State of Competitive & Market Intelligence in 2023

INTRODUCTION

If you are a [competitive and market intelligence (CI/MI) professional,](#) stop, take a breath, close your eyes for a minute, and take a sip of whatever trusted beverage is by your side before continuing. Let's face it, your job is hard. Really hard.

Technology markets are more competitive and evolving more rapidly than ever before. At the same time, technology companies are resetting from the technology investment boom of the COVID-19 pandemic and establishing leaner operations to navigate potential recessionary conditions in 2023 and beyond. This creates a challenging dual mandate for CI/MI teams and professionals. You are increasingly being asked to do more — deliver more insights, with higher quality and faster — with less (e.g., budget, resources, time).

If that sounds like you, or even a colleague you know and depend on, there are probably hundreds of questions circulating in your head. How will we expand our deliverables? How will we ensure coverage with a team that is half the size? How will we perform CI/MI analysis when we do not even have any dedicated CI/MI resources? Did I forget to update that battle card? Did I forget to eat lunch today? Am I alone in feeling like this? What are others like me doing?

Since 1996, [TBR](#) has served as a competitive and market intelligence partner for hundreds of the B2B technology sector's largest and most established firms. TBR's relationships span Fortune 500 through Global 2000 enterprises across the IT professional services, management consulting, data center hardware, PC and mobile devices, software, cloud and telecommunications sectors.

For nearly three decades, we have served tens of thousands of users across those organizations with subscription and tailored research. Our research and analyst expertise helps those users to better understand the competitive, partner and larger technology market ecosystems in which they play. We go deep on topics such as financial performance; overall business strategy; go-to-market, alliance and acquisition strategies; and pricing, portfolio and resource management strategies.

In our capacity as advisers to these organizations, we have had the opportunity to work intimately with their CI/MI teams. We often serve as a direct extension of these teams and are responsible for many of their stakeholder deliverables.

This close working relationship, compounded over years, has helped us to cultivate a deep understanding of world-class CI/MI teams. We have seen how they work, how they are structured, who they serve, what they serve them with, and how they adapt to change.

In this report, we endeavor to mine those experiences to share some trends and best practices we are seeing across our client base. It is our hope that we can help CI/MI professionals like you [navigate this year,](#) optimize your role and your team for success, and provide clear answers to the questions that are keeping you up at night.

INSIDE THIS REPORT

We compiled this report by surveying our TBR client service teams in February 2023 to better understand what is going on within the CI/MI organizations they serve. We captured data inputs on approximately 50 large global technology firms, collectively representing billions of dollars in annual revenue and millions of total employees. Specific topics we analyzed included:

- *CI/MI function reporting structure*
- *CI/MI function size (headcount)*
- *Current headcount and anticipated changes for 2023*
- *Alignment of CI/MI team members (e.g., functional, vertical, geographic)*
- *Third-party vendors used*
- *Changes in third-party vendor usage for 2023*
- *Tools used*
- *Key CI/MI deliverables*
- *Changes in overall demand for CI/MI*

In this report, we provide our analysis of the above topics and the overall trends we see in technology vendor CI/MI functions for 2023. We also compare the findings longitudinally to a previous version of this study that was conducted in mid-2019.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is one megatrend that we observed in our study that stands above the rest — change. Change comes in many forms. At the highest level, changes within the markets companies play in place new burdens on the type and volume of intelligence. Teams, budgets and organizational structures change constantly. Change can also be its own challenge; markets and teams change, but the need for CI/MI and the deliverables that CI/MI professionals create does not change.

Change typically requires the most precious resource CI/MI professionals have — time. Time is under constant pressure, as CI/MI professionals are asked to do more with less. In many recent cases, this even means doing CI/MI without the benefit of a shared and centralized budget, resources and leadership structure. As changes continue to disrupt the profession, CI/MI teams and professionals will increasingly look outside for help. They will seek out technologies, third-party analyst and research firms, and other tools that can help them automate and optimize CI/MI and free up available time for the most high-value, impactful projects.

