

**A STUDY OF THE MARKET INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES OF
SELECTED SME'S OPERATING IN THE NORTHWEST OF
IRELAND.**

By

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**A research dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for the Degree of Masters of
Science in Marketing, Department of Marketing Tourism and Leisure, School of
Business and Humanities, Institute of Technology Sligo.**

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2010

ABSTRACT

The rationale for this study was to highlight the importance of scanning the competitive environment for intelligence to the success and smooth running of businesses today. In the words of Fredrick the Great (1740-1786), "*it is pardonable to be defeated, but never to be surprised*" (Calof and Wright 2008).

It is not money that makes the world go around, but information. Successful global and domestic marketing strategies are built on a solid base of business information. Strategic intelligence is the backbone of effective global strategies, as it is of domestic marketing strategies (Hiam and Schewe 1998). Knowledge of existing and potential markets, business trends, competitors, and the effectiveness of marketing programmes is critical to the success of any company's efforts. One popular text notes that "In carrying out marketing analysis, planning, implementation and control, marketing managers need information at almost every turn" (Kotler and Armstrong, Principles of Marketing 1989).

SME's do not conform to conventional textbook marketing theories, instead their business is characterised by the limited resources available to the firm. SME's tend to be social entities and those who have placed themselves in industrial clusters have found that the collaborative relationships formed have been beneficial and a crucial method of keeping intelligence flowing into the organisation. Most SME owners act as owner managers and also play the roles of the company's strategist. Their ability to set up and manage information / intelligence management solutions in their organisation sets the tone for the business and can be the critical success factor in the market monitoring activities of the firm.

Enterprises today are constantly trying to outpace the competition while still keeping up with changing business cycles, security, globalisation and regulatory compliance. As companies struggle to respond more quickly and efficiently to business change, they are forced to examine the underlying architecture that supports their business to determine future strategy. SME's in the northwest of Ireland have a range of different orientations to the competitive environment. This study is based upon 3 research objectives aimed at identifying the level of intelligence activities with the SME's of the region. It is hoped that this study will enhance existing knowledge on the area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank Ingrid, Sarah, Christian, David and Grace for their support and encouragement through this chapter in our lives. Thank you for giving me confidence and encouragement along the way.

I would like to thank all the staff at the Institute of Technology Sligo, especially the lecturing staff in the business department. You have made this journey both enjoyable and interesting – thank you.

To all those who took part in the research, especially those who took time out of busy working schedules to partake in interviews and surveys – thank you – without you this dissertation would not have been possible.

To my friends and classmates, thank you for the comradeship and support we shared throughout.

Finally, I would like to give a sincere thanks to my supervisor Pat Scanlon whose patience, support, and guidance was very much appreciated during this endeavour.

DEDICATION

To the memory of my father.

DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of

Master of Science in Marketing

Is entirely my own work with acknowledged exception

Signed _____

Date _____

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ABBREVIATIONS

SME	Small to Medium Enterprise
KM	Knowledge Management
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
U.S.	United States
SCB	South Central Bell
BI	Business Intelligence
DSS	Decision Support System
IT	Information Technology
CI	Competitive Intelligence
KIT	Key Intelligence Topics
R & D	Research and Development
MIS	Marketing Intelligence System
SFA	Small Firms Association
SPSS	Statistical Program for the Social Sciences
KPI's	Key Performance Indicators
CSF's	Critical Success Factors
P&G	Proctor and Gamble
SIG	Special Interest Group
M&A	Marketing and Advertising
ESOMAR	The European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research

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Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

It is not money that makes the world go around, but information. Successful global and domestic marketing strategies are built on a solid base of business information. Strategic intelligence is the backbone of effective global strategies, as it is of domestic marketing strategies (Hiam and Schewe 1998).

Knowledge of existing and potential markets, business trends, competitors, and the effectiveness of marketing programmes is critical to the success of any company's efforts. One popular text notes that "*In carrying out marketing analysis, planning, implementation and control, marketing managers need information at almost every turn*" (Kotler and Armstrong 1989).

Market intelligence is often referred to as competitive or business intelligence. For the purpose of this study they are regarded as one in the same. To put it simply market intelligence is a process of knowing what the competitors are up to and staying one step ahead of them (Tan Tsu Wee 2001. 19/4).

In this chapter the researcher presents the rationale behind the study, the research problem, and the objectives which aided in its resolution.

1.2 Research Rationale

The recession that the global economy slipped into in the late 2008 has left few industries untouched, which has also had a powerful impact on Market Intelligence activities in organisations around the world. The economic conditions have raised new questions and challenges for decision-makers to deal with and have even pushed some companies to the verge of survival mode. As a result, budgets have been cut from most corporate functions, with intelligence activities being among them. Yet simultaneously with the thinning resources, the demand for high quality market information has probably never been as pressing (Global Intelligence Alliance 2009).

Competitive intelligence is regarded as a system of environmental scanning which integrates the knowledge of everyone in the company. As will be discussed in this study, the term encompasses structural, strategic and other organisational elements. In reviewing the keywords, it can be seen that the field encompasses many concepts covering the wider spectrum of business activity, and especially those usually attributed to the marketing function. They include analysis, business intelligence, business strategy, competitive intelligence, market intelligence, marketing intelligence, market research, strategic intelligence, resilience, scanning and strategic marketing (Calof and Wright 2008)

Recently, there is a widespread interest in market surveillance and intelligence techniques. These techniques are especially needed in dynamic markets where timely responses to competitor's actions are essential to secure or maintain market positions. Market and competitive intelligence is an important responsibility of top management because of its critical impact on business decisions and its role in shaping company strategy. It is defined as a network of sources and regular procedures by which market executives obtain everyday information about non-recurrent developments in the external marketing environment (Zikmund, 1996, p.34) (Tan Tsu Wee 2001 19/4).

The rationale for this study was to highlight the importance of environment scanning and information to the success and smooth running of businesses today

1.3 Research Problem

A Study of the Market Intelligence activities of selected SME's operating in the northwest of Ireland.

The aim of this dissertation was to explore the extent that SME's operating in the northwest region of Ireland are in tune with their competitive environment. In order to research the problem seven companies were examined by in-depth interview, while forty SME's took part in a telephone survey.

1.3 Research Objectives

In order to solve the research problem the researcher chose to survey 10 companies by in-depth interview in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the problem in the area. A further fifty companies were surveyed by telephone to gain specific measurable data for analysis purposes. Companies from a wide variety of sectors were chosen for research because of the diversity of size and operations of the population.

1.4 Research Criteria

Population for this research were chosen from the northwest region of Ireland. Qualifying entities were small and medium sized enterprises (SME's).

An enterprise is considered to be an entity engaged in an economic activity, irrespective of its legal form. This includes, in particular, self-employed persons and family businesses engaged in craft or other activities, and partnerships or associations regularly engaged in an economic activity.

The category of small and medium-sized enterprises is made up of enterprises which employ fewer than 250 employees (Commission European 2003).

1.5 Justification of Research

Entrepreneurial businesses that are well structured and well managed will see opportunity in uncertainty; however, they need assistance from Government to provide support and create an environment that will put them on a sustainable growth path (Avine McNally, Director, Small Firms Association).

In the SFA Summer Business Sentiment Survey published June 2010 (Appendix A) it was revealed that there is a great level of concern with the economic outlook at present. 59% of small firms rate the overall business environment currently as 'poor' or 'very poor', while

only 26% of firm's rate their own business as 'good' or 'very good' (Mc Nally 2010). This study is necessary to identify what SME's are doing to manage this situation.

It is clear that with the global economic downturn coupled with the domestic recession the SME's of the northwest region have a challenge on their hands to remain competitive and operational as governments try and get to grips with this current crises.

1.6 Thesis Structure

This study is comprised of five chapters displayed in the following diagram 1.1:

Figure 1 - Thesis Structure



Chapter 1 Introduces the research problem, highlights the objectives, rationale, and justification for this study.

Chapter 2 explores the literature existing on the topic.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in the research. The strategy, validity, limitations, and ethical issues are all discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 contains the findings of the research and presents an analysis in relation to the research objectives.

Chapter 5 contains a summary of the key findings and recommendation in relation to them.

1.7 Conclusion

There is no doubt that the current economic environment is challenging. This study intends to explore what SME's in the region are doing to manage their competitive environment and how they are keeping ahead of their competitors and abreast of changes in the market. SME's in the northwest of Ireland have a range of different orientations to the competitive environment. This study is based upon 3 research objectives aimed at identifying the level of intelligence activities with the SME's of the region. It is hoped that this study will enhance existing knowledge on the area.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Relationship marketing theory suggests that organisations should see their customers and other stakeholders as partners, to form long-term relationships with them and to reap the resulting benefits of trust, loyalty and increased profitability (Hunt and Morgan, 1994). Other authors have defended the relational approach to marketing in (Gronroos, 2004, Gummesson, 2004), however few have applied relationship marketing principles to the small and medium sized enterprise (SME). SME's operate with a strong focus on relationships with customers, suppliers, employees, and other stakeholders (Carson et al, 1995; McGowan and Durkin, 2002). Therefore, those who wish to research this area will find the lack of research extraordinary as the links between relationship marketing and entrepreneurship are apparent (Zontanos and Anderson, 2004) (Harrigan, Ramsey and Ibbotson 2008)

Knowledge of existing and potential markets, business trends, competitors, and the effectiveness of marketing programmes is essential to the success of any organisations efforts. One popular text notes that "In carrying out marketing analysis, planning, implementation and control, marketing managers need information at almost every turn" (Kotler and Armstrong, p 88 1989). It is clear that the potential for a skilled competitive intelligence practitioner to positively manipulate the current and future success of their organisation is significant. Their ability to work across functions and to act as the "glue" between different departments can be remarkable. It is clear from the articles contained in this study that competitive intelligence input and output certainly does impact on marketing activity and as such the two fields enjoy an equally beneficial and complementary role in the progressive firm (Calof and Wright 2008)

Successful global and domestic marketing strategies are built on a solid base of business information. Interestingly, to keep abreast, British executive's reportedly read three times as many newspapers as U.S managers. Strategic intelligence is the backbone of effective global strategies, as it is of domestic marketing strategies (Hiam and Schewe 1998)

2.2 Definition of Intelligence Terms

Market intelligence is often referred to as competitive or business intelligence. For the purpose of this study they are regarded as one in the same. To put it simply market intelligence is a process of knowing what the competitors are up to and staying one step ahead of them (Tan Tsu Wee 2001. 19/4).

Figure 2 – Intelligence Model



Competitive intelligence is regarded as a system of environmental scanning which combines the knowledge of every person in the organisation. As will be discussed in this study, the term encompasses structural, strategic and other organisational elements. In reviewing the keywords, it can be seen that the field includes many concepts covering the wider spectrum of business activity, and especially those usually accredited to the marketing function. They include analysis, business intelligence, business strategy, competitive intelligence, market intelligence, marketing intelligence, market research, strategic intelligence, resilience, scanning and strategic marketing (Calof and Wright 2008).

Recently, there has been a widespread interest in market surveillance and intelligence techniques. These methods are required in vibrant markets where timely responses to competitor's activities are critical to secure or maintain market positions. Market and

competitive intelligence should be the responsibility of senior management because of its critical influence on business decisions and its role in shaping organisational strategy. It can be defined as a network of sources and procedures by which executives obtain everyday information about developments in the external marketing environment (Zikmund, 1996, p.34) (Tan Tsu Wee 2001. 19/4).

2.2.1 Business Intelligence

In today's knowledge based economy organisations require the backing of business intelligence tools to collect, analyse, and disseminate information to enable knowledge employees to make informed decisions. The speed at which the global economy operates makes the ability for managers to attain "actionable data" (information that can be used to understand customer behaviour, and forecast market trends in a "real-time" manner) critical. Business Intelligence systems maintain activities such as decision support, data mining, data warehousing, dash boarding, and financial analysis (Hedgebeth 2007, Vol. 37 No. 4).

Business intelligence enables the comprehension, understanding and profit from experience. Business data and information are the earth that cultivates business intelligence, which in turn enables the capability to reason, plan, solve problems, understand ideas, and learn from business data and information. Business intelligence is fuelled from the employment of information aligned with business performance. Business intelligence is built on the identification and manipulation of defined business information. Asking the right questions is the precursor to making intelligent decisions (Ranjan 2008, Vol. 39 No. 4).

The adoption of business intelligence technologies is likely to double in the next five years. Yet, in the e-discovery arena there is very little awareness of these massive sources of electronically stored information. Business intelligence is a broad category of applications and technologies for gathering, storing, analysing, and providing access to data to help enterprise users make better business decisions. A typical business intelligence solution includes data sources where transactional information is gathered, data warehouses / data marts, reporting and visualization tools, as well as predictive analytics and modelling (Brannon 2010. Vol. 22. No. 7).

Enterprise data can be broken down into two broad categories. Structured and unstructured data. Structured data typically resides in databases such as accounting systems, while unstructured data that typically resides outside of a structured database, such as spreadsheets, emails, schedules etc. In some cases, when the unstructured data is particularly important to the company and it needs to be searchable or requires further analysis, it might be organised into a structured database and made available as part of a business intelligence solution (Brannon 2010 Vol. 22 No 7).

In today's highly competitive and increasingly uncertain world, the quality and timeliness of an organisations "business intelligence" can mean not only the difference between profit and loss, but also the difference between survival and insolvency. Business intelligence is the mindful, systematic transformation of data from any and all data sources into new forms to provide information that is business-driven and results-oriented. It will often encompass a mixture of tools and databases in order to deliver an infrastructure that will not only deliver the initial solution, but also will integrate the ability to transform with the business and current marketplace

Organisations are constantly trying to outpace the competition while keeping up with changing business cycles, globalisation and regulatory compliance. As companies struggle to respond more quickly and efficiently to business changes, they may be forced to examine the fundamental architecture that supports their business to ensure future flexibility. Companies face numerous challenges in making management more strategic and driving its application all through the enterprise (Ruddy, 2006). These challenges include defining key performance indicators (KPI's) that support the business objectives; extending usage of those KPI's throughout a wide range of functional areas within the organisation; and integrating data so that executives can truly understand the impact of operational activities on financial outcomes and on the strategic goals and objectives of the organisation (Ranjan 2008, Vol. 39 No. 4).

Business intelligence is a management term used to describe applications and technologies that are used to gather, provide access to and analyse data and information about the organisation, to help make better decisions. In other words, the purpose of business intelligence is to provide actionable insight. BI technologies include traditional data warehousing technologies such as reporting, ad hoc querying (Ranjan 2008, Vol 39 No 4)

The following are the major components that constitute BI

- Data warehouse
- Data sources
- Data mart
- Query and reporting tools

Enterprise data (including data from planning systems, data warehouses, and other sources) is considered one of the assets of the organisation, and builds the competitive advantage that ensures corporate success. But data can often be fragmented, incomplete and not readily available in a form that can be used effectively. To realise its benefits, data from a variety of sources needs to be turned into information that can be used consistently across divisions and business units. The key to fulfilling the potential of company-wide data lies in implementing a strategy for the business intelligence data consolidation in order to create a focused view of the organisation resulting in better business performance (Ranjan 2008, Vol. 39 No. 4).

Business intelligence, with the use of technology, collects and efficiently uses information to improve business strength. An ideal business intelligence system gives an organisation easy access to the information they need, and the ability to analyse and easily share this information with others. Business intelligence provides crucial insights that help organisations make the right decisions. It assists the examination of every aspect of business operations to find new revenue or squeeze out additional cost savings by increasing return on investment and providing decision support information (Ranjan 2008, Vol. 39 No. 4). However, in a world bombarded with different sources of information, there is still a question mark over whether those responsible for amalgamating and presenting information are providing a service that actually helps their company's decision markers (Mercer, 1996) (Culkin, Smith and Fletcher 1999).

2.2.2 Competitive Intelligence

Competitive intelligence involves the collection of information, both internal and external to the organisation, from competitors, customers, suppliers, and potential customers and suppliers. Competitive intelligence is designed to provide early warning signals and help to

forecast the moves of competitors, customers, and governments. This suggests that the focus of competitive intelligence covers the entire competitive environment, not just the competition. This regular scanning for competitive intelligence is critical for organisations to stay abreast of changing market conditions and the avoidance of costly mistakes (Patton and McKenna, 2005; Anderson and Hoyer, 1991).

