



Global Intelligence Alliance

INTELLIGENCE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

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1. Executive Summary

Intelligence activities are rather complex and abstract by nature, which is why the output of an intelligence operation should be built into “intelligence products”; an area still rather unknown in research literature. The idea is to clarify what the intelligence process produces and how this happens. The production processes of intelligence output should be defined as sub-processes under the entire intelligence system.

This White Paper presents one way of doing that and briefly explains some of the dimensions that intelligence products have. The paper also presents one way of categorizing intelligence products, and provides simplified ideas of how companies could approach the idea of business information product development.

2. An Intelligence Product – the Definition

An Intelligence product can be seen as the outcome of a Business / Market Intelligence process. According to Herring (1988, 5), an intelligence product is difficult to define because it actually is both a product and a process. The product is the actual information outcome of the process. The process, on the other hand, is a systematic way of producing this outcome.

For an intelligence customer (the user at the receiving end), an intelligence product is the outcome of the process. From a product development perspective, however, both the intelligence outcome and its production process can be standardized, keeping in mind the requirements that the intelligence content customers in terms of flexibility.

Business / Market Intelligence as a whole is a continuous process of producing actionable information for decision making. The cyclical process covers the phases of

- analyzing information needs,
- gathering,
- analysis, and
- dissemination of the information,
- and finally utilising it.

The objective of an intelligence process is not only to provide generic information or intelligence, but also customized solutions or customized intelligence products. This gives the management better possibilities to actually utilize the outcome in decision making (Pollard 1999, 16). The outcome should be in an actionable format, i.e. developed into a product that responds to the information needs. At its best, the information product defines the implications and actions that need to be taken based on the provided information or intelligence (Pollard 1999, 181-182).

When an organization has adopted an intelligence process and when the process has established a stable position in the organization, the entire intelligence process can be seen as a product. This means that people know and share a common view of how information should be handled, maintained and managed. In this situation, Business / Market Intelligence is a way of doing things, a set of defined modes of action, clearly a process.

The process is often described as an intelligence

cycle where the above-mentioned phases follow each other. The intelligence cycle is a good way to explain the concept of an individual product. An intelligence product can be seen as a small fibre in the general intelligence cycle, consisting of all phases in the cycle. Therefore, an intelligence product can be treated as a sub-process within the entire intelligence process.

In this paper, an intelligence product is defined as an outcome of a systematic intelligence process, where the customers, resources, information content, format, media and time-span are defined. The definition process emphasises that an intelligence product is not a computer software product or a database even though a database can also be defined as an "intelligence product". An example would be a "Research and Analysis Library Database" with a defined owner, process and content. However, technology is only a helpful tool for producing or disseminating intelligence products, but the underlying process is key, without which the tools are useless.

An intelligence operation can not be fully built into products. Every organization and company have their own intelligence needs and specific business environments, both of which change increasingly rapidly. The objective is to only standardize the core service content and the production methods, maintaining the ability to respond to the continuous customer changes.

According to Wang & Lee (1998, 95), there are four principles that should be taken into account when information is considered as a product. The principles are:

- Understand the information needs of its end user
- Consider information as an outcome of a well specified production process
- Consider information as a product with a life-cycle
- Appoint an information product manager

In this information product approach the key idea is that understanding the issue is not enough; Members of the organization will have to create a new, systematic way of thinking when producing the information outcome.

3. Dimensions of Intelligence Products

Intelligence products are complex and multidimensional by nature. In this White Paper, the dimensions covered are information content, time horizon, degree of analysis and frequency.

The dimension of information content refers to the focus of the product in question, i.e. whether it focuses on competitors, customers, market developments, or on trends. Time horizon, on the other hand, refers to the horizon of decision making and could vary from a news service providing information on past activities to a strategic analysis highlighting expected trends within the next 10 years. The degree of analysis in turn refers to the value-added features of the information content. Finally, the frequency refers to the life-cycle of the product, i.e. how often it needs to be updated.

High degree of analysis is one of the most important objectives in any intelligence process. Unless the data is analyzed and conclusions can be drawn, there is no information (Calof 1997). We could further argue that it is definitely not intelligence from the standpoint of a decision-maker. Often the amount of data in the organization is sufficient, but it is almost impossible to find and use one particular piece of data in the right place at the right time. This is why the data has to be analyzed and integrated; there has to be ways to see what one piece of data means in the bigger context; The opportunity to draw conclusions and make recommendations based on these conclusions is critical. This helps the organization move from reactive to proactive decision making.