Within that megatrend of change, there are 10 subtrends that stood out to us as most important after reviewing our internal data on client CI/MI teams. We summarize each below, and explore all of these topics and more in the rest of this report:

1. Ecosystems of Competition

Demand for CI/MI continues to grow because markets are becoming more competitive. They are not just crowding with small, ankle biter competitors, either. Markets are converging and overlapping, and major established technology vendors are encroaching on each other's territory. This creates an ecosystem dynamic in CI/MI for technology firms, in which vendors need to not only track their usual suspects but also assess how the broader ecosystem is forming in the area(s) they play in.

2. More for Less

This is the one that most CI/MI professionals have figuratively, if not literally, tattooed on themselves. CI/MI teams are always being asked to provide more resources, answers, assets and support with less time, lower budgets and fewer people. CI/MI professionals must ruthlessly prioritize projects to focus on the greatest areas of impact, lean heavily on third parties for support, and find new ways to activate competitive and market intelligence via self-service, often enabled by technology. In many cases, CI/MI is becoming the full or partial responsibility of business units or other resources such as product managers, marketers, strategy leaders, and sales enablement, strategy and operations teams.
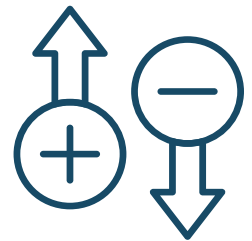
3. Staying the Course

Most CI/MI teams are staying the course for 2023 in terms of their team size, structure and deliverables, despite tech sector and macroeconomic headwinds. If anything, as we said above, they are being asked to do more with the same — or fewer — resources. For many, CI/MI has become an established mechanism that supports deal pursuits and the development of products and services. Making major functional or strategic changes to CI/MI would require eliminating the systems that have been developed to support deal win rates and the other primary KPIs that are attributable to CI/MI outcomes.

4. Core Deliverables Matter

We have not seen much change in how competitive intelligence is being translated into core deliverables. Competitive battlecards, profiles, benchmarks and newsletters remain common tools to deliver intelligence. Where dividing lines exist is around CI/MI maturity. We find that many less mature organizations are more reactive, request-driven and ad hoc in their approach to deliverables, whereas established programs at larger companies have created embedded programmatic CI/MI deliverables.
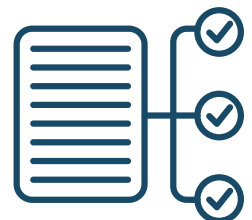
5. Live Where Stakeholders Live

Just as core deliverables have not changed much for CI/MI leaders, neither have the methods by which stakeholders seek to consume intelligence. This is suggested by the deliverables themselves. Email remains the most popular way to get competitive updates, and newsletters continue to be a popular deliverable for CI/MI teams. The big lesson for CI/MI teams is to take a stakeholder-led approach. Understand what they want and where they want it, and create resources that support their needs.

6. Specialization Everywhere

We believe specialization is going to define the future of CI/MI for practitioners at technology companies and the research firms, agencies, and other types of service providers that support them. In this research, we found no material changes in how companies are using third-party research vendors. CI/MI programs still rely heavily on analysts and other providers to augment their internal staff. However, sophisticated programs increasingly demand specialization around the market areas, customer segments, topics and/or services they care most about. As technology tools elevate the baseline of CI/MI, those organizations and providers that can provide specialization via access to nonpublic, direct-from-market data and insights will stand to win.

7. Small Teams

Even at the largest global technology organizations, CI/MI teams typically have fewer than 10 FTEs, and often fewer than five. In our surveys, we did not see any indications that companies plan to substantively grow or shrink their teams in 2023. This is why establishing specialized partnerships with research providers and analyst firms is so important; they are a lifeline for time-and-resource-strapped internal teams. This trend also underpins the importance of building a culture of self-service and all-hands-on-deck CI/MI.

8. Empowering Self-service

Self-service is the foundation of all small CI/MI programs and increasingly a priority for larger teams at bigger vendors. Through CI platforms like Crayon and Klue, solo CI/MI professionals can establish a baseline program and deliverable assets and activate through self-service, freeing up their time to respond to ad hoc field requests versus build standard deliverables. At larger organizations, the trend is to move in a similar direction where possible. A key challenge we have heard from CI/MI teams is how to design (and reinforce) systems to make sure that stakeholders know exactly where and how to collect the self-service resources they require.
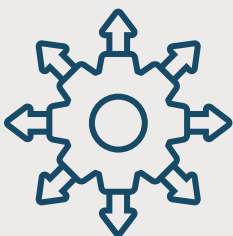
9. Manage Centrally; Empower Everyone

