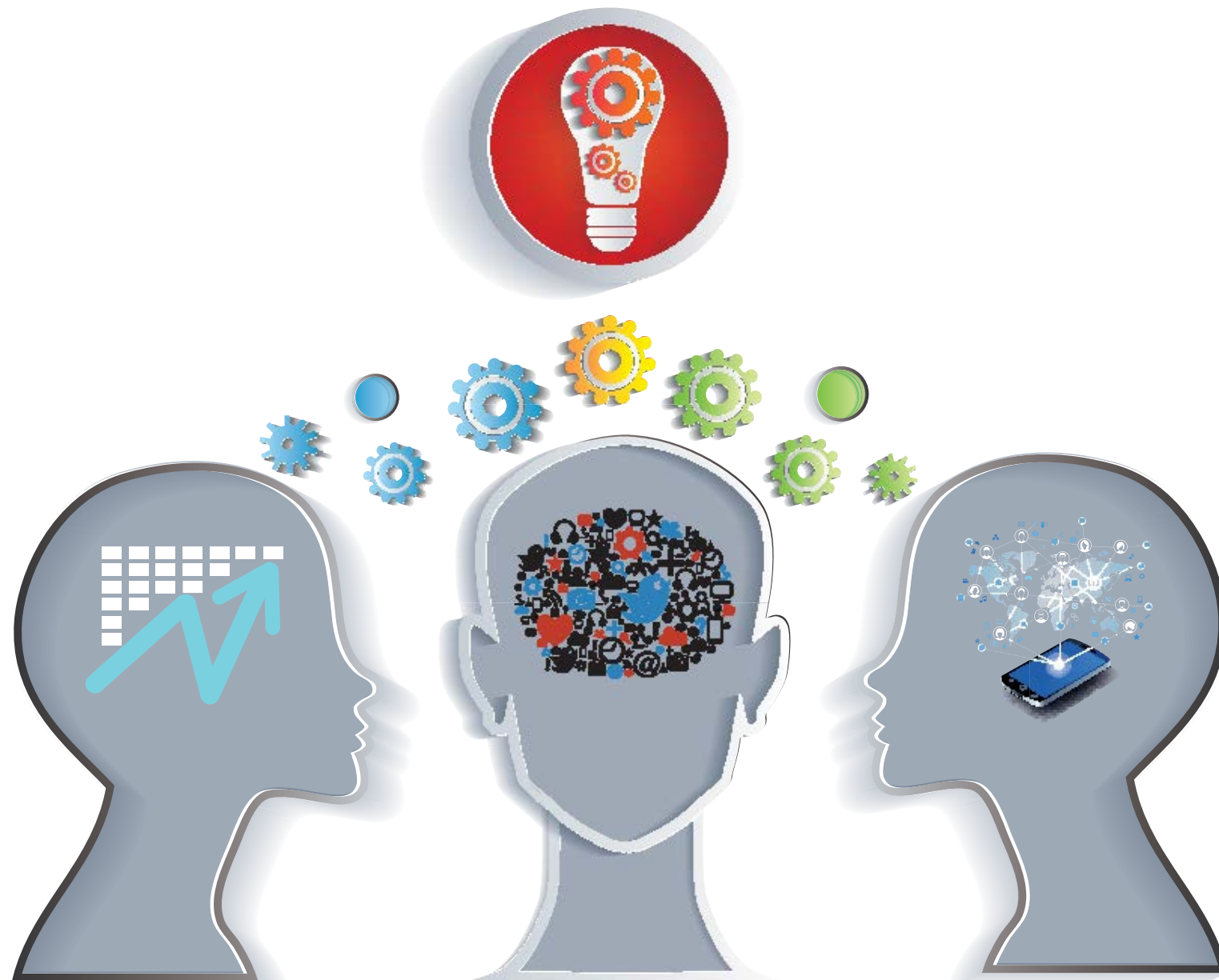# Web Intelligence? Social Media Intelligence? Mobile Intelligence?

Use 'em All!

By Amir Fleischman

How efficient are you when looking for information about your targets on the Internet? Do you implement any particular structured search methodology or use tools other than running a basic Google search? Are social media networks and mobile applications part of your CI research plan? There are plenty of free efficient tools for your day to day CI work.

