

LESSONS TO APPLY THE NEXT DAY FROM A CI JOURNEYMAN



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Often CI experts are thrown into industries or moved into various business sectors within their companies where they have no previous experience. The main challenge is building credible insight in a market you don't know. The SCIP chapter took advantage of the European conference programme from Rome 2013 to host Skype's Gary Sheen to share his experience and lessons learned as he has transitioned sectors with CI/MI to his current role. These experiences were colourfully brought to life by Gary's candidness with the assembled group. While we as CI experts may not be moving companies, we likely need to overcome the knowledge gaps we have in order to remain credible in the eyes of sceptical stakeholders, an occurrence that takes place as businesses' continue to evaluate new revenue opportunities beyond their core. Gary's session provided a great opportunity to reflect on what we could do differently at each of the attendees' place of work tomorrow from the lessons learnt.

Gary has experienced a broad range of industries through changing companies and by the diverse range of business interests they have.

Agency – Gary started out as an analyst undertaking primary research projects in the IT/Telecoms, pharmaceutical and FMCG industries before being a practice leader. As a practice leader he was able to increase his engagement with clients and project management as well as carry a target.

National Delivery Service – Gary then moved to a UK company that covered both parcel and postal delivery as well as over-the-counter retailing of over 140 lines. Gary's challenge was to be the master of all sectors. Gary stated, "the company proved to be more innovative than outsiders would give it credit for, given its breadth of portfolio and multi sector view."

Finance – A narrow, UK centric, finance house. Gary described the culture as one based on huge expectations, where there was "no applause for emerging with market share figures."

Current employee in a software powerhouse, where Gary is in his second year in a global role and with a very product feature centric approach to generating revenue 'driven by which features in which timeframe to move the revenue needle.' The business has evolved from being the disruptive innovator to now facing competition from a number of companies up and down the value chain.

Table 1: Sectors Travelled

WHAT CAME FIRST, THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG?

Gary's first lesson focused on what was the best value mix of the MI/CI practitioner: Is it more about a tool kit, process, logic, and analysis brought to relevant business problems or was it more to do with the credibility sourced through your contacts, your knowledge and industry experience? Group discussion followed to conclude that a mix is the optimal, but the interview and briefing process can be used to sell the value of leveraging the tool kit, the processes, logic, and analysis to create and provide new and informed perspectives.

LESSON #1 SMASH THE PREP WORK

Gary's first lesson from transitioning sectors was that the first meeting or stages in the interview needed to demonstrate "you had smashed the preparation work." Your first impression needs to reflect that you are indeed bringing an asset to the table, the way you think, your processes, your logic, and analytical mindset, to simply bring new insights to bear relating to the business problem at hand. Gary reinforced the idea that this is your prime selling opportunity to overcome the lack of industry expertise or experience if new to the sector.

LESSON #2 LISTEN

A natural behaviour for some individuals, when lacking knowledge or experience, is to maintain a healthy level of questioning to appear relevant in the eyes of others. Gary's suggestion was to "ask the silly questions but get them out of the way early on." On reflection, it's not the questions that expose that you have not smashed your preparation work. Attendee discussion then moved towards exploring how others get behind the meaning of business questions, whether this was through asking 'why' or more broadly exploring where the stakeholders are trying to get to and why this is the case. It was concluded that whether practitioners use forms to assist the stakeholder in articulating their need or whether it was achieved through structured conversations, what is clear is that context behind the question is imperative. Every effort needs to be undertaken to establish this.

LESSON #3 MOVE WITH THE RHYTHM OF THE BUSINESS

One message from the audience that evolved from the discussion was to plan in line with the "rhythm of the business," thinking ahead to what the business needs are, when, and using this to set expectations. By referring to when the key decision forums take place and what issues are discussed, this should provide a good steer with regards to delivering

relevant value add analysis and recommendations to the drivers of that business' industry. In Gary's word, "you should not be surprised by something that you can expect." It is important to have a plan, place the dates on the calendar around the rhythm of the business, ensuring there is enough time to be proactive and sell the mandate that you have crafted for yourself.