The best CI/MI programs at organizations of all sizes focus on building a CI/MI sharing culture. Having the full support of an organization collecting and disseminating intelligence and insights can greatly amplify the resources of the core team. We have seen great examples of how companies are using Slack, lunch-and-learn meetings, and other similar vehicles to promote CI/MI wins outside of the centralized CI/MI organization. There is a catch, however: This type of strategy does not eliminate the need for a centralized and dedicated CI/MI team. A central team is necessary to quarterback the process, provide a baseline program of assets and resources, and be available for ad hoc requests and questions.

10. Technology Enables but Does Not Replace

The emergence of CI platforms is probably the biggest technology disruption in CI/MI, but there are others on the horizon. Just as tools are being built for marketers that leverage OpenAI's ChatGPT and other functionalities, a new crop of AI tools will emerge for CI/MI use cases. For example, in 2022 a new startup named 1up emerged, billing itself as "the competitive AI." Others will follow suit. While these types of tools will automate how publicly available intelligence can be gathered and distributed, they are unlikely to replace intelligence methods such as win/loss interviews or unseat industry and/or sector specialized analysts with nonpublic data and insights. These tools promise to enable CI/MI through efficiencies but will not replace CI/MI roles and services providers. Rather, they will create more demand for unique, differentiated and specialized intelligence.
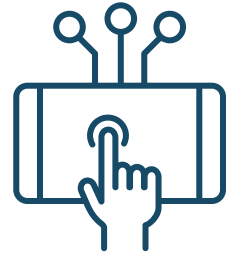
ORGANIZATIONAL DEMAND FOR CI/MI

Across TBR's client base, we see three primary megatrends that are driving a pervasive need for more competitive and market intelligence: converging markets, expanding peer landscapes, and information democratization.

Converging Markets

Nearly all of TBR's clients are going through product and/or service line disruptions. Vendors are entering and exiting businesses via M&A or major investment initiatives. This requires pivots within CI/MI teams to add these new areas to their coverage.

One example of this dynamic is occurring in the data center infrastructure landscape. Leading storage and compute hardware and software vendors are increasingly pivoting from capex-based hardware sales models to an "as a Service" model for hardware. This puts these vendors increasingly in direct competition with public cloud vendors such as Amazon Web Services, Google Cloud and Microsoft Azure. The sales and marketing teams at these vendors are now selling against not only their hardware counterparts but also the cloud vendors. This requires more from CI/MI: battle cards, deep dives, messaging points-of-view, competitive champions and other resources to help effectively sell against the cloud players.

Expanding Peer Landscapes

Across technology markets, another trend that is driving greater organizational demand for CI/MI is the need to cover a broader landscape of competitors. This is reflected in research from our peers as well. Competitive intelligence platform vendor Crayon's 2022 State of Competitive Intelligence Report indicated that 59% of CI practitioners believe their market had become more competitive. This figure was up 16% from when the same survey was conducted in 2020.

Technology sectors and subsectors are commoditizing and globalizing, and the barriers to market entry are getting smaller, particularly in software and services. Perhaps the best overall example of this is the marketing technology software landscape, which, according to chiefmartec's Scott Brinker, consists of just under 10,000 companies.

That is not an outlier; TBR has received a high volume of requests from clients seeking help covering small and midsize competitors that are disrupting aspects of their business. Covering these types of competitors often presents unique resourcing challenges as they specialize in particular sectors, are often privately held (meaning less data and insights are available), and are requested by stakeholders with very specific needs.

Information Democratization

The CI/MI process, in its most distilled form, involves collection (e.g., research gathering, assessing outliers, confirming details, collating); analysis (translating the information and data into the "so what"); and activation (getting the insights to the right people to act upon them, in the right way, at the right time). For CI/MI teams and the vendors that support them, that process is in constant flux due to changes in technology, processes and other resources.

The biggest disruptor here, based on what we hear from our clients, is technology. We are living it ourselves with the development and launch of our own data and insights activation platform, the TBR Insight Center. New technologies are emerging across all elements of the CI/MI process that are changing how research is collected and how deliverables are composed and disseminated (more on those in the sections that follow). But the result is a version of Jevons paradox: When it gets easier to collect and deliver what is available, demand increases for deeper, richer insights. If it is easier to stay on top of competitive news announcements, your stakeholders then start demanding deep dives on nonpublic competitor data such as pricing and sales incentives.