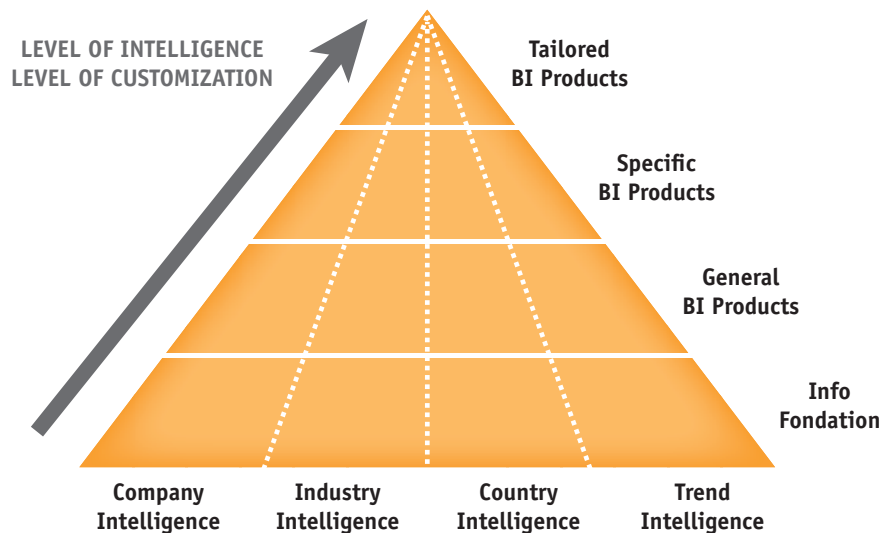
According to Pollard (1999, 161) there are five categories of information products:

- Specific items of raw data
- Information collations
- Competitor and customer profiles
- Benchmarks
- Competitor analysis.

These categories quite well capture the above mentioned dimensions. Specific items of raw data are unanalyzed facts or, for example, news in a database. These kinds of intelligence products often support operative decision making. The frequency of intelligence product updates with low degree of analysis is usually high. An example is a news service being updated even several times a day. The time horizon of a news service is typically short: The information concentrates on issues happened yesterday or today.

The dimensions vary depending on the users and usage purposes of the intelligence product. Generally, it can be argued that the most analyzed or customized products are targeted at managerial use at different organizational levels. These kinds of products could include, for example, a monthly industry report that presents the most important issues and themes briefly and clearly in an integrated format. The below graph clarifies the relationship between highly analyzed products and information content dimension. In the figure, the information content dimensions are companies, industries, countries and trends. For example, a highly customized product can exist that only concentrates on companies or even on a specific market player.

Figure 1. BI Product Pyramid



A very important issue is also the media of an intelligence product. The media refers to the tool(s) of communication. Usually the intelligence products with high degree of analysis are at least partly disseminated using oral presentations as the main medium. The products with less analysis, on the

other hand, are usually disseminated via intranet, e-mail or other "mass-media". The content and use purpose of the product are crucial when deciding on the media. In addition to the medium, it is important to decide on the format of communicating the intelligence.

4. Examples of Intelligence Product Groups

Almost any standardized format of business information can be considered as an intelligence product. A business news service, internal expert database, competitor profile, or even an improvised presentation to management can typically be described as an intelligence product, if it has been defined and it is based on systematic structures. The objective of this chapter is to provide one way of categorizing intelligence products based on similarities found in their content format or production methods.

The broadest categorization can be made on the basis of the nature of the product itself. First, the product can be a supporting service product, i.e. an intelligence software tool. Intelligence tools support the production of other intelligence products and

the intelligence process as a whole. An example can be an expert database.

Another example of a supporting service is an info source directory consisting of meta-information about sources, prices and offerings, for example. Also a news product can be understood as a supporting product, when it functions as an information source for other intelligence products. On the other hand, a news package can be a product itself, especially if the news production process includes news time-line analysis.

The eventual intelligence content products can be categorized according to the degree of analysis involved as presented in figure 2.

Figure 2. Examples of BI Product Groups



The first group contains products that provide raw data or pieces of information without analysis. Again, we can refer to a News service product delivered by an external content provider. The offering could include unprocessed news data regarding competitors, customers or, for example, suppliers. As well, Internal signals type of products aiming at collecting human intelligence can be discussed in this context.