Competitive Intelligence should be a continuous and evolving process by which businesses measure the performance and capabilities of its current and potential competitors to assist in maintaining and developing a competitive advantage (Calof and Wright, 2008). It involves finding, analysing, and utilising intelligence from available sources and converting it into knowledge on a continuous basis (Blenkhorn and Fleisher, 2005). This in turn, assists companies in their strategic planning activities (Hughes, 2005; Prescott, 1989). Moreover, as intelligence is developed in a systematic and formal basis, it allows managers to make better informed decisions regarding future events (Dishman and Calof, 2008; Gilad, 2003) (Tej Adidam, Gajre and Kejriwal 2009, Vol 27 No 5).

Managers at all levels in organisations should conduct competitive intelligence scanning to monitor market variables that are continuously shifting (Fielding, 2006). To maintain a competitive position, managers must prepare to react quickly to changes in consumer preferences, competitor strategies, and technological advancements. Managerial responsiveness to the complex and dynamic market enables organisations to take various informed actions, ranging from defensive strategies in order to increase competitiveness to profiting from new market opportunities (Qiu 2008, Vol. 42 No. 7/8).

The research highlights the fact that managers are entrenched in organisations and as such they are significantly influenced by the cultural orientation of the organisation. Highly market-orientated organisations provide a supportive culture for managers to commit to proactive scanning for competitive intelligence. In contrast, less market-oriented organisations discourage managers from conducting thorough scanning for competitive intelligence. Proactive scanning for competitive intelligence furnishes managers with knowledge about customer's needs and competitors products, services, prices, etc. Managers with knowledge of customer and competitive actions enables then to better assess the strength

and weakness of their organisations, which leads to better representations of competitive advantage.

Managers in market-oriented organisations are in a better position to perform frequent and widespread scanning for competitive intelligence as market-oriented firms provide a strong supportive culture for competitive intelligence collection and distribution. This means that managerial scanning efforts can be maximised in organisations that value competitive intelligence on customers and competitors. Managerial representations of competitive advantage are not formed in a vacuum; rather, they are influenced by the activities by which manager's scan for competitive intelligence. Managers need to conduct proactive competitive intelligence scanning before they can understand the impact of market forces on their organisation and develop effective mental representations of the strengths and weaknesses of their organisations (Qiu 2008, Vol. 42 No. 7/8).

The idea of competitive intelligence as an input to a firm's innovation and learning has a direct association to that firm's competitive value (Barney, 1986; Porter, 1980; Weirsema, 1996). However, creating such a learning organisation is a difficult task. While the success of many companies centres on learning, firms may not know how to organisationally learn. It is also true to say that deception, error hiding, and defensive reasoning are a part of organisational life in many firms, and these mechanisms inhibit learning (Argyris, 1991). Bonthous (1996) points out that many competitive intelligence units function with only adaptive learning and many do not address the contribution of organisational knowledge in order to assess the effectiveness of the competitive intelligence unit. It is believed that without a learning environment, intelligence is no more than mere information. Intelligence must be able to support organisational capabilities in order for the firm to learn and continually improve (Dishman and Pearson 2003, Vol. 32).

Resource-based strategy does not represent the sole justification for a competitive intelligence programme. Conventional views of the particulars of the market and structural struggles of companies demand knowledge (or at least assumptions) of the positions of competitors (Thompson, 1998) and of their intents and tactics in the market (Rumelt, 1998). Even with the modern emphasis on a network approach to business strategy and the need for partnering approaches to managing these networks of buyers, suppliers and peer companies, it can be argued that knowing the capabilities and intents of other companies in essentially

non-competitive and trusting relationships is an added contribution to the well being of the network in addition to being a safeguard against any future change (Powell and Bradford 2000).

2.2.3 Market Intelligence

Market intelligence is a process of knowing what the competitors are up to and staying one step ahead of them, by gathering actionable information about the competitors and applying it to the organisations strategic planning. It is a continuous and interacting structure of people, equipment and procedures to gather, sort, analyse and distribute relevant, suitable and accurate information for use by marketing decision makers to improve their marketing planning, implementation and control (Ettorre, 1995, p.17). The emphasis of marketing intelligence is, therefore, on the regular and systematic collection of data as against the typical marketing research projects that study specific company problems and are non-routine in nature. The purpose of market intelligence is therefore to provide management with facts, information and insights for competent business decisions.

To be effective and a source of competitive advantage market intelligence has to be reliable and well organised. More importantly, market intelligence provides the participation and energy for the evolution of instruments involved in the formulation and execution of effective strategy within a strategically managed company. These mechanisms are: 1) Systematic, comprehensive planning / implementation, 2) Effective responses to unexpected opportunities and problems; and, 3) Creative, entrepreneurial insights. Market intelligence provides the essential underpinnings for the crucial output of strategic management, which is an integrated set of actions aimed at increasing the long-term well being and strength of an enterprise relative to its competitors (Sammon, et al., 1984, p. 18).

Market intelligence serves four key purposes.

These are:

1. To track and measure competitors actions and operations
2. To serve as indicators to early warnings of opportunities and threats
3. To serve as information support for strategic planning and implementation
4. To serve as support of strategic decision-making (Caudron 1994)

The key difference between marketing research and market intelligence lies with marketing research's principal emphasis on the gathering of primary information and the conduct of ad hoc based research projects and studies rather than the continuous and systematic sourcing and examination of information typical of market intelligence. Market intelligence is more strategic and result-driven, is primarily qualitative, exploits secondary and primary sources and taps a wider variety of networks for information such as customers, competitors, suppliers, former employees and of course electronic databases and the mass media (Tan Tsu Wee 2001. 19/4).

The study of Reijonen and Komppula (2008) showed that SME's often gather information about their customers and competitors, but they have not necessarily developed real competence concerning information collection. Neither have they necessarily developed organisational culture supporting the learning process. There may also be problems in disseminating the information about customers and competitors. In order to really take advantage of market intelligence SME's should develop capabilities in collecting information and in internal processes, for example, company culture, marketing management, and supporting the development of market orientation (Reijonen 2010, Vol. 17 No. 2).

Jaworski and Kohli (1993) identified three sets of activities that belong to market orientation – namely:

1. Generating market intelligence concerning present and future needs of customers;
2. Disseminating this information through an organisation; and
3. Responding to this intelligence

Organisations usually differ in the extent to which they perform these activities.

Cornish (1997 Vol. 87) give a detailed description of market intelligence in that it can be defined as information about the customer's needs, preferences, attitudes, and behaviour, plus potential changes in the competitive environment that may have an effect on customers.

2.2.4 Marketing Intelligence

Marketing intelligence is information gathered from sources outside the organisation about developments in the business environment, including the activities of competitors that affect the firm (Solomon and Stuart, Marketing - Real People, Real Choices 2002). Marketing research on the other hand is the methodical identification, compilation, analysis and distribution of information for the purpose of assisting management in decision making, normally in relation to the identification and solution of problems and opportunities in marketing (Malhotra, 1996). The marketing intelligence cycle consists of collecting, compiling, cataloguing, directing, analysing and communicating data. Sammon et al. describe information as the raw material of the intelligence process.

It is unevaluated and unanalysed data derived from many sources. Intelligence is the analytical process that transforms disaggregated competitor data into relevant, accurate and usable knowledge about competitor's position, performance, capabilities and intentions. (Sammon, et al., 1984)

Market research can be described as the process of paying attention to the market and passing on information about it to appropriate management (Maltz and Kohli, 1996). An important result to this idea is that market information is important to all areas of the organisation. Thus, marketing intelligence has been considered as the traditional sensing mechanism that can help a company become market oriented and establish customer commitment (Day, 1991, 2001). It is argued that if marketing intelligence (generated by market research) is to play a critical role in the firms mission to become market-oriented, pertinent information must be produced and dispersed in the most appropriate form to achieve better performance (Low and Mohr, 2001; Gray and Hooley, 2002; Noble et al., 2002). For instance, some departments or management levels may collect marketing intelligence that is specific and action-oriented, whereas others may collect marketing intelligence that is enlightening (Day and Nedungadi, 1994). Menon and Varadarajan (1992) claimed that this differentiation is critical when one is attempting to appraise the type of market research and the effect of its use (Ganeshasundaram and Henley 2007).

A company can take several steps to improve the quality of its marketing intelligence.

Step 1: Train and motivate the sales force to spot and report new developments.

The company must “sell” its sales force on their importance as intelligence gatherers. Grace Performance Chemicals, a division of the U.S. chemical conglomerate W. R. Grace, supplies materials and chemicals to U.S. construction and packaging industries. Grace sales representatives were instructed to observe the innovative ways customers used its products in order to suggest possible new products. For example, some customers were using Grace water-proofing materials to soundproof their cars and patch boots and tents. Seven new product ideas emerged, worth millions in sales.

Step 2: Motivate distributors, retailers, and other intermediaries to pass along important intelligence.

Many companies hire specialists to gather marketing intelligence. Service providers and retailers often send mystery shoppers to their stores to assess cleanliness of facilities, product quality, and the way employees treat customers. Mystery shoppers for McDonald's discovered that only 46% of its U.S. restaurants met internal speed-of-service standards, forcing the company to rethink processes and training. U.S. health care facilities that use mystery shoppers say the reports have led to a number of changes in the patient experience, including improved estimates of wait times, better explanations of medical procedures, and even less-stressful programming on the television in the waiting room.

Step 3: Network externally.

The firm can purchase competitors' products; attend open houses and trade shows; read competitors' published reports; attend stockholders' meetings; talk to employees, dealers, distributors, suppliers, and freight agents; collect competitors' ads; and look up news stories about competitors. Canadian software developer Cognos created an internal Web site called Street Fighter, where any of the firm's 3000 workers can submit scoops about competitors and win prizes. (Kotler and Keller, Marketing Management 2009)

2.3 Intelligence and the SME

SME's do not conform to conventional textbook marketing theories; instead their business is characterised by the restrictions of a business of limited size and resources. "Thus, SME marketing is likely to be random, informal, unstructured, impulsive, reactive, and conforming to industry norms" (Gilmore, Carson and Grant 2001). Or to look at it another way, SME marketing is influenced by factors such as, customers, markets, trends and competitors whose interaction help SME's develop their unique marketing style. SME marketing has restrictions and limits such as finance, personnel, skills and attitudes (O'Dwyer, Gilmore and Carson 2009) (Carson and Cromie, pp 33-49, 1989).

It is evident that SME characteristics do not allow for the clear-cut function of large firm strategy or tactics (Carson and Gilmore, 2000; Bridge et al, 2003). In short, most SME's tend to be informal social entities with a short term focus on profit. Research focusing on bridging the competitive gap between large and small firms has emphasised the role of internet technologies (Lituchy and Rail, 2000; McCole and Ramsey, 2004) (Harrigan, Ramsey and Ibbotson 2008).

As firms are experiencing the need to be efficient, flexible, and adaptive simultaneously, they have turned increasingly to the network form of organisation. The entire set of active and potential relationships among firms in a particular industry can be called a "network organisation" (Miles and Snow, 1992). Previous research by Soderquist (1996) has identified the "development of networks and partnerships" as part of five critical success factors for improving performance in SME's. The other four CSF's are: 1) Promoting a corporate culture, 2) Creating an effective structure, 3) Analysing competitors, and 4) Developing flexibility and speed of response to customers (Terziovski 2003. Vol. 7 No. 2).

An essential method to keep the information and knowledge flowing into SME's is by locating within an industrial cluster. Being able to leverage limited resources by establishing collaborative relationships with similar organisations has proven to be successful in many parts of the world (Baptista and Swann, 1998). This strategy can also be coupled with strategic partnering to network in needed skills and expertise lacking internally (Terziovski 2003. Vol. 7 No. 2).

Prior business research in the SME domain has studied specific SME characteristics including organisational culture, human resources, systems processes and procedures, and organisational structure (uit Beijerse, 2000; Lim and Klobas, 2000; Dingsoyr and Royrvik, 2003; Macpherson et al., 2003). One of the most comprehensive set of SME characteristics is described in Wong and Aspinwall (2004). We adopted their characteristics and grouped them into five broad categories discussed briefly in the table below, (for a full insight please see Appendix F).

TABLE 1- SME Characteristics (Supyuenong, Islam and Kulkarni 2009)

Ownership and management structure	Most SME owners act as owner-managers and also play the part of the companys strategic initiator. Their intention to adopt KM systems, including formulating the vision, allocating resources to facilitate KM processes, setting up organisational procedures, etc., may set the tone for KM (Senge, 1990; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Wickert and Herschel, 2001; Lee and Kim, 2001; Drucker, 1988; Cook, 1999).
Customers and markets	SMEs depend on a small customer base and focus on local or regional markets, with a few international markets. They usually have limited product/service lines and sometimes cater to niche markets. Employees have close relationships with their customers.
Systems, processes and procedures	SMEs have simple planning and control systems, and informal rules and procedures. There is less standardisation of work processes.
Human capital management	Since SMEs have less clear employee responsibilities, a lower degree of job specialisation occurs, leading to greater employee versatility. Human capital development is done according to specific needs in an ad hoc manner. Employee performance evaluation is not standardised.
Culture and behaviour	SMEs usually have an informal, organic, and unified culture. The size of the organisation fosters recognising the company as a whole instead of looking at single departments or functions. The behaviour of employees is more easily influenced by the owner-managers philosophy and beliefs.

2.4 Gathering Intelligence

The market orientation viewpoint on marketing intelligence (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Slater and Narver, 1995) states that companies should endeavour to achieve higher value and profits through marketing intelligence gathering and sharing across departments. Scanning for competitive intelligence is a major means for organisations to acquire essential information for marketing intelligence creation and market adjustment (Patton and McKenna, 2005; Sawyer et al, 2000). Arguably, organisational competitive advantage rests on the ability of organisations to scan proactively for competitive intelligence and make effective responses (e.g. Brownlie, 1994; Oktemgil and Greenley, 1997; Pickton and Wright, 1998). However, scanning for competitive intelligence alone does not enable organisations to adapt to the market. It is members within organisations who build competitive insight and dictate strategic responses (Gray, 1994; Wright and Ashill, 1998). As Hambrick (1981, p. 299) suggested, scanning for competitive intelligence is “*the managerial activity of learning about events and trends in the market*”. The efficiency of scanning the competitive environment determines managerial understanding of the market (Qiu 2008, Vol. 42 No. 7/8).

Scanning for competitive intelligence relates to the process of looking for and collecting information about trends and changes beyond company limits to guide organisational strategic management (Aguilar, 1967). The systematic scanning of competitive intelligence, including noticing and interpreting competitive stimuli, is critical for organisations to stay abreast of changing market conditions and avoid costly mistakes (Anderson and Hoyer, 1991; Patton and McKenna, 2005) (Qiu 2008, Vol. 42 No. 7/8).

Market research is regarded as the foremost activity that is used to generate market intelligence, but in reality it provides only a small portion of all market intelligence. Significant intelligence is also obtained through the day to day activities of the companies employees (management, sales staff, service staff, engineers etc) when they communicate with customers, distributors, or other intermediaries involved with the organisation (Cornish 1997). Competitive intelligence gathering must be legal and ethical, though. Procter & Gamble reportedly paid a multimillion-dollar settlement to Unilever when some external operatives hired as part of a P&G corporate intelligence program to learn about Unilever's hair care products were found to have engaged in such unethical behaviour as “dumpster diving” (Kotler and Keller, Marketing Management 2009).

Tracking and continuous research are a relevant contributor to market intelligence. They can include time studies, mystery shopping and panel research. Tracking studies range from self administered questionnaires filled up for example in hotels and restaurants, to complicated computer based systems. Mystery shopping on the other hand uses independent parties to assess organisations operations in an impartial way on service quality, product knowledge of staff, and efficiency. Businesses that have a lot of direct contact with customers typically use mystery shopping as a means of obtaining consumer feedback (Tsu Wee Tan and Ahmed U. 1999).

Marketing intelligence comes from many sources, company executives, sales people and engineers are all part of the intelligence gathering system of an organisation. The company must convince its workforce on their importance as intelligence collectors and educate them on how to spot new developments and urge them to report intelligence back to the company (P. Kotler, et al. 2001).