STRUCTURE AND SIZE OF CI/MI FUNCTIONS

Dedicated versus Shared CI/MI

Of the organizations we evaluated, nearly 70% have a dedicated, branded competitive and/or market intelligence function with formal leadership. For the rest, CI/MI responsibilities are usually embedded within a corporate strategy or analyst relations team. There are a handful of exceptions. In these instances, CI/MI is a distributed function within business unit strategy.

Our sample admittedly skews toward large, established, publicly traded technology and professional services firms. For smaller organizations, CI/MI is often a shared responsibility of the product marketing team. This is particularly true in B2B SaaS; CI/MI is often a partial role for a product marketing manager (PMM), automated via CI platform technology, and designed for self-service access. With growth, a solo CI/MI leader is hired, and/or the PMM team starts to specialize, including in CI/MI.

We have heard some instances within our client base of changes to CI/MI operating models. Some are moving away from dedicated teams to embedded teams within business units. Overall, however, the trend and trajectory are clear — if you are a large global technology company, you generally will have a dedicated CI/MI function with clear accountabilities and KPIs.
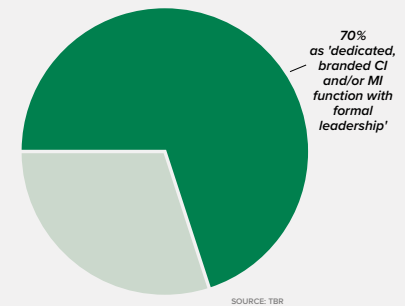
For those organizations that are transitioning away from centralized CI/MI functions and moving responsibilities into business units, we believe this will increase the reliance on third-party research and other services vendors. Team members with CI/MI responsibility in business units are typically time and resource strapped and have "day jobs" in addition to their CI/MI remit. Third-party vendors are a critical outsourcing option for these team members, particularly as they aim to optimize for efficiency (and reduce the burden on their shoulders) by building a set of self-service CI/MI resources.
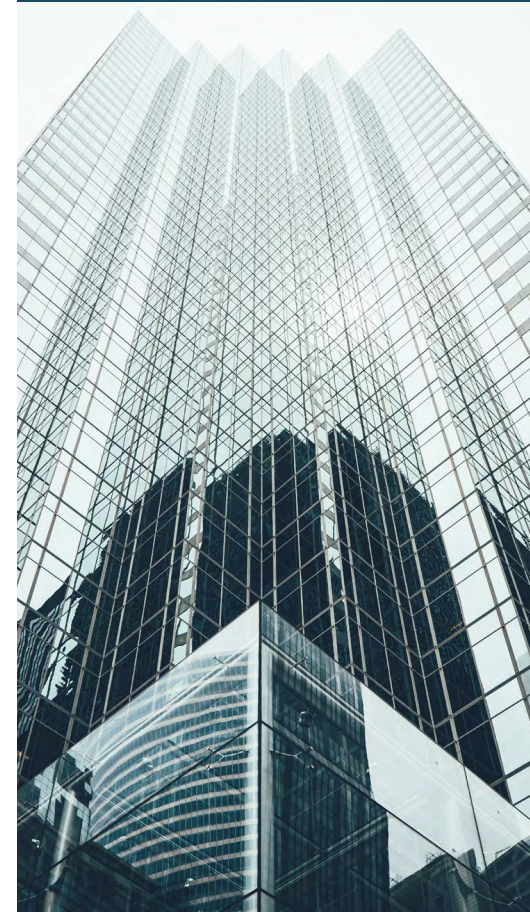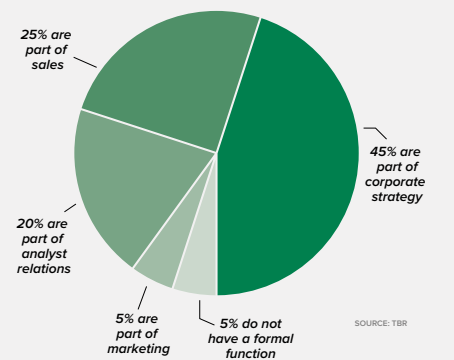
Shadow CI/MI

One trend that exists in both centralized and distributed CI/MI organizations is shadow CI/MI. In nearly all the organizations we surveyed, there is a formal CI/MI organization but also other groups throughout the company that perform CI/MI work. The extent and scope of these activities are hard to reliably benchmark because they are conducted outside the purview of formal CI/MI teams.