In today's world a competitive intelligence (CI) practitioner cannot gather significant business information about targets without checking on them on the Internet. A classic target would be a competitor, but a target could also be a potential or existing customer, a supplier, distributor, or even a worker. A target does not necessarily have to be a human. It could be a company, a (competitor's) product, or something that is more abstract such as a patent or a document – presentation, price offer, someone's resume, etc.

The ultimate question is how you will get the needed information - to be later analyzed - and then come up with the right insights about that target. Most of the crucial information will not be found on a , but if it does exist there, then it is somehow hidden. It is a clever CI practitioner's task to find it in the most quick and efficient way, without spending too many resources like working time, money, energy, and manpower.

Where can the information be found? I usually use an 8-level model to get it directly or indirectly:

8-level Search Model

Sectorial Organizations are a good starting point to look for market segment statistics and target existence. In the Events level, we will check on our targets' physical appearances – tradeshows, conferences etc.- whereas the Group level – forums, communities, and other virtual meeting points – will generate plenty of threads and posts coming from people who know or work with the targets. Databases are great digital resources for CI practitioners. Type into your search engine words like database, directory, list, or index to reach structured info that has been pre-gathered and placed in order in one centralized place. The Writing level always reveals new information sources like magazines, articles, blogs, and newsletters. By looking for professionals and specialists in the Experts level, you will get to know the ones who probably know your targets better than you.

Typing into Google business-related words like "contract" or "price offer" would usually get us templates or even real authentic documents belonging to your targets. Don't forget to use synonyms! The Internet provides different results when looking for clients and/or customers, suppliers and/or vendors, tenders and/or bids, etc. The last level, Players, constitutes your targets themselves. Try using their names with each and every level to map their online appearances – the organizations they are members of, the forums they moderate, the databases they are listed in, etc.

Vertical Search Engines

When looking for specific information about your targets on the web, you don't want to search Google alone. There are numerous vertical search engines that have been built to collect and show results that Google will never be able to find (at least not on its top pages). Vertical search engines index very specific information, not general data like Google, so if you are interested in financial information you should use Google Finance (google.com/fiance) rather than google.com. If you are interested in Excel or PDF files related to your targets, then you might want to look for them in Zanran (zanran.com), an engine built to search the web for data and statistics. How about patents? Google Patent Search provides informative details about patents and patent applications – abstracts, sketches, inventor names, and more. Interested in search engines that are built to retrieve information from the social media arena? Try

socialmention.com, social-serchear.com, and Google Social Search.

As for public records of people and companies, there are vertical search engines that have access to public records like instantcheckmate.com and others who know how to search for people in the deep web (pipl.com), their salaries (glassdoor.com), and their Internet-connected devices (shodan.io). The largest open database of companies in the world is called Opencorporates (opencorporates.com), which is a free aggregator of corporate registry information.

You should realize there are plenty of powerful vertical search engines to get any sort of desired info. Some of them cost money, most of them are free. You just need to know they exist. Using them in parallel to general search engines like Google, Bing and, Yahoo will get you safely to shore quickly and easily.

Search Operators and Social Media

If, as a CI practitioner, you are also an information specialist, then you should know by now that the Internet has a secretive language known only to a few people. The syntax is usually not known to those who are engaged with business and marketing oriented-functions but to those who are mostly employed in back office positions. Boolean operators and others enable search engines get the most accurate results in terms of search queries. The most popular operator used by CI practitioners is probably Filetype, which traces various documents concerning our targets (PDFs, PPTs, XLs etc). Those of you who are more advanced in that field surely know that since social media platforms have turned up in our digital life, operators like # or @ have become pretty handy when it comes to reaching posts or tweets belonging to your targets on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Google+. Those of you who use LinkedIn routinely, should know that some of the operators brilliantly work in this platform, and as of mid-2017, you can run a LinkedIn search that looks like this: — title:"software engineer" NOT lastname:doe school(Harvard OR Stanford)