A broader description of intelligence sources is provided by Tsu Wee Tan & Ahmed, who cite that the many sources of competitive intelligence can be placed in four broad categories:

1. The organisations employees
2. Online sources, such as the internet and databases
3. Sources such as journals and newspapers
4. Sources such as interviews with customers, suppliers, agents and specialists in the industry (Tsu Wee Tan and Ahmed U. 1999).

2.5 Analysing Intelligence

There are four questions that managers should ask themselves in order to provide themselves with proper direction for market intelligence activities (Sutton, 1988, pp. 6-7):

1. How can we learn what we need to know, what are the most useful data sources and how can we tap into them?
2. Which current and potential competitors should be analysed and why?
3. What do we need to know about these competitors and why?
4. How can we analyse the data to make it relevant for decision making?

In analysing their competitors Tsu Wee Tan & Ahmed (1999) were a little more detailed and recommend the following information as essential:

TABLE 2 Analytical Approach to Competitors

Analytical Approach to Competitors	
Analysis of ownership structure	to determine the structure of ownership, costs, asset composition, financial ratios, financing sources, cash flow etc.
Analysis of key indicators	to identify the competitors industry, revenues, sales, customers, markets, products and services.
Analysis of competitor's position	to identify competitor's prices, production costs, costs to sell their products and services compared to your own system for similar products and services.
Analysis of current strategies	to identify and analyse your competitor's current strategies and tactics.
Analysis of future strategies	to develop possible scenarios of what you believe may be your competitors future strategies and tactics and the possible these tactics may have on your company

In a research study by Coca-Cola, it was found that one-third of its Diet Coke drinkers consumed 84 percent of the total product sold. On the basis of this type of data, companies are fighting to increase profits from high-consumption customers. Companies today, just like Coca-Cola and South Central Bell, are following an enterprise wide focus, examining all organisational departments for the purpose of sharing and leveraging information. The goal of this process is to transform the company from a marketing research, information-acquisition Company to a market intelligence enterprise that shares information for the purpose of being connected, responsive, and proactive to its customer.

A few years ago, South Central Bell (SCB) lost almost 27 percent of its intrastate long-distance telephone customers to other long-distance providers. Using highly refined information on the profitability of those customers, SCB segmented its defectors and tailored a strategy to win them back. The company was able to re-sign almost 50 percent of SCB's most profitable customers, leaving the unprofitable customers with the competition. Through additional research, SCB gained important information from those customers, including how competitors lured them away and how those customers rated the service quality of SCB. The

company learned that its service was weak and needed to be enhanced immediately (Hair, Bush and Ortinau 2003).

The market intelligence enterprise follows a different business model to the traditional organisation. This model promotes a competitive advantage by using customer information at the granular data level, that is, data that is extremely detailed, personalised, and particularly structured around the individual customer. This enterprise embraces the vision that targeting customers is not sufficient – capturing customers is the goal. On the basis of granular customer information, market intelligence enterprises anticipate the desires of the customer and refine their offerings according to this anticipation. This is commonly referred to as the customer-centric approach in a CRM environment. A Customer Centric Approach facilitates convenience and efficiency for customers in their interactions with the company. Again, as mentioned earlier, the purpose of the contact is to obtain information from the customer in order to build and solidify the relationship.

The market intelligence enterprise possesses four unique characteristics that shape and define its character. These characteristics are also the defining qualities of a sound CRM program: 1) The strategic use of customer information; 2) Information based on a transactional focus; 3) Enterprise wide approach to the use of information; and 4) Technology support of the CRM structure (Hair, Bush and Ortinau 2003).

2.6 Distributing Intelligence

A continuous flow of information is the lifeblood of a good market intelligence system; information about new technologies, markets, customers, the economic and regulatory environment, etc. Both formal (routine financial reporting, annual reports, etc.) and informal information (market comments and opinions) must be tapped. In addition, there is a wealth of knowledge buried in company databases, file servers and desktops and also the existence of the internet has swamped companies with a vast quantity of information (Tan Tsu Wee 2001. 19/4).

A marketing information system is described by Solomon, Marshal & Stuart (2008) as an organisations system for constantly gathering, sorting, analysing, storing and distributing to manager's relevant and timely marketing information. A marketing information system in

effect gathers and distributes market intelligence to relevant parties within the organisation to assist in strategic decision making.

Intelligence helps your company sustain and develop distinct competitive advantages by using the entire organisation and its networks to develop actionable insights about the environment (customers, competitor, regulars, technology...). It uses a systematic and ethical process involving, planning, collection, analysis, communication and management (Calof, 2008)

In a survey conducted on 1025 executives regarding their companies' usage of competitive intelligence (collection, analysis, and dissemination), they exposed that the practice of competitive intelligence, while strong in the area of information gathering, it was weak from a process and analytical perspective. Analysis of the survey produced the following results in the six areas studied.

Of note in the Planning and Focus section of the study was the large number of respondents who recognized that intelligence is more than just asking questions about competitors but involves other aspects of the environment (76%). Unfortunately, only 23% regularly interviewed executives to truly understand their strategic or decision making needs.

One of the more significant Collection results of the study was the high percentage of respondents who regularly get information about competitors or emerging technology from their employees (73%).

Analysis is considered by some to be the most important part of the intelligence process. However, analysis recorded the lowest means of any questionnaire sections. None of the nine analysis questions had more than 31% answering yes. It is clear the respondents place a great deal more time and effort in collection as opposed to analysis.

In the Communication section of the study, results revealed that 54% of the respondents indicated that the results were given to anyone in the organisation who was interested in the findings.

The results from the Process / Structure indicate that companies may not yet be investing appropriately in building the internal infrastructure required for a fully effective intelligence

efficacy. Although 49% indicated that they have convenient ways for employees to report intelligence input, only 13% have incentives to encourage this to happen.

Of all the sections in the questionnaire, the section on Awareness / Culture yielded the highest number of positive responses. With the exception of the use by senior management, all questions recorded greater than 70%. This indicates an organisational culture highly supportive of effective intelligence (Dishman and Calof, *Competitive Intelligence: a multiphase precedent to marketing strategy* 2008).

2.7 Intelligence and Technology

Dr Dan Power, founder of the association for Information Systems Special Interest Group on Decision Support, Knowledge and Data Management Systems (SIG DSS) and editor of Decision Support Systems Resources newsletter, defines a decision support system (DSS) as *“an interactive computer-based system or subsystem intended to help decision makers use communications technologies, data, documents, knowledge and/or models to identify and solve problems, complete decision process tasks, and make decisions”* (Hedgebeth 2007, Vol. 37 No. 4).

The need for making complex decisions, combined with the emergence of powerful information systems, gave birth to the field of business intelligence. BI's beginnings trace back to the creation of decision support systems in the 1960's. Since that time, five types of DSS have emerged: model-driven, data-driven, communications-driven, document-driven, and knowledge-driven. The internet prompted the creation of a sixth type, the web-based DSS, which powers today's web-centric databases and knowledge gateways.

TABLE 3 Business Intelligence Integration

Effective BI partnerships for business and information integration are:
Business is responsible for capturing BI value;
IT is responsible for delivering BI applications in an effective manner;
BI projects should be funded based on a projected return on investment;
BI expertise should be developed using a pool of knowledgeable business personnel;
Business expertise should be developed using a pool of knowledgeable IT personnel;
An organisational emphasis should be placed for BI in order for it to be successfully implemented.

Information based organisations should avail themselves of current business intelligence software offerings to manage their business intelligence applications (Hedgebeth 2007, Vol. 37 No. 4).

According to Adelman et al (2002), BI is a term that encompasses a wide range of analytical software solutions for gathering, consolidating, analysing, and providing access to information in a way that is supposed to help an enterprises employees make better decisions, Malhorta (2000) describes BI that facilitates the associates in the new form organisation, bringing real-time information to centralised repositories and support analytics that can be exploited at every level within the organisation. BI is the result of in-depth analysis of detailed business data, including database and application technologies, as well as analysis practices (Gangadharan and Swamy, 2004). BI is technically much broader, potentially encompassing knowledge management, enterprise resource planning, decision-support systems and data mining (Gangadharan and Swamy, 2004) (Ranjan 2008, Vol. 39 No. 4).

Firms are (Evans and Wurster, 2000; D'Aveni, 1994) experiencing environmental changes resulting from the new economics of information and the increasingly forceful and global nature of competition. Therefore as pointed out by Dijksterhuis et al. (1999) organisational survival depends on the building and integration of knowledge development and adjustment to the environment, as well as stimulating environmental changes through the firm's knowledge and practices. The key drivers examined by (Doherty et al, 2003) for underlining change are the application of information technologies and systems in any organisation. IT now is ever-present and ever more critical part of the fabric of the modern organisation, supporting its day to day operations and all aspects of the decision making process as well as its strategic position. As a result (Mahoney, 2002), the investments in IT that enable differentiation are of ever increasing significance (Ranjan 2008, Vol. 39 No. 4).

To make the kind of real-time decisions required in enterprises today, business users must be able to sort through an increasing volume of knowledge and information quickly while still maintaining high operational efficiency. Just a few years ago, managers were accustomed to waiting long periods of time to have their information requirements fulfilled. Today, however, they require the ability to use their own dashboards, control their analytic tools and generate their own reports using integrated BI tools through a comprehensive framework (Karbhari, 2006) (Ranjan 2008, Vol. 39 No. 4).

In the current business environment many companies offer similar products and use comparable technologies, making business processes the last remaining points of differentiation. Business intelligence platforms help management make better decisions in the exceedingly complex and ever changing business environment, to out think the competition, to run the business in the most efficient way, to truly understand their customer base, and to deliver individualised products and services. Business intelligence platforms are becoming more prevalent and sophisticated, and an increasing number of companies are integrating their BI and file management solutions. Management need to be aware of the wealth of information contained in these BI systems and take full advantage of them in the discovery process (Brannon 2010. Vol. 22. No. 7).

2.8 Customer Relationship Management & Intelligence

One of the primary roles of marketing research in the CRM process is to collect, store, and analyse customer interaction information (customer Knowledge). In doing so, marketing research takes on a new role that is unique to the CRM environment. This role is to transform the practice of marketing research into one of market intelligence. This approach moves away from traditional market research practices of pure data gathering, into one where data acquisition is strategic and transactional in focus. In short, market intelligence is based on real time customer information (Hair, Bush and Ortinau 2003).

Market intelligence begins with the idea of customer knowledge. Customer knowledge is the necessary starting point for any CRM process. An organisation cannot begin to address its customers' needs and wants (and thereby offer value) unless it understands clearly the growth and change of the customer. In a CRM environment the major use of customer knowledge data is as a means of assessing profitability. In addition, other information that is needed relates to providing increased value to the targeted segments of profitable and potentially profitable customers. Therefore, from a marketing research perspective, the four major questions to address in the CRM process are:

1. What kind of relationship will add value to the enterprise's customers (loyalty programs, preferred customer status, etc.)?
2. What is the value perception of the customer segment, and how can the value be enhanced (direct communication to customers, new services, etc.)?
3. What products and services, and what mode of delivery, have value to the customer segment (e.g., stock market alerts via Web-enabled cell phones)?
4. What are customers' responses to marketing and sales campaigns?

In an attempt to answer the four major questions, the marketing research responsibility is to capture and integrate information about consumers from multiple sources. This includes demographic and psychographic data, behavioural and preference data, complaint behaviour, and all other direct and indirect communications with the enterprise. Data of this nature are used for two purposes: to create customer profiles that can be used to tailor interactions with the customer and to segment customers in order to develop appropriate product and service offerings, marketing campaigns, and long term relationships (Hair, Bush and Ortinau 2003).

2.9 Marketing, Intelligence, and the SME

The internal records system supplies results data, but the marketing intelligence system supplies happenings data. A marketing intelligence system is a set of procedures and sources managers use to obtain everyday information about developments in the marketing environment. Marketing managers collect marketing intelligence by reading books, newspapers, and trade publications, talking to customers, suppliers, and distributors, monitoring “social media” on the Internet via online discussion groups, e-mailing lists and blogs; and meeting with other company managers (Kotler and Keller 2009).

Researchers widely agree that marketing in small firms differ from that of their larger counterparts (e.g. Fillis, 2002; Gilmore et al, 2001; Hill, 2001a; Coviello et al, 2000). Small firm marketing has been characterised as random, informal, unstructured, reactive, and built on as well as conforming to industry norms (Gilmore et al, 2001). Stokes (2000) adds that in small firms, marketing is used for the needs of the moment and only little attention is paid to plans, strategies and analysis. This is in contrast of marketing in large firms, which is seen as formal, planned and well structured (Reijonen 2010, Vol. 17 No. 2).

One reason for this difference is that small firms have certain limitations. Compared to their larger counterparts, small enterprises have limited resources related, for example to finance, time and marketing knowledge (Gilmore et al, 2001). As a result, complex theories and sophisticated processes seem to be unsuitable in small enterprises (Hogarth-Scott et al, 1996). Furthermore, it is argued that owner-managers of small firms tend to view marketing narrowly. The role and potential of marketing is regarded often from a narrow perspective that is close to sales management (Moller and Anttila, 1987). It is even argued that SME marketers may consider marketing as a synonym of either selling or advertising (Marcati et al, 2008) (Reijonen 2010, Vol. 17 No. 2).

Fuller (1994) argues that through marketing a firm aims to achieve competitive advantage by satisfying its customers more effectively and efficiently than its competitors and, thus, long-term profitability. In addition, he states that marketing places customers at the centre of the firm's activities. Marketing can be, then, regarded as a process that brings the firm in

constant and direct contact with its customers (Beverland and Lockshin, 2004). Marketing in small firms seems to be dependent on several factors. These include situation, nature of markets, growth stage, types of products and services as well as quality of management. (Hogarth-Scott et al, 1996). Carson (1993) suggests that general marketing concepts, approaches and theories are applied in small firms after several stages of “fitting” so that they become appropriate to a certain situation. First, the general marketing ideas have to fit particular characteristics of small business marketing. Second, a different type of marketing is applied to goods and services. Third, there is industry specific marketing and, finally individual firm specific marketing. Furthermore, when the impact of the owner-manager is all-pervading in every activity, it could be added to Carsons model, that there is also owner-manager specific marketing.

Many studies have shown that competence in marketing is a key determinant for the success or failure of a small firm (Chaston, 1997). Simpson et al, (2006) point out, however, that there is little empirical evidence supporting the claim that marketing activities improve business performance. There also seems to be a credibility gap: a firm can grow and profits can increase without any marketing planning. So, why should there be any marketing planning? (Carson, 1993). There are many factors inside the organisation and in the business environment that influence the performance. Thus, Simpson et al. (2006) argue that marketing orientation may only be successful under certain business conditions and due to the dynamic nature of the business environment a variety of approaches and strategies may prove to be relevant (Reijonen 2010, Vol. 17 No. 2).

During the last 60 years marketing thinking has experienced several changes. It has evolved from production and sales centred into customer and relationship focused marketing. Instead of short-term individual transactions marketers have started to value long-lasting relationships. Interaction has proven to be more efficient than one-way communication and it has been realised that marketing is not a task of just the marketing department but the whole organisation (see Gronroos, 2006) (Reijonen 2010, Vol. 17 No. 2).

Marketing as a culture / philosophy refers to the values and beliefs a firm holds about the importance of the customers to their operations. Furthermore, it includes the understanding that customer needs pave the way for marketing and product or service development. Marketing as a strategy emphasises on how a firm competes in its markets and how it uses

segmentation, targeting and positioning. Marketing as tactics / methods focuses on the use of the marketing mix (4 P's – product, price, place, promotion); in other words, on the implementation of marketing strategy. Stokes (2000) adds a fourth dimension to this list of marketing: market intelligence. Market intelligence refers to Kohli and Jaworskis (1990) market orientation and means the organisation wide generation, dissemination and responsiveness to the information gathered about customers and competitors (Reijonen 2010, Vol. 17 No. 2).

2.10 Strategic Intelligence

It is well known by students and managers alike that in order to evaluate the position of an organisation, it must be compared against its competitors. This involves addressing questions such as: what are the competitions objectives? , and what are the competitions strengths and weaknesses? In the answers to these simple questions should exist the basis of a company's business strategy (Bernardt 1994).

