

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.