

# What Is Your Company's IQ?

Watch for new feints by your competition on the price and product fronts

By Bryan Rader ■ *MediaWorks*

Recently President Bush asked what one thing he would like more of in the fight against terror. And without hesitation he stated “more human intelligence.” He was referring to more intelligence in the field — in the trenches, and inside each potential enemy’s camp.

More human intelligence. Being prepared for every possibility. Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of your enemies. The desire of your enemies. Gathering as much real-time information as you can about your enemies. Your enemies’ methods. Their plans. Their capabilities.

If it works for our military, it should certainly work for our business. And I definitely believe successful private cable operators need more “human intelligence.”

Good intelligence about your enemy is so important, especially in a highly competitive marketplace like the video, voice and data business.

Based on the region of the country you operate in, you may be competing with one of several franchise providers such as Comcast, Time-Warner, Charter, Cox. You are also fighting the satellite providers too, DirecTV and Dish Network, in the cable TV space. You may also have overbuilders such as RCN or Knology to contend with.

You are running head-to-head with the local phone provider such as BellSouth, SBC or Verizon for broadband services. And if you’re in the phone business, you could be competing

with all of the above, plus every provider in the VoIP business.

There is potential competition for your customers coming in from all directions. All are trying to win on their product, service or pricing. And the mix can change very quickly.

Gathering intelligence information about enemies (rather, competitors) is a very important task for each of us. And you can’t just do it once a year, or simply when things slow down. Your intelligence about your competitors must be current and meaningful.

My company tracks everything that the franchise operators do in each of our markets. Are they adding channels to basic service? Are they adding new features such as HD or DVR capabilities to their digital box? What is their rollout schedule for VoIP in each market?

In fact, the minute they announce rate increases (which usually occurs at the end of the year), we immediately update our files, and notify our clients of the price comparison between them and us.

We also monitor the satellite guys and the DSL providers. You never want your potential customers to be the first to tell you that your competition is giving away the first two months, waiving install fees, or providing free premium channels. You should know it first, and then do something about it to stomp out the enemy.

All of us should have used last year as a time to explore the VoIP market. Why? Because it was obvious (if you were managing your competitor intelligence)

that each of the large franchise operators would be aggressively rolling out into this service category. Timing is important, so you can get a jump on your “enemy.” And now you should ask, how will they price it? Bundle it? Offer it?

This information is available on the web in most cases. But be sure to avoid press releases as “factual plans.” I’ve often found releases to be better sources of what your competitors *want* to do, not what they *will* do.

Intelligence data should extend to your customer as well. How well do you know your local market, your apartment community, or private single-home development? Do you have a handle on the demographics of your community? This may include the economic level, ethnicity, presence of children, and employment status. Not being informed on your market place can be just as dreadful to your business as not having competitive information.

In today’s environment of rapid change, it is critical to build significant “human intelligence” into your business model. It’s the best way to be effective in this competitive landscape.

So, what is *your* company’s “intelligence” quotient? ♦

## About The Author

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