Marketing research is a systematic and objective identification, collection, analysis and dissemination of information for the purpose of assisting management in decision making which is related to the identification and solutions of problems and opportunities in marketing (Malhotra, 1996; Zikmund, 1996; Aaker et al., 1995). Marketing research does not replace management skills; it reinforces management thinking by testing conventional wisdom and commonly held assumptions in business. In short, marketing research provides managers with new perspectives for strategic planning (Tan Tsu Wee 2001. 19/4).

Marketing research and strategic planning have become more essential in providing firms the opportunity to stay ahead of competition. During times of economic boom firms are provided with ample slack resources to penetrate the market. The excess resources of the firms allow them certain margins of error for failure of their products or services but these tend to diminish during periods of uncertainty. Thus companies are more averse to taking business risks and attempt to increase the probability of right decisions in the market as there is much less latitude for errors due to their companies limited resources. Managers need to know their business and markets for strategic planning to be effective. While past experience may be helpful to the managers in the understanding of those factors influencing successful competitive practices, much of this knowledge exists as untested assumptions as to their

validity and value. This not only makes strategic planning difficult, it also becomes more like a guessing game. The role of marketing research cannot be overestimated, especially in times of uncertainty and it is the responsibility of managers to take a closer look at what constitutes good research and how it can be used to help businesses to cope in difficult situations (Tan Tsu Wee 2001. 19/4).

Market intelligence provides the input and energy for the development and execution of effective strategy within a strategically managed organisation. By doing so, market intelligence provides the essential underpinnings of strategic management, which is described as “an integrated set of actions aimed at increasing the long term well being and strength of an enterprise in relation to its competitors” (Sammon et al, 1984). Several factors contribute to an organisations growth. Decision making gets more complicated as the size of the business and market share increases, as does the opposite when a company downsizes and market share decreases. This implies a critical need for strategic focus – focusing on customer / competitive analysis. Both elements are critically dependent on rigorous marketing intelligence (Bernardt 1994).

The Telfer School of Management at the University of Ottawa has established a management insight research programme. The aim of the programme is to unify and promote strategic thinking that may be labelled foresight, competitive or business intelligence, forecasting, strategic planning and similar names. Telfer choose to call this Management Insight, signifying the use of clear thinking, sensible data gathering, careful judicious use of software/procedural tools and wise sharing of information to provide for well-founded decision-making and enhanced performance (Calof, 2008).

2.11 Influence, implications and endorsements

Extraordinary changes in the business environment around the world have created new forms of competition as well as new competitors in the global and domestic markets. Globalisation is forcing firms to rethink their marketing strategies and information gathering. Samiee (2008) cited three developments in the business environment stand out as having a major part in this shift. The first shift has to do with the rapid growth of globalisation. Firms today have a greater involvement in global business transactions. In particular, the tremendous growth in outsourcing activities has engaged new players in global business-to-business activities,

which he believes, greater attention should be paid. The second change agent is the evolution to a more complete approach to controlling supply chain systems through greater coordination of entire distribution channels. To address the needs of their customers, organisations require harmony and continuity in their supply chain systems and as supply sources are increasingly global, for example, through increased outsourcing, alliances have become much more important. The third development fostering a major change is how firms conduct business and compete in the transition to electronic forms of exchange, particularly with respect to information access, storage, and retrieval (Samiee 2008).

TABLE 4 The Competitive Intelligence Foundation (2006) commissioned study

CI focused on producing:	New or increased revenue
	New products or services
	Cost savings / avoidance
	Time savings
	Profit increases
	Meeting financial goals
Systems focused on intelligence topics: (given in rank order)	Company profiles
	Competitive benchmarking
	Early warning alerts
	Market or industry trends
	Customer or supplier profile
	Technology assessment
	Economic / political analysis
	Executive profiles
Intelligence resulted in supporting decisions in:	Corporate or business strategy
	Sales or business development
	Market entry decisions
	Product development
	R&D / Technology decisions
	M&A decisions
	Due diligence
	Joint venture decisions
	Regulatory / Legal responses

This study reveals that CI influences a wide range of decision-making areas and is a vital ingredient in the formulation of business strategy. It is difficult to identify any feature of organisations activities which would not acquire a positive benefit from CI input (Calof and Wright 2008).

Marketing research and strategic planning have become more essential in providing firms the opportunity to stay ahead of competition. One development in the marketing research industry is the integration of basic research approaches and the delivery of packaged solutions and franchised systems. The past decade has also witnessed a rapid development in the methodological and technical aspects of data analysis and research. A group of technical specialists whose knowledge cuts across industry boundaries becomes a big asset to any research agency (Tan Tsu Wee 2001. 19/4).

There has also been a trend for a more holistic and solution-oriented approach towards marketing research. Clients appear to be no longer content with just having information pointing to sales volume, market share and so on. While simple data and information does provide a good overview of how the firms and their competitors are faring, it stops short of testing and eliciting those critical factors that enable them to stay ahead of the competition and how best to respond to competitors activities. Much research today provides a great deal of interesting-to-know information, but it is of limited use when it comes to satisfying the more important needs of clients, such as in strategy, challenging decisions, and the formulation of strategic plan.

Intelligent use of the internet can provide a valuable and additional resource for marketing, competitor and business intelligence. The growing size, depth and reach of the internet can be harnessed for marketing intelligence and companies that do not exploit this medium stand to risk losing out on knowledge which could easily be translated to good earnings and profits. Because of the dynamic nature of industries, market intelligence has to be performed on a systematic and continuous basis and the internet is emerging as one of the more cost effective and strategic platforms to accomplish this. Fundamentally, the internet can be used in all phases of the marketing intelligence process of scan, analyse and distribute. Even if all marketing intelligence can be scanned and analysed off-line from annual reports, trade associations, ex-employees, suppliers and customers, the internet still presents an effective medium to channel intelligence and knowledge quickly and globally in a just-in-time, anytime, anywhere scenario (Tan Tsu Wee 2001. 19/4).

The marketing planning process provides a ready-made structure for homing in on our strategic assumptions and challenging the most critical. For most of us, this on its own is a

substantial step forward (Piercy, Market-Led Strategic Change - Making Marketing Happen in Your Organisation 1991).

In order to maximise opportunities, organisations must first consider their strategic position. Only then will they be able to decide where and how the company should position itself. Appraisal of past performance, marketing strengths and weaknesses, reputation for quality products, and mission need to be addressed. Most importantly, the driving force in meeting strategic objectives is the marketing intelligence system (Conway, Saban and Lanasa 2000). Many companies recognise the significant connection between strategic planning and market intelligence. Two-thirds of the population surveyed by Conway, Saban, & Lanasa had increased market intelligence expenditures dramatically and three-fifths said market intelligence had an important impact on their tactical and strategic decision making.

Organisations that realise the benefits to be gained through market intelligence usually have a strong foothold in the market in which they operate. The trend to employ market intelligence will continue to rise and companies that fail to identify the need for market intelligence will lose their strategic and competitive advantage. The backward thinking organisation that believes downsizing market intelligence activities will increase profits through cost reduction will find just the opposite, as weak market intelligence reduces its visionary capability, and potentially therefore its market leadership (Conway, Saban and Lanasa 2000).

Companies that advertise regularly are conducting more advertising research in recent times. This is due to the prevailing economic slowdown that saw a corresponding drop in advertising and promotion budgets. Tight budgets mean less room for expensive mistakes in marketing promotions. Companies are therefore more willing to spend money on advertising research that can ensure the production of "good ads" (Tsu Wee Tan and Ahmed U. 1999).

2.12 Conclusion

Based on the analysis we can conclude that networking practices do have a significantly positive effect on business excellence. This supports the general hypothesis that the strength of the relationship between networking practices and business excellence is significant and positive. The analysis shows that groupings of network practices are required to explain SME business excellence. These findings are consistent with the findings from the literature.

The networking practice with the highest explanatory power was found to be the allocation of resources to maintain formal support systems such as communication linkages. It is important to keep in mind that the findings are a statistical association only. The results do not guarantee that SME's will definitely produce improvement in business excellence.

The main implication of the research results for SME managers is that a typical manufacturing SME that engages in networking practice is more likely to achieve business excellence through the establishment of formal support systems such as job rotation, training and communication linkages, incorporation of diverse points of view, and learning from mistakes, than without these practices (Terziovski 2003 Vol. 7 No. 2).

There is evidence in the literature for a positive link between market research and business success. It has been claimed that the level and type of market research activity has a variety of beneficial effects (See table 5 below). Hence, marketing intelligence is seen as an important prerequisite for organisational effectiveness (Barabba and Zaltman, 1991), an intuitively appealing proposition given that the basic purpose of marketing intelligence is to "help the manager make decisions that are more likely to be correct than incorrect" (Peterson, 1988, p. 9), and that "increasing percentage of good decisions should be manifested in improved bottom-line performance" (Lehman, 1989, p. 14).

TABLE 5 Literature Evidence to a positive link between research and business success

Slater and Narver, 1997	Being the most important factor in overall business success
Moorman, 1995	Enhancing organisational performance
Sinkula, 1994	Leading to organisational learning
Narver and Slater, 1990; Kohli and Jaworski, 1990	Assisting in the creation of superior customer value
Zikmund, 1986; McDaniel and Gates, 1991	Facilitating the achievement of profitability
Hooley and Lynch, 1985; Baker et al., 1986	Enhancing business performance in general
Gandz and Whipple, 1977	Increasing the probability of successful marketing

Despite the apparent consensus that marketing intelligence is central to business success, surprisingly little empirical work has been conducted on the link between market research and business performance (Ganeshasundaram and Henley 2007).

Marketing Intelligence refers to the 'soft' or qualitative information which we get from a vast array of sources: personal experiences, sales staff reports, distributor feedback, press articles, trade association publications, government statistics, conference reports, technical literature, ad hoc meetings, gossip, and so on. If you say 'but this information is probably inaccurate, incomplete, sketchy, random, haphazard and unscientific', then I would have to agree with you. However, there is an important fact to bear in mind: all the evidence is that how managers get to understand and make sense of both their companies and the outside world through precisely this type of information. This is just as true, incidentally, of sophisticated international corporations, as it is of smaller organisations. This would seem to be the unavoidable reality – age of new technology or not. There is nothing particularly wrong with this, incidentally. It is part of how we reduce the incomprehensible complexity of the world to something simpler that we can comprehend, so we can get on with things.

However, this does suggest two interesting things: first, that there is scope in most situations for managing intelligence flows more systematically to make our view of the world more valid; and, second, understanding how managers are influenced by intelligence sources gives us a clue as to how we may affect some of the assumptions they make and the dogma to which they subscribe. We will deal only with the first of these for the moment.

To improve our intelligence gathering, we can start reducing the random element. This may come down to nothing more fundamental than deciding what are the critical things to watch in the environment and systematically collecting all the available intelligence together, to understand what is happening and what we can do about it. In some cases we have achieved quite remarkable things very cheaply in companies with apparently little or no market and competitive information, just by introducing regular sales force and distributor questionnaires which focused on the critical issues of market sizes, trends and sources of competition, market by market. In other words, useful and important things can be achieved simply by managing the 'soft' data. However, the real question is who decides which are the critical issues, which pieces of information we take notice of, and which things we respond to (Piercy, Market-Led Strategic Change - Making Marketing Happen in Your Organisation 1991)

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Methodology is a system of methods used in a particular area of study or activity. (Oxford 2010) This study aims to examine the market intelligence activities of SME's in the northwest of Ireland. To achieve this endeavour ten companies were selected and researched by semi-structured in-depth interview with the marketing manager or senior representative. A further fifty companies were surveyed by telephone in order to ascertain the level of intelligence gathering and internal dissemination within SME's in the region.

The American Marketing Association has defined marketing research as follows:

Marketing research is the function which links the consumer, customer, and public to the marketer through information – information used to identify and define marketing opportunities and problems; generate, refine, and evaluate marketing actions; monitor marketing performance; and improve understanding of marketing as a process. Marketing research specifies the information required to address these issues; designs the method for collecting information; manages and implements the data collection process; analyses the results; and communicates the findings and their implications (Mc Daniel and Gates 1996).

The role of marketing research is not confined to the field of marketing, but to business as a whole, as its function is to provide information so that well founded decisions may be taken (M. J. Baker, Research For Marketing 1991).

3.2 Research Strategy

Marketing research is a methodology-led process that systematically and objectively investigates a problem or opportunity confronting marketing management. (Domegan and Fleming 2007) In order to gather the information needed for this research, a mixed methodology approach was used in which qualitative research methodologies were supported by quantitative methods. Qualitative data is associated with exploratory research, it looks at

the why and how of particular issues whilst quantitative data is concerned with the facts and figures of the particular issue. (Domegan and Fleming, Marketing Research in Ireland 2007) The mixed method approach was employed as qualitative research provides insight and a richness of information but lacks the conviction and credibility which are associated with quantification (Baker, Research For Marketing 1991)

3.3 Approach / Methods

The author chose a mixed method approach of primary data collection constituting a combination of in-depth semi structured interviews and telephone surveys. The study was aimed at analysing the intelligence activities of small to medium enterprises in the Northwest of Ireland. The research was carried out by interviewing seven companies from four different sectors, service industry, motor industry, medical pharmaceutical, and food and beverage producers. A further forty companies were surveyed by telephone from a wide variety of sectors in order to ascertain the level of intelligence gathering and internal dissemination within the SME's in the region.

An interview involves a personal exchange of information between an interviewer and one or more interviewees in which the interviewer seeks to obtain specific information on a topic with the cooperation of the interviewee (Baker, Research For Marketing 1991). A semi-structured interview contains a combination of both closed and open-ended questions and was considered most appropriate in this case as the combination approach benefited in that the researcher was able to gain an understanding of the topic and by the same token each respondent was required to answer the same questions which enabled data collected to be aggregated and analysed (Baker, Research For Marketing 1991).

Advantages of the personal interview are regarded as; because of the greater interaction between interviewer and respondent, the personal interview has great flexibility. The personal interview tends to have less non-response error than other survey methods. Disadvantages of the personal interview are personal interviews are often impractical to conduct over wide geographical regions because of time and cost. There is a potential for interviewer bias (Domegan and Fleming 2007).

The telephone is rapidly increasing in popularity as a method of administering surveys. Nowadays almost everyone can be reached by telephone. A major advantage of this method is the relatively low cost compared to alternatives. However, on the negative side, the external validity of telephone surveys is reduced by the fact that only people with a telephone and willing to put up with the intrusion can be surveyed (McBurney 2001). The researcher took into account the time factor (both theirs and the respondent) as well as the cost factor in choosing this method of collecting research.

Secondary research was conducted by way of a literature review in order to give insight into the field of market / marketing / business / competitive intelligence. The researcher conducted an extensive review by utilising a wide variety of sources such as academic journals, books, websites, business publications, marketing and business trade associations and organisations.

Non-probability samples that are unrestricted are called convenience samples. Such a sample is the least reliable design but is normally the cheapest and easiest to conduct. In this case, researchers or field workers are given the freedom to choose whomever they find to be included into the sample. Hence, the name "convenience". While convenience sample has no controls to ensure precision, it may still be a useful procedure. Often you will take such a sample to test ideas or even to gam ideas about a subject of interest. Such samples may also give evidence that is so overwhelming as to make the more sophisticated sampling unnecessary. (Emory and Cooper 1991). A convenience sample is a non-random sample that is chosen for practical reasons (McBurney, Research Methods 2001).

The researcher chose to survey the population using a convenience sample because of their extensive experience of SME's in the region over the past 14 years. Thus companies were selected for interview based on their perceived standing in their respective sectors combined with their willingness to take part in the study. Companies were approached by letter (see appendix) initially; this was followed up by a telephone call two working days later. Ten companies were selected as appropriate for interview. Seven companies agreed to take part in the study, the companies who opted out of the study did so as a result of timing issues on the study as it clashed with company holidays in both cases. However, these companies took part in the telephone survey.

3.4 Validity

The issue of validity was addressed in this study by conducting the research from two different approaches, namely in-depth semi structured interviews and telephone surveys. The in-depth interviews were conducted with companies who are renowned for being market leaders in their respective industries, whilst the telephone surveys were taken from a much wider sample.

