific information I need to know about every company. Start with what you know about them. Then add to the list of information you want questions that'll help you compete e.g. demographics, pricing strategies, product/service offering mix (and changes in that mix), a sense of what their price matrix looks like compared to your own (refer to my earlier article on PRICING MATRIXES). What else? How do these companies go to market – their marketing process? What else?

Secondly: I should want to learn as much as I can about industry trends in products, services and marketing.

Where can I get this information? From the industry trade press, from eNewsletters that deal with your industry/profession, from the library who maintains access for local businesses to find out what others are doing in the same or similar field.

The Boston Public Library, as a good big city example, has a specialty business only branch called the Kirstein branch located in a historic four-story town house building – across the street from Government Center in Boston. This branch has 10 reference librarians on hand most of the time and probably offers one the best hard-copy information resources available in the metro area:

Kirstein Business Branch

20 City Hall Avenue

Boston, Massachusetts 02108

617-523-0860

<http://www.bpl.org/research/kbb/dbases.htm>

If you're thinking of developing a business plan for your company, they have available for you copies of business plans from successful companies that you can review, photocopy and use to help you grow your business.

Anyone that has a local library card (Massachusetts ONLY) can get a Boston Public Library (BPL) card by applying at any regular (not business) library. Whether you have a BPL card or not, you can visit, use and research as much as you want. You are unable, however, to take books out without your own BPL library card.

Naturally there are other libraries that also might provide similar information – including most of the colleges and universities that offer business degrees. Even your local library has information and very accommodating reference librarians who job it is to help you find out what you need to know.

What else should I do?

- Subscribe and READ as many of your industry's trade publications as you can afford. Many of these are freebies and only require you to go to their website to sign up. If you're qualified (Inotherwords, in the industry) you should be able to get the publication
- Subscribe to as many of your industry's Enewsletters as you can – again, most of the time, there is no fee involved.
- Get involved with your trade or professional association. It's amazing how much information the association's have that you can access by merely being a member.
 - Most of these also maintain a on-line library of reports that provide valuable information about your industry including financial trends.
- If you are a member of a buying group, coop or franchise, get to know non-competing companies in your business. Regular contacts with them can provide you with a wealth of information including ideas that work. Don't be afraid to call them and develop a on-going information gathering relationship. Remember research is an on-going process – it doesn't end ever.
- Learn from the people who call on you (sales people) – if you're a company that buys products for resale or for internal use, ask them questions about what they're seeing in the marketplace – companies/firms that are succeeding. Maybe they know what they are doing – and can share it with you. We all know that salespeople like to share information – especially if they're being asked to doso. I had a lot of success that came from this information source.

Bottom line – keep yourself at the leading edge of those in the know and you’ll position yourself to avoid major surprises – the kind that can compromise even the most successful company/firm.

For more information and practical hints to help avoid “being too busy”, contact Craig by calling him at (978) 640-0803 or emailing him at cstimmel@spiainc.com. SPIA has a very rich website where more information is also available: www.spiainc.com – blog: <http://blog.spiainc.com>.