LESSON #4 TELL A STORY

"People do not remember facts, but stories; we must use stories more to communicate" was the conclusion taken away. Other factors emerged such as landing a simple active message and then backing it up with a chain of analysis that supports the active message that has been made. Communication technique is one of the most overlooked areas of the MI analyst's role. Given the chase of the collection and the thrill of the analysis, be that to establish the existing situation and offer an impact assessment relative to where the issue in hand could go. Clearly knowing the audience is important to Gary, recommending that the draft should be discussed with the stakeholder prior to its broader audience dissemination.

#Toolkit – Save the more impactful analysis formats as templates you create by removing the detail while maintaining the structure. This saves an inordinate amount of time when called upon again.

#TheMistake – It is OK to reach the wrong interpretation but not the math. Practitioners are encouraged to obtain a peer review, or for those lone wolves out there, an understanding peer.

#Visualisation – Visual analysis is everywhere, so long as it simplifies the message and adds value to the data. There are a range of visualisation frameworks out there ranging from marimekkos through Harvey balls.

Table 2: Other Lessons Learnt

SO WHAT NEXT FOR THE AUDIENCE?

Attendees left this networking meeting with a fresh perspective on how they could improve the value of their CI/MI in their business. Audience take-aways included:

New perspectives and debate around the outcomes drawn and reached

Visualisation and use of marimekko charts

Very difficult to argue with fact as well as the voice of the customer

Recognizing limitations - take the best person to that complex meeting

Getting data and interpretation out to others. Discuss, whether you are in agreement or not, discuss to get consensus

There is never an easy way out. It's OK to not know or understand in the beginning, but you need to get out of the hole fast

Two good questions to understand stakeholders views and what to do in the first ninety days



NETWORKING EVENT SERIES

The SCIP UK Chapter hosts a series of networking events throughout the year. These events bring together practitioners from all corners of the discipline: service providers, consultants, academics and practitioners to address topics as identified from the events' feedback forms.

The series aims to increase the understanding and awareness of desired themes among SCIP members and non-members as well as take the discipline to different business practices through co-hosting opportunities with other professional organisations and membership bodies. It is about creating an environment to discover, enhance, exchange and problem solve. To understand the previous networking events' discussion themes, go to the SCIP UK chapter page for a complete running order as well as the link for the SCIP Competitive Intelligence magazine article, helping to form SCIP's Body of Knowledge.

The SCIP UK Chapter is grateful to all speakers, passionate characters like Gary, without whom there would be neither a networking event nor the creation of a rich exchange of ideas and learnings. The opportunity to speak at these networking events is open to anyone, United Kingdom-based or just passing through, subject to meeting the growing list of event topics. Engagement with attendees is around five themes, centred on case studies: innovative integration of CI within the business, professional growth in CI, analysis in action, managing information overload and communicating with impact.

We encourage others to come forward to introduce the group to new perspectives, experiences and learning. What links all the prospective speakers and panellists, irrespective of their background or role within the competitive intelligence profession, is a passion for the discipline. Along with all the volunteer speakers to date and those that have yet to take advantage of the opportunity, they are all unique examples of characters continuing to fix the discipline more firmly on the map! What is the next step? Register your interest and details with Michelle Winter mwinter@scip.org to explore speaking opportunities and/or to be proactively kept abreast of forthcoming events in the UK.

Andrew Beurschgens is the Head of Market Intelligence at the UK mobile network operator, EE, the JV between Orange and T-Mobile. In cooperation with other volunteers from both the practitioner and supply side of the competitive intelligence discipline, Andrew is acting Volunteer of the UK Chapter. He is a Catalyst Award winner, individually recognised for his volunteer services to the profession and its members, and has served on the SCIP Board and now volunteers for the SCIP Global Advisory Board, focusing on the European region.