3.5 Hypothesis

1. Because many SME's are owner managed, they are not inclined to focus on the competitive environment to the progress of the company and are thus re-active with their strategic decisions.
2. Some SME's have difficulty in informing all of their relevant employees of intelligence / information that will benefit the organisations decision makers in the long run.

3.6 Research Objectives

The culmination of the problem / opportunity formulation process is a statement of the research objectives. Research objectives are stated in terms of the precise information necessary and desired to solve the marketing management problem. Research objectives are basically a restatement of what management needs to know to make a decision in research terms (McDaniel and Gates 1996)

The following objectives were used by the researcher to gather information on the market intelligence activities of SME's in the northwest.

- (1) The level of intelligence gathering activity within SME's
- (2) The level of intelligence analysing activity within SME's
- (3) The level of intelligence distribution within SME's

3.7 Research Analysis

In-depth interviews were recorded with the interviewees consent (See Appendix C for script). Following interviews the researcher reviewed the stored recordings to analyse the findings and prepare a case study for each interview. Following the research objectives, information was categorised, analysed and cross referenced against other participants for trends and comparisons. The telephone interviews were recorded on a survey sheet (one sheet for each interview) for ease of recording (Appendix B). Once all surveys were complete the research findings were processed through the research database system "Statistical Package for Social Sciences" (or SPSS) (See Appendix E for details) Further analysis was conducted using excel worksheets (See Appendix D for details)

As a mixed methodology approach was used during the research phase, the case studies were cross referenced against the findings of the survey to broaden the scope and to underpin the outcomes.

3.8 Ethical Issues

Ethics refers to moral principles or values generally governing the conduct of an individual or group. (McDaniel and Gates 1996) It is essential that marketing researchers restrict their research activities to practices that are ethically sound Ethically sound research considers the interests of the general public, the respondents, the client, and the research profession as well as those of the researcher (Tull and Hawkins 1993).

For the purpose of this study the researcher chose to apply ESOMAR (The European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research) guidelines of researcher responsibilities Hence, the following provisions were made under ESOMAR's code of conduct (see table 6 below) (Domegan and Fleming, Marketing Research in Ireland 2007)

TABLE 6 ESOMAR's Code of Conduct

Respondent's cooperation in this research project is entirely voluntary at all stages. They will not be misled when being asked for their cooperation.
Respondent's anonymity will be strictly preserved.
The researcher will take all reasonable precautions to ensure that respondents are in no way harmed or adversely affected as a result of their participation in this study.
Respondents must be told if recording equipment is being used. If the respondent so wishes, the record or relevant section of it must be deleted or destroyed.
Respondents are entitled to withdraw from the interview at any stage, or refuse to answer any question.
The researcher will not use information to identify respondents without the permission of the respondent.

Ethical considerations in this study focus on the voluntary participation of the respondents by obtaining their consent to participate in the study. The purpose of the research and the participation expected are communicated to respondents as part of the process.

3.9 Limitations

Fifty companies were contacted by telephone to take part in the survey, however ten companies declined to take part in the survey as there was no one available to take the call. The researcher proposed to call back at a more appropriate time; this was not feasible in all cases.

Three companies of the ten selected for in-depth interview were unwilling or unable to partake in the research.

A difficulty of the in-depth interview is that the respondent may be unwilling to provide confidential information or answers to sensitive questions on a one-to-one basis (Domegan and Fleming 2007).

3.10 Conclusions

In order to fulfil the research objectives it was necessary for the researcher to use both qualitative and quantitative research methods. A questionnaire was designed using closed ended questions with ratings on a Likert scale to enable analysis and comparisons. The semi-structured contained a combination on open and closed ended questions to give the respondents the freedom to elaborate where possible.

The data was analysed using the SPSS software system and presented using a combination of SPSS queries and Excel spreadsheets

Ethical dilemmas were considered and addressed and all respondents were anonymous throughout the research.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the results of the primary research in line with the research objectives. The research comprised of two methods of data collection.

1. In-depth semi-structured interviews with 7 SME's
2. Telephone surveys on 40 SME's

The researcher devised a script in order to conduct the in-depth interviews, structured in such a way as to cover the research objectives whilst using open ended questioning as to enable the interviewee the ability to answer in their own words. Thus broadening the scope of the topic and deepening the understanding of the topic within the population. The findings of the in-depth interviews are presented in case study format to enable the identification of trends and the analysis of data.

A questionnaire was created and administered by telephone survey for the purpose of speed and agility. The questioning was structured using a Likert Scale to enable analysis and cross tabulation of data, highlighting trends and best practices. All data from the questionnaire was entered into SPSS which enabled the researcher to analyse and present the findings.

Analysis of the primary data through the case studies and the SPSS package have enabled the researcher to attain the research objectives and assisted in the process of highlighting trends and making recommendations, which can be found in chapter five.

4.2 Profile of Population for Interview

Population for this study was taken from small and medium sized enterprises as defined in chapter 1 operating within the northwest region of Ireland. The researcher chose to survey the population using a convenience sample because of their extensive experience of SME's in the region over the past 14 years. Thus companies were selected for interview based on their

perceived standing in their respective sectors combined with their willingness to take part in the study.

4.3 Interview Company Case Studies

4.3.1 Case Study Company A

CASE STUDY 1 Company A

COMPANY PROFILE

Sector:	Insurance Brokers
No. Employees:	12
Person Interviewed:	Owner (Managing Director)
Customer Base:	Local, Regional and National

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

The main sources of intelligence this company use to find information and intelligence are suppliers, customers and trade associations.

According to the interviewee the staff is a major source of intelligence and they are encouraged at all times to gather and share information.

Information on product viability and market demographics are very difficult to gain from the underwriters. For this purpose management and staff must source information in order to make good decisions.

The competition must be constantly monitored and this is done on a daily basis. Any sudden change in direction or policy is immediately shared throughout the organisation. The interviewee stated that the company is totally aware of the competition. This is in large part to the governance by the Financial Regulator of the insurance industry. The interviewee informed the researcher that legally an insurance broker must inform a customer if they can receive a product cheaper elsewhere. Thus the system is completely transparent.

Information required for decision making (especially major decisions) is at hand most of the time, however from time to time decisions have to be made on past experience or knowledge.

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE ANALYSING ACTIVITY

Internal data is analysed by data mining and reporting

Benchmarking against opposition is commonplace

Management work very closely together and share intelligence and make decisions on a real time basis

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE DISTRIBUTION ACTIVITY

The organisation distributes intelligence and information through internal reports and meetings.

There is a high level of satisfaction with the level of integration between staff and departments in relation to the sharing. A major reason for this according to the interviewee is having great staff and everyone working very close together.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Business intelligence is primarily used to keep abreast of the competition and to quickly react to customer requests

Major decisions rarely get made without supporting intelligence.

Management are “happy enough” with business insight at present but would like to improve it.

Business insight is shared with all employees to a point. Intelligence relating to the strategic decision making of the company is kept at management level.

The interviewee feels that research efforts have underpinned good decisions

“Good decisions are made with good information”

“Information is out there – it’s down to you to go and get it”

Every employee must complete 26 hours of professional development each year as part of industry regulation and requirements.

INTERVIEWER NOTE

This company takes a proactive approach to business

Interviewee portrays a deep respect and understanding for the competitive environment

4.3 2 Case Study Company B

CASE STUDY 2 Company B

COMPANY PROFILE

Sector	Franchise Motor Dealer
No Employees	45
Person Interviewed	Owner (Dealer Principle)
Customer Base	Local, Regional and National

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

The manufacturer provides most of the market and competitor intelligence required for this business

An outside research consultant is used and provides reports. These reports try to identify potential customers

The marketing manager mines internal databases to identify customers who are due for service or customers who may potentially be in the market for a new car. Customers due to purchase or service are sent a letter which is followed up with a phone call a week later. There is almost a 20% success rate from this endeavour

Competition is constantly monitored both within the brand and outside. The business is very territorial and a close eye is kept on the county registration report published by the SIMI (Society of Irish Motor Industry) to ensure that brand competitors are not selling into the district. This report is also used to ensure that competitive brands are not gaming ground on a local basis

According to the interviewee the organisation is completely aware of the competition

Very rarely are decisions made without relative information. The manufacturer ensures that the company has a very high awareness of competitive intelligence

Information is always on hand when required

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE ANALYSING ACTIVITY

Information and intelligence is analysed by internal reporting

The company is benchmarked against competitors both on internal reports and by external (industry and manufacturer reports)

The marketing manager trawls databases and gathers information for distribution to the relevant departments during weekly meetings or as required

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE DISTRIBUTION ACTIVITY

The organisation distributes intelligence and information through internal reports, meetings, and online through the website, CRM system and emails

There is a vast amount of intelligence data distributed through this company

For example Customer satisfaction surveys from manufacturer monthly

 Internal performance reports – targets etc – weekly

 Sales performance targets are monitored at sales meetings each day

 Customer profiling is received from the manufacturer for each model and country Also the direct competition for each

Management are extremely happy with the level of integration and information sharing between employees and departments

All information is shared with concerned employees and all employees have the same information Targets are placed on notice boards, customer satisfaction surveys are published internally also

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Business intelligence is used to react quickly to customer demand and to increase customer loyalty

The level of customer lifetime value is a major consideration when attracting and retaining customers according to the interviewee

Management keep an extremely close eye on operations by monitoring key performance indicators (KPI's) on a daily basis This eliminates any major surprises according to the interviewee

Decisions are never made without the relevant information being at hand

Management are happy with the present level of business insight This insight is shared with all employees

Employees are customer focused and management ensure that standards do not slip in customer service at any time

Research activities and intelligence gathering have benefited the organisation by improving general awareness throughout the organisation. It enables the organisation to be proactive and flexible

INTERVIEWER NOTE

Interviewee accepts that the organisation is fortunate to sell a brand that is extremely well managed by the manufacturer

However this company takes a proactive approach to business and is extremely customer focused

There is a high awareness of the competitive environment

4.3 3 Case Study Company C

CASE STUDY 3 Company C

COMPANY PROFILE

Sector	Food Distribution
No Employees	8
Person Interviewed	Owner (Managing Director)
Customer Base	Local, Regional

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

This company uses customers and suppliers mainly as sources of intelligence and information

In the past management would attend exhibitions and conferences but resources are now too tight to take time out from day to day business

Customers are surveyed very rarely

There are no outside agencies employed to conduct research

The organisation tries to keep abreast of the competition The customers are the main source of intelligence in this respect

On a scale of 1-5 the awareness of the competition is rated at 3 by the interviewee

Information required for major decisions is not in place 50% of the time when decisions are made

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE ANALYSING ACTIVITY

Meetings are rare as resources are tight

There is no structured in house reporting

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE DISTRIBUTION ACTIVITY

There are no internal reports, important information is emailed

Interviewee states that the company has a problem in that staff tend to work in their own corner and not share information.

There could be much better integration between staff and departments, often a link is missed and opportunities are lost.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Business intelligence is used to keep on top of customer satisfaction as price is very sensitive in this business.

Interviewee finds it hard to keep on top of customer relationship management.

Major decisions are made without the support of market intelligence more than 50% of the time.

Interviewee is not happy with the level of business insight at present. "We need to build better information and a larger customer base".

Business insight is kept at management level, other employees are told on a need to know basis.

Employees are customer focused.

The inability of the company to gather and share information has a negative effect on operations as opportunities are being lost. According to the interviewee, employees are completely focused on the day to day running of the business.

INTERVIEWER NOTE

Company has cut back on staff in the past year; this has had a negative effect on the operations of the business. Routes have been reduced and as a result customers have been lost.

Interviewee accepts that business cannot be taken for granted, however times are extremely difficult and company is doing its best to stay afloat.

This company is reactive with their decision making.

This family run business is a good example of what the dangers are of not being in tune with the competitive environment. There is very little strategic thinking at this organisation.

Company lives by the "quick fix" solution approach (according to the interviewee).

4 3 4 Case Study Company D

CASE STUDY 4 Company D

COMPANY PROFILE

Sector	Food & Beverages
No Employees	6
Person Interviewed	Owner (Managing Director)
Customer Base	Local, Regional

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

Employees are the major source of intelligence gathering Business model is set up in a way where sales representatives are not used in the traditional manner Delivery drivers are used as sales reps and these employees are the lifeblood of the information flow within the company

Suppliers and customers are also a source of intelligence

Reports have been purchased in the past by marketing research organisations, however the interviewee found that the result did not justify the cost of these reports

Van drivers monitor the competition continuously, for every stop made the level of competition is monitored

On a scale of 1-5 the interviewee stated the level of awareness of the competition is 4

Most important decisions are made as a result of obtaining information / intelligence

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE ANALYSING ACTIVITY

Customer transactions and patterns are not analysed to highlight future orders or potential for growth

There are no official standardised meetings

Drivers on road feed back information to management and other employees

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE DISTRIBUTION ACTIVITY

There is no official internal reporting conducted However the size of the company allows for a lot of communication between employees

The interviewee is satisfied with the level of integration between departments and employees
“Everyone in the company works together so integration and communications is no problem – yes I’m satisfied”

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Business intelligence and information is used to grow the business, to react to demand, and to keep in touch with competition

Decisions are rarely made without the aid of intelligence / information

Interviewee is happy with the level of business insight at present, he feels that the company is fortunate to have excellent employees

Insight is shared with all employees

Interviewee is happy that all employees are customer focused

INTERVIEWER NOTE

Interviewee spoke of a credit control problem existing within the company Over the past 18 months customer credit has slipped from just over 30 days to just over 70 This point was made by other companies during this research

This organisation has been “burned” in the past by consultant companies who charged a lot of money but made very bad advice to the company The company had to re-brand as a result of this Consequently the interviewee is adamant in keeping the business model simple This is slowing or even stunting the growth of this brand

4.3.5 Case Study Company E

CASE STUDY 5 Company E

COMPANY PROFILE

Sector: Motor Industry
No. Employees: 5
Person Interviewed: Owner (Managing Director)
Customer Base: Local, Regional

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

The best source of intelligence for this company is its customers. Also suppliers and trade magazines are cited as a valuable source of information.

There is no active research or monitoring of the competition. Interviewee stated that there was no time for this exercise. However there is a certain amount of feedback from customers on the competition in relation to quality and pricing.

On a scale of 1-5 awareness of the competition is rated at 2.

A lot of decisions are made without the desired intelligence in place. (more often than not according to the interviewee)

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE ANALYSING ACTIVITY

There is no internal reporting.

Company is benchmarked against the competition whenever there is information to do so.

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE DISTRIBUTION ACTIVITY

There are no official reports or meetings.

Management makes all decisions. Interviewee stated that company is small so there is good opportunity to discuss with employees because of the close proximity of workstations.