In our experience as a vendor, we most often see shadow CI/MI occur in two forms. The first is when individual prosumers in a given function or business unit subscribe to a recurring third-party resource (analyst firm, data provider, platform or other tool) that serves a highly specific use case for their individual role. That person is the go-to person for intelligence within their business unit and often is the connection point to the CI/MI team. The second instance where we see shadow CI/MI is with strategic one-off projects. At large, complex, matrixed organizations, teams frequently need strategic projects executed to support product or service launches or inform other deliverables. These teams often engage with research providers through word of mouth or website searches, not knowing there is a central CI/MI team to lean on to source these requests. Often we find in these instances that CI/MI teams are brought in to help manage the successful execution and activation of these projects.

Dedicated vs. Shared CI/MI

70% as 'dedicated, branded CI and/or MI function with formal leadership'

SOURCE: TBR

CI/MI Reporting Alignment

25% are part of sales

20% are part of analyst relations

5% are part of marketing

5% do not have a formal function

45% are part of corporate strategy

SOURCE: TBR

CI/MI Reporting Alignment

For the organizations we analyzed:

- 45% are part of corporate strategy
- 25% are part of sales
- 20% are part of analyst relations
- 5% are part of marketing
- 5% do not have a formal function

It should be noted that the above can be further aggregated. For example, in many organizations, analyst relations teams would report into a global corporate marketing function and thus, by extension, also be part of corporate marketing.

This reporting structure data reflects a unique difference between large global technology organizations and smaller technology firms in SaaS and other sectors. Large firms generally have established strategy organizations that are specialized in multiple areas, including CI/MI. In smaller organizations, CI/MI is often a shared function across one or more marketing team members. In these organizations, CI/MI is reactive and built around the sole needs of the sales team. In larger organizations, structured and standardized teams are much more commonly tasked with disseminating proactive competitive intelligence not only to sales but also to product, marketing, executive and other stakeholders.

Team Size

While CI/MI functions are typically formally structured with clear reporting lines, teams are surprisingly small relative to the overall size of the companies they support. CI/MI functions are usually spearheaded by a senior leader with title of senior director or vice president. Over 50% of the clients we analyzed have fewer than 10 FTEs on their CI/MI team, and 60% of those companies have fewer than five dedicated CI/MI team members.

These CI/MI team members are often supported by broader networks of shared resources. As noted above, diffusing resources and deliverables across decentralized shadow CI/MI efforts is common. In addition, particularly in the professional services sector, in-market CI/MI leaders are supported by distributed knowledge networks that leverage global resources with CI/MI skill sets.

The bottom line is, however, that CI/MI teams are small but mighty. They are tasked with supporting a high volume of ad hoc requests while also delivering recurring competitive data and insights to their organizations, which span hundreds of thousands of employees across disciplines and time zones.

CI/MI FUNCTION CHANGES FOR 2023

There was a wide spectrum of changes we observed when conducting this audit for 2023. These changes track less closely than one might expect to external events such as the ongoing layoffs and earnings lulls in the tech sector and the uncertain macroeconomic picture. Instead, the changes occurring are more inward-facing and propelled by individual companies' CI/MI maturity and goals.

Headcount Changes

Less mature organizations in our orbit are maintaining or growing CI/MI headcount, albeit on a small base. As we noted above, CI/MI programs at high-growth companies are often solo acts or, if not, typically small teams of up to five people. Many larger and more mature organizations are in maintenance mode. They are optimizing vendor relationships and shifting focus to areas of corporate strategy, but otherwise are staying the course to ensure they meet their KPIs and deliverables. There have been minimal changes to overall functional headcount; these teams are being asked often to do more with the same or less budget and time. This group represents over 75% of the companies we evaluated for this study.