Visual Info and Social Media

There is a well known phrase in marketing that claims a picture is worth a thousand words; Same thing with intelligence. We live in an era that is often nicknamed as 'The selfie era' — all of us, including our targets, constantly get photographed, and these photos are often uploaded to the net. It makes the task of tracing us quite an easy one, not to mention reliable and authentic. Billions of images, graphs, pictures, and other formats of visualized significant info is there to grab, the sooner the better. When you go visual you reach thicker layers of intuitive information that is less likely to be found in boring tiring texts. While Google Images or Bing Images are mandatory tools to capture competitor products, employees, offices, etc., there are tools to perform visualized searches to a larger extent. TinEye (tineye.com), for example, is a reverse image search tool that has indexed throughout the years more images than Google. Some say that Pinterest, one of the fastest growing social media networks in recent years, does to images what Google does to search. It has already indexed over 50 billion images and counting. To get further accurate results you can — and should — look for images using filters like color, type, size, and year. One of the latest 2017 developments in Flickr is running a Similar Photos Search to get to know, for example, products that look like the ones of your competitor.

And if a picture is worth a thousand words, what would a video be worth? This level of information transforms feelings into insights. YouTube is a great platform to get visualized intelligence — competitor product displays, tutorials, webinars, keynote presentations, technical installations, and target interviews — it's all there. And let us not forget Vimeo (vimeo.com, a video-sharing website) and SlideShare (sldeishare.net, the largest presentation-sharing platform in the world). Do take advantage of your targets' wishes to promote their offerings at almost any cost, something that may cause them to reveal valuable information that should have never been uploaded and shared within online communities in the first place.

Social Media Intelligence (SOCMINT)

Any innovative CI practitioner refers to the social media arena as one of today's prime sources of target information. You should do the same and use social media networks as intelligence networks. As a rule, social media networks reveal the 'behind the scenes' information that is not indexed by search engines as often made to formal websites. Numerous valuable unstructured data may help us form an accurate profile of a potential threatening competitor on one hand, and preserve a key strategic customer who has a birthday today on the other hand. Furthermore, using sophisticated built-in search engines, like Facebook's Graph Search, will get you results Google can only dream of. Enter search queries to Facebook like: 'groups joined by <Target's name>', 'Photos liked by <Target's name>' ,or 'Places visited by <Target's name>, and from the gathered, analyzed info instantly build a genuine target profile, deduct qualitative conclusions and take winning business actions accordingly.

Not only that, but the social media world is also used by CI practitioners for generating customer intelligence — customers complaining about suppliers, stores, services, and products is sometimes the real authentic juicy stuff we look for to win competition. A smart CI practitioner could clearly spot competitor drawbacks by going through angry posts, tweets, and reviews of the latter's angry, frustrated customers.

Whenever it comes to SOCMINT, you should also follow your target followers. Who knows, they may eventually end up as your customers in near future. The social media is full of real names, real pictures, and what targets and followers are after. Take advantage of that and use it wisely.

Foreign Search Engines and Social Media Networks

Sometimes our targets are foreigners — they usually live and work outside your country, some of them may visit us a couple of times a year, but most of their lives are spent in faraway places with different language and different appearance on the Internet. Some of them may be blocking Google and/or Facebook. Take China for example — if you would like to explore business opportunities there, it would be more useful to find information about local targets using Baidu (baidu.com), which is one of the largest Internet companies in the world, rather than Google, which is blocked in China. Baidu has indexed more Chinese web pages than Google. Hence, Baidu is more comprehensive in terms of results about Chinese industries.

The equivalent local search engine to Baidu in Russia is called Yandex (yandex.com), with about 65% market share in that country. Again, more results to be found here on local companies and people than in Google.

And where will you find all the juicy stuff about Chinese targets in the social media arena? Guess what — Like Google, there is no Facebook in China as well. That is where local social media networks come in handy. As a rule, you should always look for a local social media network to go behind a target's scene. In China, it could be the WeChat application software, Weibo (weibo.com) or others; In Russian-speaking countries, it is usually either Odnoklassniki (ok.ru) or VKontakte (vk.com).

Alerting Tools

Focused CI practitioners do not waste precious search time. Instead of waiting for the info to get uploaded to the net and then dig for it, they use automatic 'agents'. Once the info is uploaded to the net, these agents generate alerts that are streamed into the CI practitioner's online storage places — either their mail accounts or elsewhere in the cloud. You may want to use Google alerts (google.com/alerts) to monitor whatever interests you on the net, but there are also other advanced alerting tools like Mention (mention.net), which is nicknamed as 'Google Alerts on steroids' or TalkWalker (talkwalker.com). These tools' main strength is social media monitoring and analytics.