Interviewee is satisfied with the level of integration between employees in relation to information sharing and communication. Company is small and everyone works together.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Business intelligence is used mainly to match pricing of competitors

Interviewee stated that very often decisions are made without required market intelligence – estimated 50% of decisions made in this way

Interviewee is not satisfied with the level of business insight at present Stated that he finds it hard to find time for researching, and also can't afford to subcontract it

Employees are not customer focused Management deal with customers Technicians are job focused and do not deal with customers

INTERVIEWER NOTE

Company operates on a cost plus basis – if customers take business to the competition no effort is made to retain them

Company suffers from a lack of resources

Interviewee wishes to have more time to spend on strategic issues, however is happy with the level of orders The company is growing slowly at present

4.3.6 Case Study Company F

CASE STUDY 6 Company F

COMPANY PROFILE

Sector	Restaurant & Take Away
No Employees	67
Person Interviewed	Owner (Managing Director)
Customer Base	Local, Regional, National

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

Interviewee stated that customers are the most important source of intelligence Suppliers are also a major source of information

Company does not purchase outside reports or market research

Employees are also a great source of intelligence, management meet often to discuss ideas and developments

There is a good awareness of the competition, interviewee stated that “we try to keep an eye on what they are doing, marketing, promotions etc – especially in the home delivery end of the business”

Interviewee stated that for the restaurant, quality and service are the most critical factors so the focus is here and not on the competition

On a scale of 1-5 awareness of the competition is stated at 3

Rarely are decisions made without the benefit of required information

Interviewee stated that information required for important decisions is available immediately For example, the company has a purchasing policy which ensures management purchase in the required fashion from approved vendors

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE ANALYSING ACTIVITY

There are no official reports

There are structured regular management meetings

Interviewee stated that there is a large amount of discussion between management and employees in an unstructured manner

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE DISTRIBUTION ACTIVITY

Intelligence is distributed through weekly meetings or on a needs basis

Management meet and discuss issues, and then distribute the information through their respective teams

The interviewee is satisfied with the level of integration between staff and departments

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Business intelligence is used to react to customer demand

Customer relationship management is also stated as the major concern of management

Major decisions are rarely made without the benefit of market intelligence, interviewee stated the level to be approximately 10%

Interviewee is satisfied with the level of business insight at present, however feels that there is room for improvement

Interviewee feels that all employees are not as customer focused as they would like Interviewee feels that this is a trait that comes more easily to some people than others

The benefits of intelligence gathering are stated as

A good general awareness throughout the organisation

INTERVIEWER NOTE

Owner is responsible for the marketing function and activities The company is franchised with 4 entities in total

Interviewee stated that it's not about being the best (business), its about satisfying the customer and getting them back into the restaurant

There is no training policy, however even though its not a major problem the interviewee feels that the organisation would benefit from a centralised programme as its important to have the right staff trained in the right way

Owner policy is to keep the organisation structure as flat as possible and believes that titles are a hindrance to industrial harmony This organisation is extremely customer focused The customer experience is managed expertly

The owner is hands on and is always available to staff and is thus a major presence in the operations of this organisation

4.3.7 Case Study Company G

CASE STUDY 7 Company G

COMPANY PROFILE

Sector Medical / Pharmaceutical

No Employees 35

Person Interviewed Marketing Manager

Customer Base International

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

Distributors are the primary source of marketing intelligence and information at this organisation

End users (patients in hospitals) and customers are also a major source of intelligence

Occasionally the company purchase trade research reports

End users and distributors are surveyed regularly by the marketing department

Competitors are constantly monitored Its commonplace to acquire competitor's products for testing On a rating scale of 1-5 awareness of the competition is 4

Opportunities pursued by company are normally "blue ocean", as a consequence it can sometimes be hard to get information for such projects as it does not always exist

The interviewee feels that if the effort is made information can always be obtained in a short while for decision making

There are regular scheduled internal meetings Management meet on a needs basis

The company CRM system is updated when intelligence is gathered

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE ANALYSING ACTIVITY

Information / intelligence is analysed through in-house reports to monitor trends based on retrospective sales analysis

Internal data is "mined" and utilised where possible and appropriate

Data from the U.S. market is very strong and reliable. However this is not the case for the rest of the world – where U.S. data is extrapolated and applied. This is not an ideal scenario although it is more accurate than existing data for these markets.

LEVEL OF INTELLIGENCE DISTRIBUTION ACTIVITY

Relevant information is always circulated through internal reports and meetings.

Marketing team collect intelligence and present it to management in appropriate formats (e.g. PowerPoint).

There is not a strong link between departments in relation to integration and information sharing. The company has not suffered from this to date. Due to internal politics integration is not perfect – there is room for improvement.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Business intelligence is used mainly to improve product performance and to react quickly to customer demand.

Decisions are not made without supporting information.

The interviewee is somewhat satisfied with the level of business insight at present rating it at about 70% indicating room for improvement.

In general all employees are customer focused.

INTERVIEWER NOTE

The employees have a lot of pride in the organisation as they are market leaders in their field.

A due diligence approach is applied to every major decision.

All intelligence must be drilled back to data points.

There is a formal R&D department who work very closely with the marketing department.

The interviewee stated at interview the due to the industry the company operates in; there is an advanced system for monitoring customers and suppliers.

One thing the interviewee would like to change is the induction and hiring process. Training needs to be improved in the early stages of employment to improve customer focus.

It is evident that this company is very much in tune with the competitive environment.

4.4 Profile of Population for Telephone Survey

Population for this study was taken from small and medium sized enterprises as defined in chapter 1 operating within the northwest region of Ireland. Companies were selected randomly. A total of 50 companies were contacted with request to take part in the research, however 10 companies opted out of the survey.

4.5 Findings and Analysis

4.5.1 Objective One - Study the level of intelligence gathering activity within SME's

The questions measured in this section of the telephone survey were Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, and Q12. The average overall score was 67.8% in relation to the intelligence gathering activities within the population. The top performing sectors were Services with 85.3%, Retail with 78.7%, and Engineering with a 75% rating.

During the in-depth interviews the interviewee from company A stated that the main sources of intelligence for their company are suppliers, customers, and trade associations. The staff is also a major source of information and are encouraged at all times to be information gatherers. This sentiment was shared by company F.

Company B (motor industry) is in a fortunate position whereby the manufacturer supplies an abundance of intelligence, however the company does regularly purchase outside market research. Also focused on research is the Medi Pharma company G, who also purchase research from agencies. Company G are extremely focused on the competition, whereby they will obtain and compare products.

The three companies with the lowest workforce (Companies C, D, and E) do not purchase market research. They also have little time to monitor the competition according to the interviewees due to a lack of resources.

4.5.2 Objective Two - Study the level of intelligence analysing activity within SME's

The questions measured in this section of the telephone survey were Q5, Q6, Q7, and Q8. The average overall score was 41.9% in relation to the intelligence analysing activities within the population. The top performing sectors were Services with 60%, Medi Pharma with 51.7%, and Restaurant with a 50% rating.

Findings from the in-depth interviews show that companies A, B, and G analyse their information and intelligence through internal reporting. Companies C, D, E, and F have not internal data mining, reporting or scheduled meetings.

4.5.3 Objective Three - Study the level of intelligence distribution within SME's

The questions measured in this section of the telephone survey were Q9, Q10, and Q11. The average overall score was 63.7% in relation to the intelligence distribution within the population. The top performing sectors were Services with 80%, Retail with 76.7%, and Medi Pharma with a 75.6% rating.

Findings from the in-depth interviews highlight companies A, D, E, and F have management and staff who work very closely together and share information on a real time basis where possible. Company C admitted that they had a problem in that employees at the company tend to work on their own and withhold intelligence and information. Company G have an advanced CRM system and have a strong link between departments in relation to integration.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the research findings in relation to the research objectives. The researcher has recorded and analysed the data obtained. A number of patterns have been exposed through the research which indicates both the existence of best practice, but also the plight faced by many SME's, not just in this region but globally.

Best practice patterns were obvious from the services and retail industries that scored highly in the ratings from all sections of the study. There was no surprise that the restaurant industry is the most customer focused, however the food producers and distributors scored average in this section.

Obvious from the research results is that companies with fewer employees scored the worst on the information gathering and analysing sections. This is no doubt due to a lack of resources, a point that was raised during the in-depth interviews. Some of these companies are finding it hard to keep up with the day to day operations, let alone be pro-active with their business approach. Unfortunately these companies can only tread water until their fortunes change.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Conclusion's and Recommendation's

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to examine the market intelligence activities of selected SME's operating in the northwest of Ireland. Whilst keeping the research in line with the following objectives certain observations and recommendations can be made:

- 1) The level of intelligence gathering activity within SME's
- 2) The level of intelligence analysing activity within SME's
- 3) The level of intelligence distribution within SME's

In this chapter the researcher will draw conclusions and make recommendations under each of the research objectives.

5.2 Summary of key findings

There is a correlation between the resources available to a firm and the ability of that organisation to keep in tune with the competitive environment. Two of the organisations surveyed by in-depth interview stated that they had not the resources to monitor competitors or to research the market. Through the research one could assume that this issue is endemic to SME's in the region, however this hypothesis would need to be tested through further research.

Through the surveys the service and retail industries scored highest in relation to the research objectives. Through further research of these sectors a best practice model could be assembled.

5.3 Objective 1

Findings indicate that the customer focused sectors of retail and service lead the way in relation to intelligence gathering. Research indicates that there is a correlation between

resources and the pursuit of competitive intelligence as the smaller owner run firms struggle in this activity.

This would concur with the literature as SME's do not conform to conventional textbook marketing theories; instead their business and marketing is characterised by the limitations of a business of limited size and resources in a lot of cases. "Thus, SME marketing is likely to be haphazard, informal, loose, unstructured, reactive, built upon and conforming to industry norms" (Gilmore, Carson and Grant 2001).

5.4 Objective 2

Findings with regard to the intelligence analysing activities indicate that although some SME's may be good at gathering intelligence (average for this study was 67.8%), they have an inability to analyse it. This is highlighted by the fact the surveyed population only scored 41.9% in respect to this objective.

This finding would support the hypothesis (discussed in chapter 3) that Some SME's have difficulty in informing all of their relevant employees of intelligence / information that will benefit the organisations decision makers in the long run.

5.5 Objective 3

Again findings indicate that the customer focused sectors of retail and service have better internal communication and intelligence distribution. In this section of the survey the service sector companies scored an average of 80%, while the retail SME's scored 76.7%, both well above the average mark of 63.7%. This is an important finding as it can highlight to SME's wishing to improve or implement an intelligence system to look toward these sectors for best practice.

Knowledge of existing and potential markets, business trends, competitors, and the effectiveness of marketing programmes is critical to the success of any company's efforts (Kotler and Armstrong 1989).

5 6 Future Research

Through this study the researcher has highlighted three areas where future research may be valid

- 1 Research indicates that there is a correlation between resources and the pursuit of competitive intelligence as the smaller owner run firms struggle in this activity A study into how specifically micro sized owner run firms apply their market orientation would be of benefit to the field
- 2 The hypothesis (discussed in chapter 3) that Some SME's have difficulty in informing all of their relevant employees of intelligence / information that will benefit the organisations decision makers in the long run A study with regards to specifically how decisions are made would be of benefit to the field
- 3 Through the surveys the service and retail industries scored highest in relation to the research objectives Through further research of these sectors a best practice model could be assembled This would benefit the field as there are no best practice models existing for SME's in this respect

5 7 Conclusion

This study has identified the importance of a healthy intelligence / information environment to SME's operating in this region and outside The study has also highlighted the correlation between a firm's size, the lack of resources, and the absence of a sustainable decision making information system within much of the surveyed population

Intelligence helps your company sustain and develop distinct competitive advantages by using the entire organisation and its networks to develop actionable insights about the environment (customers, competitor, regulars, technology) It uses a systematic and ethical process involving, planning, collection, analysis, communication and management (Calof, 2008)

The researcher has found that the SME's in this region were generally owner managed and are severely constrained by limited resources There is also a pronounced lack of knowledge of the competitive environment and organisations tend to be reactive with their marketing and decision making There also exists an inability to make best of internal data due to a lack of

knowledge in the area of information technology Customer service oriented firms such as motor dealers and restaurants displayed the highest awareness of the competitive environment, however in most cases decisions within this firms are made quite often based on industry norms

The researcher also found that the single most determining success factor in the pursuit of intelligence and information was the desire and ability of the owners to recognise and move with changing markets and environments It is clear that globalisation and information technology are having a major effect on the organisations of the region

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Appendix

APPENDIX A

PRESS RELEASE



Embargo: Midnight Sunday, 13th June 2010

For use: 00.01 Monday, 14th June 2010

**SMALL FIRMS
ASSOCIATION**

"Entrepreneurial businesses that are well structured and well managed will see opportunity in uncertainty; however, they need assistance from Government to provide support and create an environment that will put them on a sustainable growth path."

Avine McNally, Director, Small Firms Association

SFA SUMMER BUSINESS SENTIMENT SURVEY REVEALS

- **Small business sentiment remains unchanged as many remain under serious pressure**
- **59% rate the overall business environment currently as 'poor' or 'very poor'**
- **Services & Manufacturing Sectors are more positive than Distribution**

- **26% of firms rate their own business as “good” or “very good”**
- **Firms display more positive outlook for their business in 3 months time**
- **Access to Finance remains big challenge**

The Small Firms Association (SFA) has released the findings of its Summer Business Sentiment Survey. Commenting on the figures, **SFA Director, Avine McNally stated**, “the overall survey results show that the positivity felt in the first quarter remains unchanged, as many small firms remain under serious pressure ”

The survey was conducted during April and a total of **622 companies employing 13,750 people** responded. The sample was drawn from manufacturing, distribution, retail and services sectors and from a regionally representative sample, with all parts of the Irish Republic included.

The results show that 59% of respondents rate the **OVERALL BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT** currently as ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’, while the figures remain unchanged from Q1 2010, when compared to 12 months ago sentiment has markedly improved from 74%. Just under half of respondents (53%) expect the overall business environment in the **next three months** to be either ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ in the current survey. When compared to the 68% who rated in the same manner at this point last year, this indicates an improvement in sentiment. Some **16% of respondent companies expect the overall business environment in three months time to be either ‘very good’ or ‘good’, a significant increase on the 7% of November ‘09 and a 10% increase on Quarter 2 of 2009**

There is significant variation across **SECTORS** in regard to their views on the current business climate, with seven out of ten respondents (70%) in the distribution sector rating the overall business

environment in Ireland currently as either 'poor' or 'very poor'; higher than respondents from the manufacturing sector (56%) and services sector (53%). The proportion of respondents that rate the overall business environment as either 'very good' or 'good' again varies substantially between the services (13%) manufacturing sectors (19%) and the distribution sector, which are less positive as 7% only currently rate the overall business environment in Ireland as either 'very good' or 'good'.

Confidence in respondent's **OWN BUSINESS** in Ireland in this survey shows a drop of 7% on the Q1 2010 survey, with more than one in five companies (21%) more confident about their own business than they were three months ago. Just a quarter of respondents (26%) rate their own business currently as "very good" or "good", similar to the previous quarter, but a significant increase on the one in ten companies who did so at this time last year. The proportion of companies rating their own business currently either as "poor" or "very poor" is again similar to first quarter 2010 but shows a significant decrease on the 60% in Q2 2009.

In relation to assessment of their business on a **SECTORAL BASIS**, just under a third (31%) of companies from the manufacturing sector rate their own business currently as either "very good" or "good", an increase of 24% on the previous quarter. Almost three in ten respondent companies (29%) from the services sector rate their business as "very good" or "good" compared to 16% of companies in the distribution sector, similar levels to the previous quarter.

More than half (54%) of distribution sector companies rate their business in Ireland as "very poor" or "poor" and these levels remain unchanged since the first quarter. The figures in the distribution are significantly higher than the Manufacturing sector (32%) and the Services Sector (37%). While the firms in the Services sector have remained unchanged, businesses within the Manufacturing sector who rate their own business as "very poor" or "poor" has decreased by 10%.

Companies' outlook for their own business in the next three months is broadly similar to the previous quarter. However when compared to the same time last year, companies are displaying a **more positive outlook** for the forthcoming months. Almost a quarter of companies (24%) expect their own business to be 'good' in three months time compared to one in ten at the corresponding

point last year. The proportion of companies rating their own business as either 'poor' or 'very poor' (36%) has reduced significantly compared with this time last year (57%)

One area of the survey that is more negative than Q1 is the **BUSINESS ACTIVITY INDICATORS**. The proportion of companies expecting **increases** to turnover in the **next three months** are 32%, profitability 22%, domestic sales 32%, customer base 34%, order books 29% and employee numbers 9%

While the figures for companies expecting a decrease are slightly higher than Q1. The proportion of companies expecting a **decrease** to turnover in the **next three months** are 28%, profitability 39%, domestic sales 29%, customer base 24%, order books 27%, output selling price 39% and employee numbers 28%

Access to **CREDIT**, including both working capital and investment finance continues to be problematic, with the **cost of working capital having increased for 20%** of respondent companies in the **last three months** and the **cost of investment finance having increased for 12%** of respondent companies. **One-fifth of companies (20%) have seen the availability of working capital decrease in the last three months**, with some **15%** indicating that **investment finance availability has decreased**.

McNally stated "Small businesses sentiment has remained unchanged as many still remain under pressure, as a result of being the victims of slow payment by creditors, the high cost of doing business, and at the root of it all, cashflow problems. However, entrepreneurial businesses that are well structured and well managed will see opportunity in uncertainty, but they need assistance from Government. The role of Government in the coming months will be critical in developing a business environment conducive to small business growth and expansion. They must put jobs and enterprise centre stage."