Leadership Changes

Companies that have previously approached CI/MI with a fragmented or nondedicated model are evolving their programs by installing leadership that can help them to structure and scale their efforts. They bring on functional leadership with experience at larger companies and/or partner with third-party research services and platform providers to optimize for self-service across their organizations. For example, we identified three client relationships that launched formal CI/MI programs at the start of the year. In each case, new leadership from much larger and more mature vendors, often in tangential or unrelated technology sectors, was installed to help build out the programs.

Reporting Structural Changes

There is a small group of mature global technology vendors that are making broad changes to their CI/MI functions. The common thread across this cohort of companies is decentralization. These organizations are moving dedicated CI/MI team members into business units, reducing and/or shifting centralized budget, and eliminating vendor contracts. While we believe that self-service and organizational empowerment around CI/MI are trends, we do not believe decentralization will have staying power for most organizations. Most organizations that we have evaluated are building centralized CI/MI teams to spearhead programs and deliver measurable, actionable results.

CI/MI DELIVERABLES

Our analysis reveals that CI/MI teams' deliverables have changed little since we first ran this deep-dive analysis in 2019. Changes have been more focused on depth, quality, speed and consumption mechanisms than on the actual types of deliverables these teams are responsible for producing.

Deliverables typically fall into two buckets: (1) ad hoc and reactive, and (2) programmatic and standardized.

Nearly all CI/MI teams are responsible for fielding ad hoc requests from sellers, product teams and executives for competitive insights to support deals and projects. Often these are quick-turn, "hair on fire" requests, where CI/MI teams must drop everything and scrum together what they can in a matter of hours or days. Sometimes, ad hoc requests rise to the level of strategic projects, often supporting a new product or service launch or a major marketing initiative. Sometimes special projects are self-directed by CI/MI teams that have identified a critical need for intelligence across their organization. These types of efforts usually involve deeper, customized research, incorporating the expertise and services of third-party analyst firms and other research services providers. CI/MI resources and teams at smaller, nimbler organizations are often designed primarily to deliver ad hoc, reactive support to front-line sales teams and executives.

Programmatic and standardized insights are the bread and butter of larger, more established CI/MI teams. Among the vendors we surveyed for this research, there are three main recurring deliverables that are most commonly produced: battle cards and/or profiles; competitive and market insights newsletters; and competitive benchmarks.

Battle Cards and Competitive Profiles

Battle cards and competitive profiles are a core foundation of delivering CI/MI support, particularly for front-line sellers. CI/MI teams in our universe typically use a platform like Klue or Crayon to compile competitive insight from internal and external sources and regularly update a comprehensive set of battle cards and profiles on competitors across business units, regions, verticals and other relevant segments. These are available on demand for stakeholders and can be pushed on request.

Newsletters

Newsletters were commonly cited as a key deliverable by our audience. Newsletters are usually sent weekly or monthly to a defined set of stakeholders and cull from internal and external research sources to curate the most important and relevant updates on a company's key competitors and market segments.

Competitive Benchmarks and Landscapes

Competitive benchmarks and landscapes are a natural extension of the battle card and profile deliverables that CI/MI teams distribute to their audiences. Benchmarks are often an ad hoc, project-based deliverable but, in many cases, are translated into standardized and programmatic outputs as well. Benchmarks often get their start in a project before evolving into a standard deliverable, and they are usually created with a very specific subset of the larger CI/MI stakeholder audience in mind. For example, one of our IT professional services clients delivers a quarterly benchmarking report that specifically focuses on the talent strategies of four of its competitors in a particular business unit in the European market. Resources from this report are then condensed into an action-oriented version that is distributed to the appropriate sales team in the region. In this example, as with many others that we have seen, benchmarks are an area where third parties are leveraged to extend the bandwidth of an internal CI/MI team.

CI/MI DELIVERY AND CONSUMPTION MODELS

As we discussed above, one key dimension of CI/MI delivery models is cadence. Some activities are a "push" from stakeholders and are usually ad hoc in nature and reactive to some event (e.g., RFP, new solution launch). Others are a "pull" in which CI/MI are producing recurring assets and inviting stakeholders to engage with them.

In our opinion, determining which of these models is better is not an exact science. It depends on the makeup of the stakeholder ecosystems the CI/MI team is supporting, the capacity of that team, and the unique culture and ways of working within the organization. In general, as a CI/MI team matures and expands in size, we see an evolution from more reactive and ad hoc work to standardized and predictable deliverables. This evolution, of course, happens along a spectrum, and we see many companies that are at different waypoints along that path.