When the gathered pieces of information remain unprocessed they can be regarded as collection-oriented intelligence products. However, when the gathered pieces of information are then analyzed and verified, they can be called analysis-oriented intelligence products. In the signals analysis process, certain information is typically found repeatedly, which makes the signal stronger, one that requires further analysis and possible actions.

The Key Figures product group contains products that focus on gathering numerical data with high updating frequency. Examples include macro-economic figures from the main market areas or countries. Also, raw material price level follow-up, competitor stock price monitor, industry capacity or delivery follow-up could be described as Key Figures products.

The Info Collations group contains products, the information content of which is gathered from different sources, but is unanalyzed. An example here can be an information pack, which is produced

by collecting pieces of information from different sources to form a package of information on a specific topic.

The difference between the earlier mentioned product group and the Profiles product group is that Profiles are integrated from different sources and have a well-structured format in the form of a fact-sheet. Most typically Profiles focus on companies and sometimes on countries. Having a standardized format of these Profiles makes it possible to do benchmarks between the specific companies or countries.

Different Reviews and Reports include processed and analyzed content regarding an industry player, customer industry, a strategic theme or some other specific intelligence need. The level of customized analysis typically depends on whether the output has been purchased from external vendors, or if it has been interpreted from the point of view of the company.

The Briefings product group supports timely decision-making and provides highly analyzed information in a short and concise format with an immediate opportunity for discussion and feedback. An extended version of Briefings are Forum products that involve interaction between the information provider and the receiver. The product can be a company-wide discussion forum in the web, a war game simulation or, for example, a scenario workshop.

Sources

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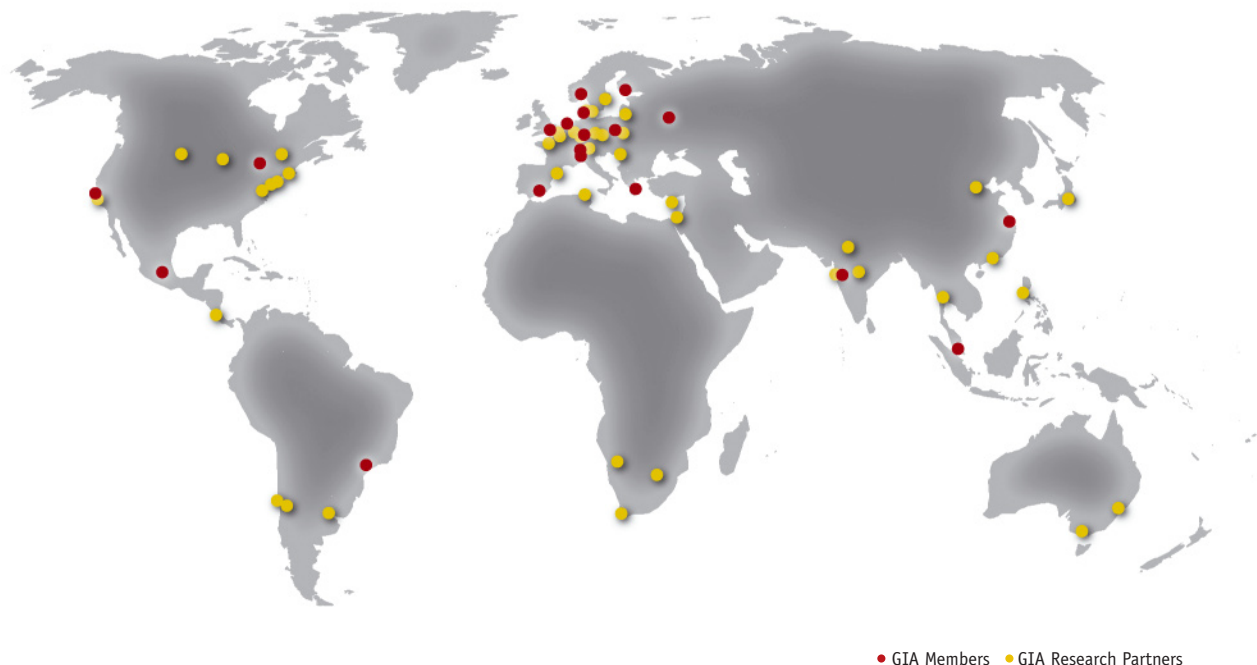
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