Action the government can take includes

1. **All Government agencies to pay their own bills to small businesses within 10 days, including local authorities and the HSE, which will assist small businesses with their cash-flow.**
2. **Reduction of employers' PRSI – this will incentivise companies to keep people in jobs.**
3. **Immediate implementation of Employers PRSI Incentive Scheme**
4. **Action to tackle our excessive cost-base - it is no surprise that the top 3 business cost increases over the past year, namely electricity, local authority charges and other energy costs (e.g. gas/oil), come from the government administered sector.**

For further information, please contact: Avine McNally, Director, Small Firms Association

Telephone: 087 645 0205 or e-mail: avine.mcnally@sfa.ie.

EMBARGO: Midnight on Sunday, 11th July 2010

FOR USE: 00.01 on Monday, 12th July 2010

"While the survey shows that the pace of job losses within the small firms sector has slowed, we cannot become complacent, many jobs are still at risk until the issue of business costs are addressed "

Avine McNally, Director, Small Firms Association

SFA JOBS SENTIMENT SURVEY REVEALS

- **60% of employee numbers have remained the same in the last 3 months**
- **3 out of 5 companies expect employee numbers to remain the same in 2011**
- **50% of Small Businesses will freeze recruitment in the next 3 months**
- **14% of Small Businesses will implement short time working in the next 3 months**
- **37% will train and upskill staff in the next 3 months**

The Small Firms Association (SFA) has released the findings of its Q2 2010 Jobs Sentiment Survey. Commenting on the figures, SFA Director, Avine McNally stated, "The overall survey results show

that the pace of job losses within small businesses has slowed and the prospects for job creation remains weak ”

A total of 622 companies employing 13,750 people responded to the survey. The sample was drawn from manufacturing, distribution, retail and services sectors and from a regionally representative sample, with all parts of the Irish Republic included.

The results show that retaining jobs and creating employment will remain a challenge for small firms in the coming months. While **60% of companies indicated that employee numbers have been maintained at current levels during the last three months**, **29%** of companies had experienced a **decrease in employee numbers** in the same period. Just under a quarter (**24%**) of companies **expect a further decrease** in the next 3 months.

The Q2 2010 survey shows a decline in the number of firms placing employees on lay off or short time working over the next 3 months, with **14% of companies indicating the introduction of short-time working** (a decrease of 1% on Q1 2010) and **7% implementing lay-offs** (a decrease of 4% on Q1 2010).

McNally said, “The survey shows that the rate of job losses and reduction in employee hours has slowed. This is a reflection of the series of actions which have been taken by many small firms to try and reduce costs and regain cost competitiveness, however, we cannot become complacent, many jobs are still at risk ”

50% of small firms will implement a recruitment freeze in the next three months (an increase on 3% from Q1) and **24% of firms will not extend any current employment contracts**, this figure remains unchanged since the end of 2009. “These figures are quite worrying as it shows the outlook for job creation remains weak. The reluctance to recruit is based on a number of issues, mainly economic and financial uncertainty.” added McNally.

Looking ahead to **2011**, the figures would appear to be more positive with **three out of five companies expecting employee numbers to stay at their current level and 19% of firms expecting to increase their employee numbers**

In regard to training, **37%** of survey respondents indicated that in the next 3 months they will be training and upskilling staff “This is a positive sign as small firms are again recognising the importance of training and are willing to investment in this critical area By ensuring that all staff have the necessary skills to assist them in developing innovative new products and processes, as well as sales techniques, will assist them to trade out of this recession, become more innovative and sustainable,” said McNally

“Our ability to create jobs has been severely damaged by a loss to competitiveness and it will continue to be a problem until this issue is addressed It is vital that the Government prioritise the restoration of cost competitiveness to the small business sector, generate confidence in the economy and create the enterprise environment where job losses can be stabilised and jobs can be preserved and created,” McNally said

Ends

For further information, please contact Avine McNally, Director, SFA at

Tel 01 605 1633 or 087 6450205

APPENDIX B

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

MSc in Marketing – 2010 – Thesis

**A STUDY OF THE MARKET INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES OF SELECTED SME'S
OPERATING IN THE NORTHWEST OF IRELAND**

Date _____ Company _____
Interviewer _____ Interviewee _____
Sector _____ Position _____
B2B B2C Co Address _____

Background Information

How many employees?

Who is responsible for the marketing function? (What position)

Are your customers – local, regional, national, international?

Please answer the following questions on a rating scale of 1 – 5 (1 = low – 5 = high)

Level of openness / networking / market monitoring (Management practice)

1 The company actively researches and monitors the competition?

1 2 3 4 5

2 The organisation monitors developments in new technologies?

1 2 3 4 5

3 The organisation seeks customer / supplier input on relevant matters?

1 2 3 4 5

4 Employees can communicate with people outside the company including outside experts?

1 2 3 4 5

5 Employees are encouraged to challenge the status quo thereby supporting constructive conflict?

1 2 3 4 5

6 Management see employee's failures as opportunities to learn?

1 2 3 4 5

7 Employees are encouraged to share their opinions and points of view?

1 2 3 4 5

8 The organisational culture encourages formal meetings and interactions?

1 2 3 4 5

9 Employees are encouraged to share information and technology across the organisation?

1 2 3 4 5

10 Major decisions are made by your organisation with the support of market intelligence?

1 2 3 4 5

11 The companies vision / mission been communicated to all levels within the organisation?

1 2 3 4 5

12 Organisational culture encourages employees to interact with outsiders?

1 2 3 4 5

13 All of your employee's are customer focused?

1 2 3 4 5

14 You are satisfied with your level of business insight at present?

1 2 3 4 5

Other observations / comments

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW RECORD

MSc in Marketing – 2010 – Thesis

**A STUDY OF THE MARKET INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITIES OF SELECTED SME'S
OPERATING IN THE NORTHWEST OF IRELAND**

Date	_____	Location	_____		
Interviewer	_____	Interviewee	_____		
Company	_____	Position	_____		
Sector	_____	B2B	<input type="checkbox"/>	B2C	<input type="checkbox"/>

Background Information

How many employees?

Who is responsible for the marketing function? (What position)

Are your customers – local, regional, national, international?

Level of Intelligence gathering activity

1 What sources does the organisation use to gain intelligence / information?

For example

Suppliers
Customers
Trade associations
Exhibitions / Conferences
Annual reports
Online (web surveys, chat rooms etc)
Other

2 Do you actively research and monitor your competition?

3 On a scale of 1-5 (5 being very aware), how aware of the competition are you?

Not aware					Aware
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4 How often do you find that information required for major decision making takes a long time to get or not obtained at all?

5 How often do you find that information required for major decision making is available immediately or in a short while?

Level of Intelligence analysing activity

6 How does the organisation analyse intelligence / information to the benefit of the company?

For example	Data mining (in-house reporting etc)
	Statistical analysis (benchmarking organisation against competitors)
	Other

Level of Intelligence distribution activity

- 7 How does the organisation distribute intelligence to ensure the organisation benefits and prospers from acquired information?

For example	Internal Reports Newspapers Trade magazines Online (through website or email etc) Other
-------------	---

- 8 Are you satisfied with the level of integration within departments in relation to the sharing of knowledge / intelligence required for the smooth operations of the organisation?

General Questions

- 9 What do you use your business intelligence for?

For example	To quickly react to customer demand The need to be more predictive with forecasting capability To improve customer loyalty and retention
-------------	--

- 10 How often (as a %) would you say that major decisions are made by your organisation without the support of market intelligence?

11 How satisfied are you with your level business insight at present?

12 Do you share business insight with all employees?

13 Are all of your employee's customer focused?

14 What secondary benefits do you find intelligence gathering has on your organisation?

For example

Improved general awareness throughout the organisation

The ability to be more proactive

Unpredicted intelligence gathered

Other observations / comments

APPENDIX D

Statistics From Telephone Survey

Sector	Gathering	Analysing	Distribution	Insight	Customer Focus
Max Score	25	20	15	5	5
Total Avg.	17.0	8.4	9.6	3.3	3.6
Total %	67.8%	41.9%	63.7%	65.0%	71.0%
Agri Supplies	10	6	8	3	3
Auto Services	13	9	6	4	4
Building Supplies	17	5	7	3	3
Confectioners	18	6	11	4	3
Electrical Services	22	10	11	4	5
Engineering	18.8	8.5	10.0	2.8	2.8
	75.0%	42.5%	66.7%	55.0%	55.0%
Food	15.3	7.8	8.2	3.5	3.7
	61.3%	39.2%	54.4%	70.0%	73.3%
Hospitality	14	6	9	3	3
	56.0%	30.0%	60.0%	60.0%	60.0%
Manufacturing	16.7	7.4	9.6	3.0	3.1
	66.9%	37.1%	63.8%	60.0%	62.9%
Medi Pharma	18.0	10.3	11.3	3.3	3.0
	72.0%	51.7%	75.6%	66.7%	60.0%
Motor Industry	17	9.5	9.5	3.75	4
	68.0%	47.5%	63.3%	75.0%	80.0%
Restaurant	18	10	11	4	5
	72.0%	50.0%	73.3%	80.0%	100.0%
Retail	19.7	9.7	11.5	3.3	4.5
	78.7%	48.3%	76.7%	66.7%	90.0%
Services	21.3	12.0	12.0	3.7	4.7
	85.3%	60.0%	80.0%	73.3%	93.3%

APPENDIX E

FREQUENCIES VARIABLES=Q1 Q2 Q3 Q4 Q12

/NTILES=4

/STATISTICS=STDDEV VARIANCE RANGE MINIMUM MAXIMUM SEMEAN MEAN MEDIAN MODE
SUM SKEWNESS SESKEW KURTOSIS SEKURT

/HISTOGRAM NORMAL

/ORDER=ANALYSIS

Frequencies

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	Cases Used	Statistics are based on all cases with valid data

Statistics

		Monitor Competition	Monitor New Tech	Customer Input
N	Valid	40	40	40
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		3.33	3.55	4.33
Std. Error of Mean		.126	.156	.110
Median		3.00	4.00	4.00
Mode		3	4	5
Std. Deviation		.797	.986	.694
Variance		.635	.972	.481
Skewness		-.028	-.146	-.540
Std. Error of Skewness		.374	.374	.374
Kurtosis		.463	-.934	-.750
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.733	.733	.733
Range		3	3	2
Minimum		2	2	3
Maximum		5	5	5
Sum		133	142	173
Percentiles	25	3.00	3.00	4.00
	50	3.00	4.00	4.00
	75	4.00	4.00	5.00

Statistics

		Outside Expert	
		Access	Outside Interaction
N	Valid	40	40
	Missing	0	0
Mean		3.23	3.08
Std. Error of Mean		.166	.154
Median		3.00	3.00
Mode		3	3
Std. Deviation		1.050	.971
Variance		1.102	.943
Skewness		.223	.375
Std. Error of Skewness		.374	.374
Kurtosis		-.603	-.153
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.733	.733
Range		4	4
Minimum		1	1
Maximum		5	5
Sum		129	123
Percentiles	25	2.25	2.00
	50	3.00	3.00
	75	4.00	4.00

Frequency Table

Monitor Competition

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	6	15.0	15.0	15.0
	3	17	42.5	42.5	57.5
	4	15	37.5	37.5	95.0
	5	2	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Monitor New Tech

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	7	17.5	17.5	17.5
	3	11	27.5	27.5	45.0
	4	15	37.5	37.5	82.5
	5	7	17.5	17.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Customer Input

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	5	12.5	12.5	12.5
	4	17	42.5	42.5	55.0
	5	18	45.0	45.0	100.0

Customer Input

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	5	12.5	12.5	12.5
	4	17	42.5	42.5	55.0
	5	18	45.0	45.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

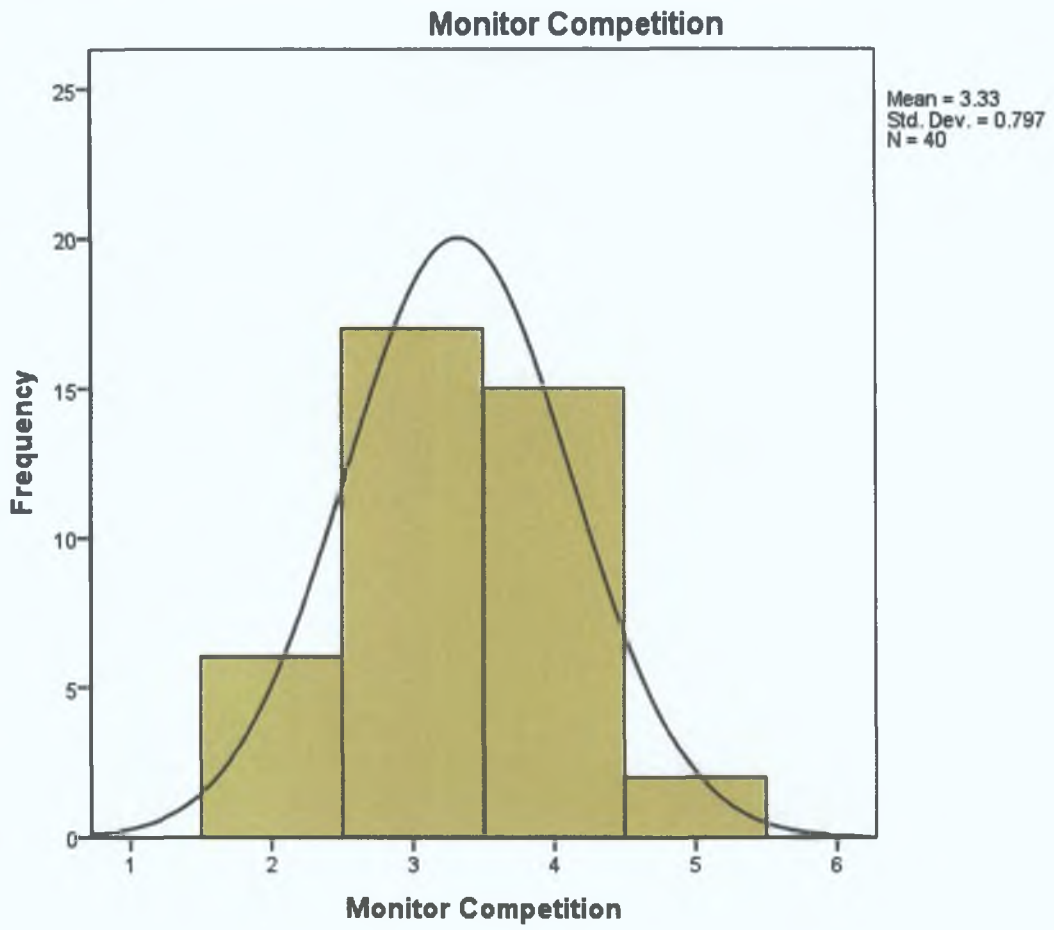
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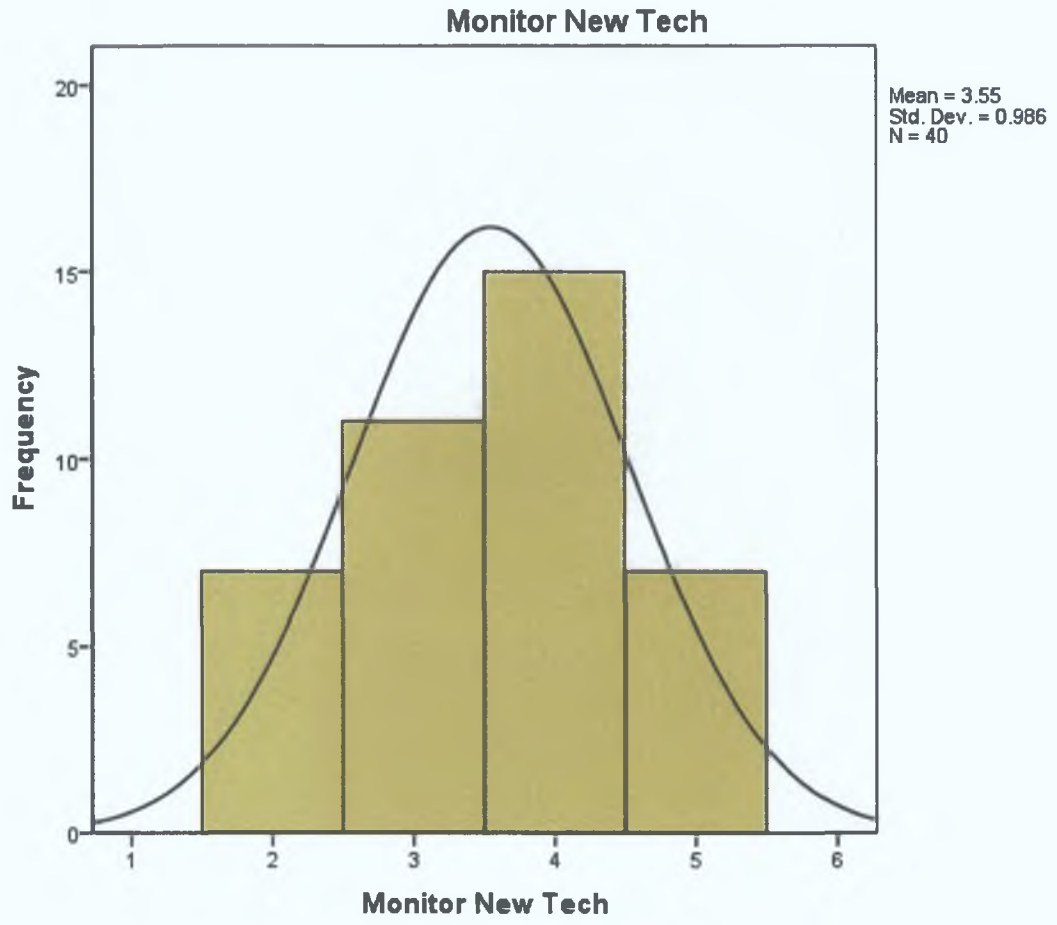
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	3	16	40.0	40.0	65.0
	4	8	20.0	20.0	85.0
	5	6	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