One important and broadly applicable consideration in CI/MI delivery and consumption is to meet your stakeholder users where they are. What do we mean? In the previously cited survey from CI platform SaaS provider Crayon, the company discovered that 84% of CI/MI stakeholders surveyed prefer to receive CI/MI updates via email. The next most popular delivery method was Slack (28%), with CI platforms coming in third (22%). Less popular were meetings (no surprises there) and internal wikis and CRMs.

We have experienced this dynamic as well with our clients. Power users within the core CI/MI teams at our clients are eager to get their hands on our Insight Center platform. They are, after all, the ones that are curating and disseminating what we provide across their organization. Other users in their stakeholder audience are much more likely, however, to download our research from the emails we send out with each research publication.

CI/MI professionals and teams should take this to heart: leverage all the research and analysis tools that you can get your hands on (trust us, they are life-changing). But be aware that most of your stakeholders are not like you. They do not want to dig deep; they want the "so what" and they want them delivered where they spend their time, which is usually on email or Slack.

Another key point to be made here is about building an organizational culture that empowers distributed CI/MI. This does not mean that you as the CI/MI team member or leader should outsource CI/MI responsibilities to your peers. You are still responsible for managing the central repository of assets and serving as the centrifuge of CI/MI operations. But you and your team are small, and you cannot cover everything. The ideal state is a balance in which sales, product, marketing and other teams feel empowered to deliver CI/MI insights and answer competitive questions via your defined channels while also leveraging your team, when required, to augment their efforts.

THIRD-PARTY VENDOR LANDSCAPE

A key aspect of running a successful CI/MI program is engaging with third-party research vendors. For large CI/MI teams, this can often be a full-time role. A vendors, in this context, mostly refers to any firm that provides data, insights and analysis that augment your CI/MI program. There is a broad category of companies that might fit into this bucket, but it commonly includes analyst firms, win/loss research providers, competitive intelligence agencies, survey panel providers, expert networks, analyst relations contractors and/or CI/MI contractors.

Across the firms we evaluated, the most research services vendors used by any one company is 50. The fewest is three. The majority of companies use between 10 and 20 research providers.

Each CI/MI program has different reasons for using such a large landscape of research vendors, but here are some of the most common:

• *Research vendors have different topical specializations (e.g., industry sector, vendors covered, topics covered).*

• *Research vendors support different types of stakeholders, and stakeholders have specific preferences on types of research and vendor.*

• *Research vendors have different levels of influence with different audiences (for example, buy-side versus sell-side).*

• *Research vendors will have different competencies (e.g., some are better at market forecasting versus pricing analysis).*

• *Using multiple vendors diversifies supplier risk.*

• *Data and analysis from multiple vendors can be cross-checked against one another to inform final models and analyses.*

• *Executive stakeholders may a have a preference for one research vendor or type of research.*

• *Research vendors have different ways of working.*

• *Research vendors have different commercial models.*

Companies' research vendor landscapes are constantly changing. The first change that most people think of is consolidation. We have heard of some vendor consolidation heading into 2023, but those instances have been more situational and company-specific than broad-based.

Long-term, as larger companies continue to expand the degree of self-service CI/MI they offer to their stakeholders, it is likely that further consolidation in third-party services will occur. This will also coincide with natural consolidation among different types of research vendors. For example, CI platform provider Klue recently acquired DoubleCheck Research, a services firm that specializes in win/loss research.

The changes we have seen so far this year come in three forms: (1) evolving the research vendor landscape to expand specialization in priority areas, such as industry verticals or specific technologies; (2) partnering with research vendors as a way to outsource chunks of a CI/MI program; and (3) aligning research vendors to preferred commercial and engagement models.

Specialization

This is a straightforward one. As CI/MI programs mature and more research vendors enter the market, the value axis shifts toward vendors that offer a unique specialty in some area. That specialty could be around a technology area, industry, geography, research topic, audience and/or a combination of those and other factors. Vendors seek partners that can fill knowledge gaps and help them go deeper in areas of priority. One interesting firm is GTM Partners, an analyst and consulting company that launched in 2021 with a focus on SaaS go-to-market strategy.