Another agent is an online RSS reader that allows CI practitioners to access updates a target's online content. The most popular reader in use today is probably Feedly (feedly.com), but there are also other popular RSS readers like Digg Reader, NewsBlur, Inoreader, and The Old Reader.

Those of you who use LinkedIn extensively know that you can generate alerts on market segments, companies, employees and position without any difficulty. Thus you always know what happens to a certain target in terms of moving from one company to another, acquiring new skills, or getting a job promotion.

Browser Extensions / Plugins

Most of you use Google Chrome web browser as your one-stop-gateway to the Internet and are satisfied with its default settings. However, some of you might be interested in upgrading the browser's capabilities by downloading efficient plugins to ease your CI-related research. A plugin is a software component that adds a specific feature to the web browser, and some new plugins were recently added to Google Chrome in the last two years. Among them are these fives:

• Lead Intelligence by Lead411 – Search and find business prospects: finds emails by industry, titles, job openings and geography.

• Rapportive – Shows LinkedIn profiles in your Gmail account.

• Discoverly – Lookup contacts. Gmail, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn don't play well together, but Discoverly helps them "play nice".

• Shopify Inspector – Track your competition's most recent orders: uncover product details, apps and secrets on the stores you visit.

• Competitor Webpage Monitor – Track and monitor competitor websites automatically by setting up email alerts.

Do yourself a favor and keep on browsing for any relevant plugin you might want to use routinely and conveniently for your CI research from within the Google Chrome address bar.

Mobile Applications

We live in a mobile era, where mobile phones are not considered as luxurious devices anymore, but a true necessity to be used in our private and business lives. That is why almost all of us (not to mention our children) possess mobile phones, and nearly 60 percent of searches now come from mobile devices. As such, you should take advantage of the massive amount of free applications that exist on Google Play, the official app store for the Android operating system, or the App Store, for IOS devices, just waiting for CI practitioners to use them for their research on the go.

What's so nice about some of the CI-related applications is that they are programmed to utilize the smart phone advantages over desktops by activating the portable camera and GPS system.

Most vertical engines have representation on Google Play, and the same goes to visual search tools like Tineye, social media networks, alerting tools, and RSS readers.

It is worth mentioning applications like CamFind (camfindapp.com) that enables you to search the physical world by taking a picture and then run an online search on the Internet based on that picture – you can take pictures of your competitor products and then immediately look for online information about them right away. How lovely.

Applications ,which trace people, like your ex-followers on Twitter or Instagram, are easy to be found on Google Play – Followers+, Follower Analyzer and Follower Insights are just few of the main ones. The social media app All in One contains all popular social networking sites, including Russian-speaking VKontakte.

As for alerts, you can conveniently use voice alerting tools that are text-to-speech based and are plugged into your speakers at home or in your car. If you are within a business to consumer (B2C) industry you may want to use an application like Perch, where you can get a birds-eye view at reviews, social posts and promotions for your competition in one place.

Two relatively new business intelligence (BI) applications from March 2017 are Microsoft Power BI and nSights and are used to monitor and access your most important business data anywhere, anytime. Furthermore, you can easily view and interact with BI dashboards, share them with your colleagues, and discover insights in minutes.

In Conclusion

The 21st century CI practitioner should be a skilled and computer literate. Period. This is the age of big data, and an enormous stream of valuable data is up for grabs. The ones who do not know how and where to get it – and certainly not to analyze it – will lag behind and keep on using the same limited sources they used to rely on in the past (not to mention artificial intelligence, which is supposed to be the next big thing in the field of CI).

It is quite clear that obtaining the information is just the first step in your CI-related research, but yes, we would like to get it as authentically and efficiently as possible. There are so many great tools out there to make your life easier in terms of getting accurate data with minimal effort and resources: it would be a shame not to take advantage of them. Don't miss the opportunity to ameliorate your performance by putting the combined search methodologies and innovative tools into practice. If you fail to do so and bury your head in the sand (something a CI practitioner should never ever do), then you are nothing but an ostrich.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amir Fleischman, Founder and managing director of Cicom Global, is an international lecturer and trainer who delivers around 200 lectures, talks and workshops per year in the field of marketing and competitive intelligence. Connect with Amir at amir@cicomglobal.com

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