

## **Visit Guidelines: A Checklist for Gathering Competitive Intelligence**

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### **Step 1: Develop background on planned meeting or interview**

- Assemble those attending and those who might use intelligence likely to be found
- Provide overview of CI techniques: intelligence collection and counter-intelligence
- Brief on legal and ethical guidelines (ideally from company counsel)
- Share background on organizations of interest (host, visitor, or attendee)
  - Why are they important?
  - What has been our history with them: friendly, neutral, or hostile?
  - What plans, if any, do we have for working with or competing against them?
  - What decisions might we make based on the results of the visit?

### **Step 2: Develop an intelligence plan to FISH**

- **Focus:** What information is needed and how to find it (see attachment for examples)
  - What do we think we know that we would like to confirm?
  - What don't we know that we need to know?
- **Investigate:** Know how you will actually collect the intelligence on the visit:
  - Assign responsibilities
  - Develop strategies
  - Do homework (on people, terms, other sources)
- **Share:** Determine what information you want others to know about you
  - Partnering interests
  - Areas of expertise and capabilities
- **Hide:** Determine what information should be safeguarded
  - Brief attendees
  - Role play interactions to practice responses
  - Review all presentation and display material

### **Step 3: Work hard on the visit**

- Do:
  - ask questions that will help achieve your objectives.
  - look around wherever you go for clues about other's operations and capabilities.
  - be a good listener – people love to share their views and what they know
  - modify your objectives and techniques based on experience
- Do not:
  - deceive your host about why you want information or how you will use it
  - be too obvious about your underlying motives and objectives
  - be too assertive about gathering information

### **Step 4: Review what you learn with others who can use it**

- At the conference debrief among the attendees and update targets and needs
- Schedule a mid-day break on company visits for private discussions.  
(Note: Do not discuss what you found where other parties can hear)
- On return, quickly set up briefings with those needing the intelligence
- Focus on interactive sharing – not on written reports

### **Step 5: Act on the information**

- Validate the information if necessary
- Assess viability of existing activities and plans in light of the new intelligence
- Change plans or operations as appropriate
- Launch an ongoing monitoring effort in selected areas to minimize future surprises

### **Step 6: Give feedback to the visit team**

- Let them know how their information was used
- The greatest reward is seeing your efforts make a difference
- It provides an opportunity to catch errors in interpretation
- Feedback enhances the effectiveness of future scouting missions

## **Attachment 1 Examples of Potential Intelligence Questions**

- Trade shows and conferences:
  - Learn about new products or services being offered or hinted at by competitors.
  - Assess the reaction of others (e.g., customers, competitors, vendors, and consultants) to ideas you are considering.
  - Understand the underlying technologies that support their current and projected offerings.
  - Gauge their technical sophistication compared to yourself, and the best in the world.
  - Estimate the level of effort being applied, and the timing of anticipated advances.
  - Determine the sources of an organization's technical know-how.
  - Assess their interest in partnering and existence of current alliances
  - Identify the customer needs they seek to satisfy.
- Company visits: customers, suppliers, competitors or potential partners:
  - Identify and clarify their needs – known and emerging.
  - Uncover what they know about your competitor's plans, technology, and products.
  - Get their reaction to concepts and projects you are working on or are considering.
  - Discuss opportunities to work together to leverage technology at lower cost or risk.
  - Create liaisons with development groups to influence their designs and to explore collaborations.
  - Test the personal chemistry among key participants.