Outsourcing

This is a research vendor use case that we have encountered more frequently in the past year than in previous years. As we have said a few times throughout this report, CI/MI teams are often asked to do more with less. With this mandate, research partners often become a critical lifeline. This has always been the case for project-based work, particularly in areas where research vendors can offer better access to interviews with competitors' customers and other resources. However, we have seen this become more of a trend around recurring and programmatic insights. Research vendors are designing their services to perform the core duties of members of CI/MI teams.

Commercial and Engagement Models

This trend bears watching. We think there will be a major future evolution in how CI/MI teams work with research and analyst firms. In the early days of working with research firms, almost everything was based on annual or multiyear term seat-based contracts for research, which also afforded access to analysts.

One way we are seeing this change is through technology. Vendors often use tools such as Crayon, Klue or other CI platforms, which require that research vendors adjust contract terms and parameters, and sometimes research delivery models, to ensure that research can be used in those tools.

As vendors build out their own platforms, there is increasing interest in getting research served up to them on their terms, in their tools, via APIs or other methods, versus having to navigate multiple research portals from multiple research partners.

The last subtrend in this category is personalization and configurability. CI/MI teams move quickly and want to be able to access what they want, when they want it. Some vendors have begun to offer "pay per research report pulled" and "pay per download" models. We recently spoke to a company that provides a research library of expert interviews that has shifted to a per-call model from a subscription model for this very reason.

CI/MI TOOLS LANDSCAPE

CI/MI tools are a broad category, as tools span the entire process from research collection to activation. If you are looking for a comprehensive report on CI/MI tools, the [Competitive Intelligence Alliance's Competitive Intelligence Tools of Choice 2023](#) Report is a great resource. In this report, however, we focus primarily on the trends we see in how CI/MI tools are used by our clients and the differences between types of vendors.

Where we see a lot of consistency across most CI/MI teams is in the use of a CI/MI platform. Many of our most mature clients have built their own systems. Many others use Crayon, Klue or a similar platform from an off-the-shelf CI platform software provider. CI/MI teams connect these systems directly to research vendor portals and platforms and/or have established systems to port the research they subscribe to into these tools. Dedicated CI/MI teams, in our view, will continue to standardize on these platforms to collect, update and distribute intelligence.

Where there is less consistency and more opportunity, in our view, is in the tools used to support competitive intelligence collection. When it comes to collection, the smaller, scrappier teams tend to rely on technology, whereas larger and more established CI/MI teams seem to rely more heavily on their ecosystem of third-party services providers. In our engagements with CI/MI teams at SaaS companies, we almost uniformly hear that practitioners use a conversational intelligence tool such as Gong as part of their competitive intelligence program. These are tools that we rarely see used by CI/MI teams at larger organizations.

We think there is an opportunity here for CI/MI teams of all sizes to apply a hybrid approach. Conversational intelligence tools like Gong are great for collecting intelligence. But sometimes, they can collect too much, making it hard to find the signal in the noise. One CI/MI leader at a high-growth SaaS company told us that he gets over 100 Gong recordings a week of sales conversations. With that volume, it is impossible to analyze all calls and extract all the relevant competitive insights, especially if you are a small team of one or two people. This is where a services model might become valuable: A vendor could lean on a trained analyst to devise competitive enablement assets based on the conversational intelligence call resources.

On the horizon are additional tools, particularly around generative AI, that will impact the CI/MI process. While these tools will make research processes more efficient, they are unlikely to replace CI/MI teams. CI/MI teams are needed to analyze the data, make human-to-human connections to ensure teams act upon insights, and engage in customer and prospect interviews to extract novel insights that are not available on the internet or in any database or report resources.

CONCLUSION

Whether you are a one-person show doing CI/MI research as part of your day job or a member of a sophisticated, dedicated CI/MI team with specialized roles, you are facing constant pressure from stakeholders to do more with less as markets and deals become increasingly competitive.

To succeed, you need to know what good looks like. You are a researcher, and you know that requires going deep into the data on your peers and figuring out what they are doing and how it might apply to you.

We hope this report helps you to do just that. We are engaging with CI/MI professionals like you, so if you ever have a question, whether on this report, your job, your function or anything else, we are here. Let us know what is on your mind!

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