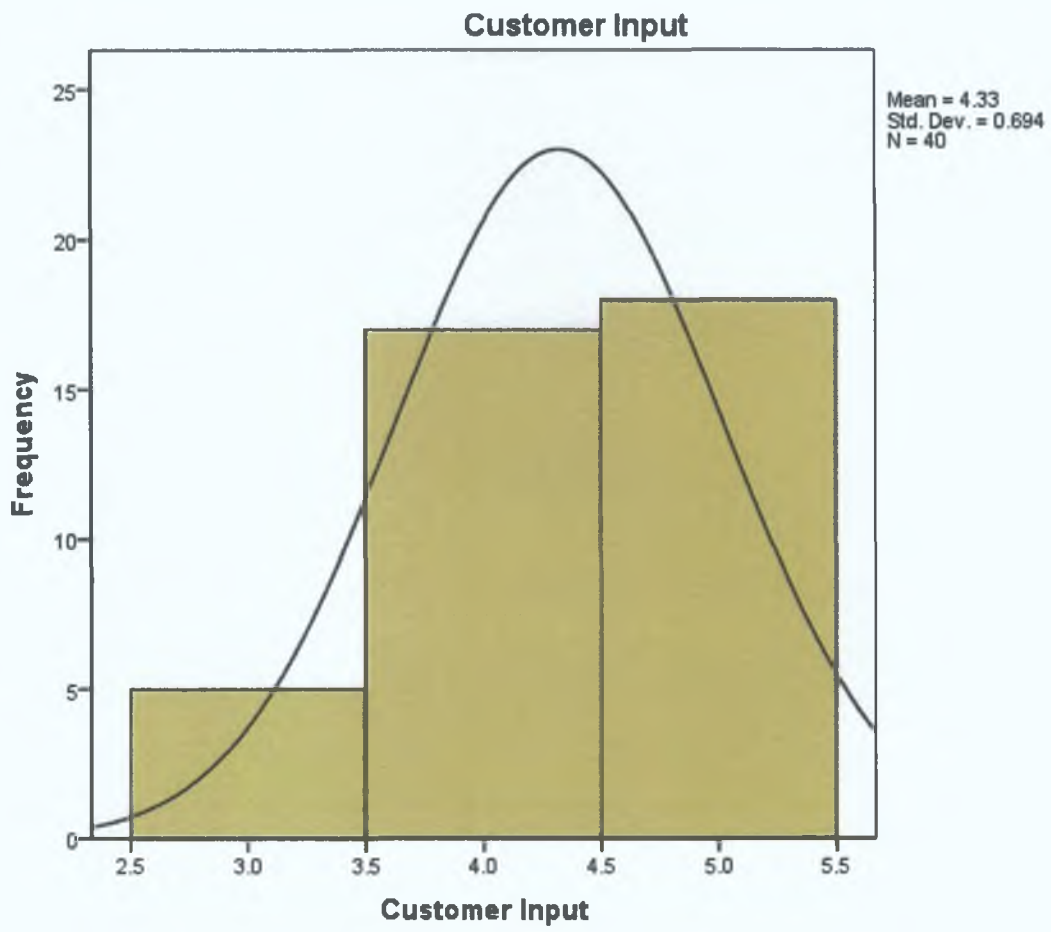
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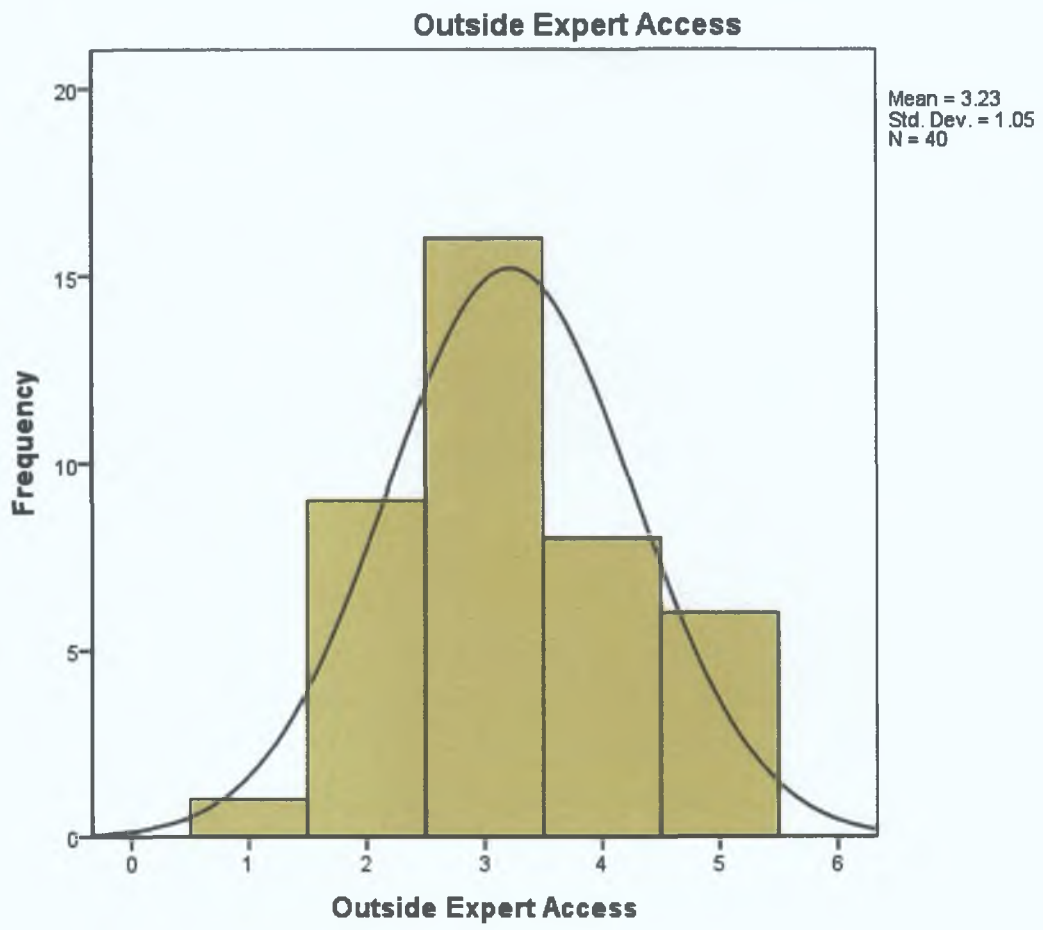
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	2.5	2.5	2.5
	2	10	25.0	25.0	27.5
	3	18	45.0	45.0	72.5
	4	7	17.5	17.5	90.0
	5	4	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

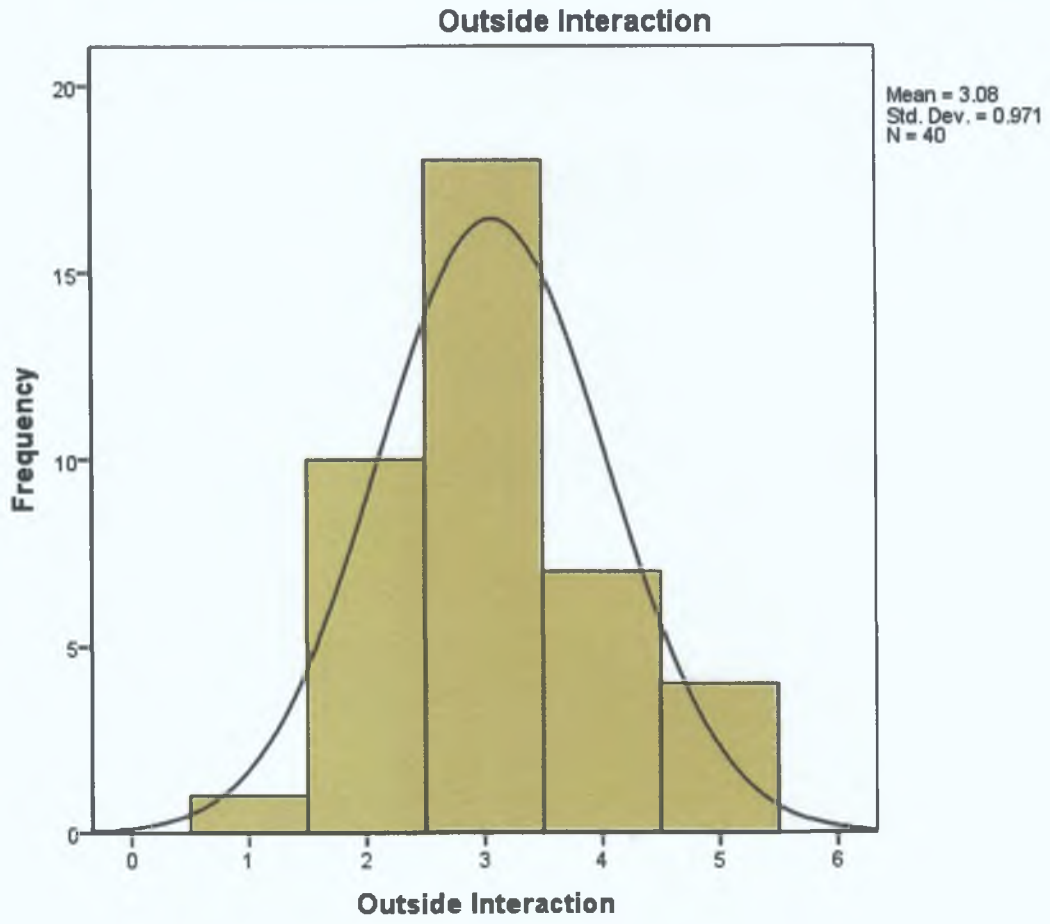
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Frequencies

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	Cases Used	Statistics are based on all cases with valid data
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Statistics

		Monitor Competition	Monitor New Tech	Customer Input
N	Valid	40	40	40
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		3.33	3.55	4.33
Minimum		2	2	3
Maximum		5	5	5
Sum		133	142	173
Percentiles	20	3.00	3.00	4.00
	25	3.00	3.00	4.00
	40	3.00	3.00	4.00
	50	3.00	4.00	4.00
	60	4.00	4.00	5.00
	75	4.00	4.00	5.00
	80	4.00	4.00	5.00
	85	4.00	4.00	5.00
	100	5.00	5.00	5.00

Statistics

		Outside Expert Access	Outside interaction
N	Valid	40	40
	Missing	0	0
Mean		3.23	3.08
Minimum		1	1
Maximum		5	5
Sum		129	123
Percentiles	20	2.00	2.00
	25	2.25	2.00
	40	3.00	3.00
	50	3.00	3.00
	60	3.00	3.00
	75	4.00	4.00
	80	4.00	4.00
	100	5.00	5.00

Frequency Table

Monitor Competition

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	6	15.0	15.0	15.0
	3	17	42.5	42.5	57.5
	4	15	37.5	37.5	95.0
	5	2	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Monitor New Tech

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	7	17.5	17.5	17.5
	3	11	27.5	27.5	45.0
	4	15	37.5	37.5	82.5
	5	7	17.5	17.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Customer Input

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	5	12.5	12.5	12.5
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	5	18	45.0	45.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

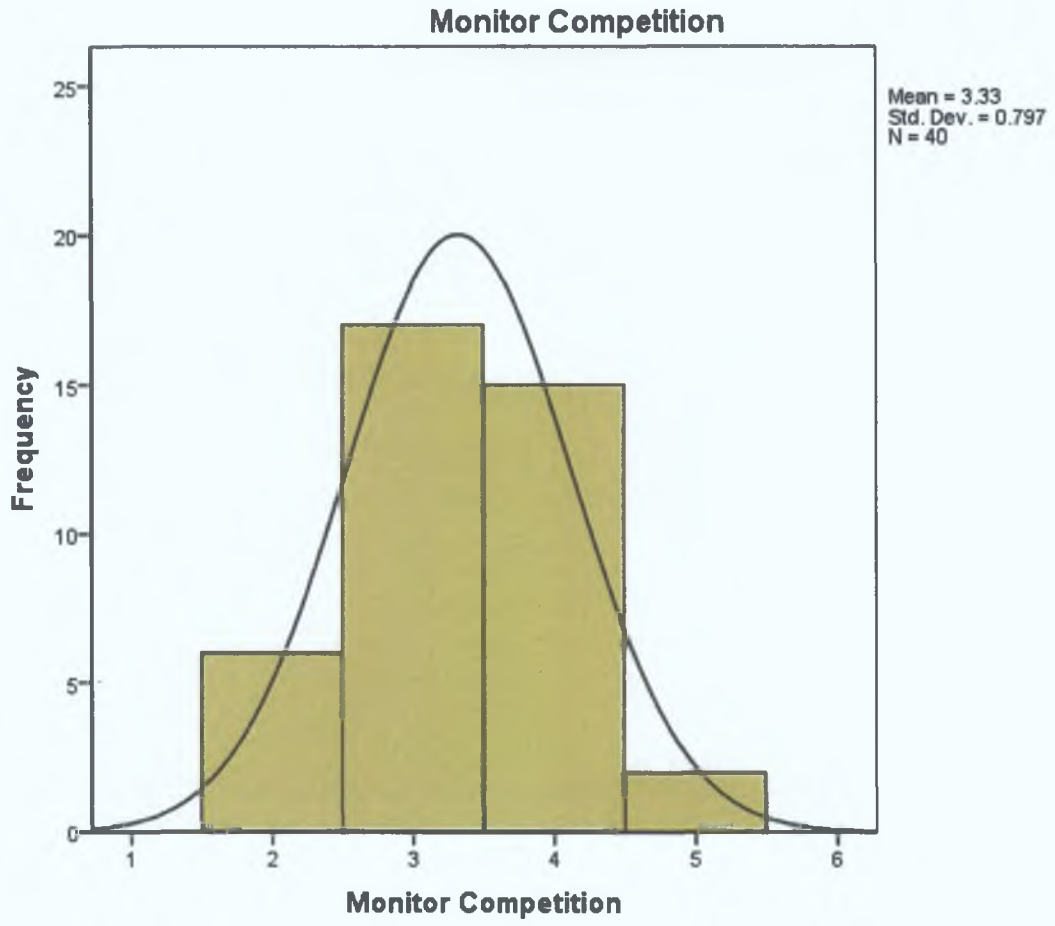
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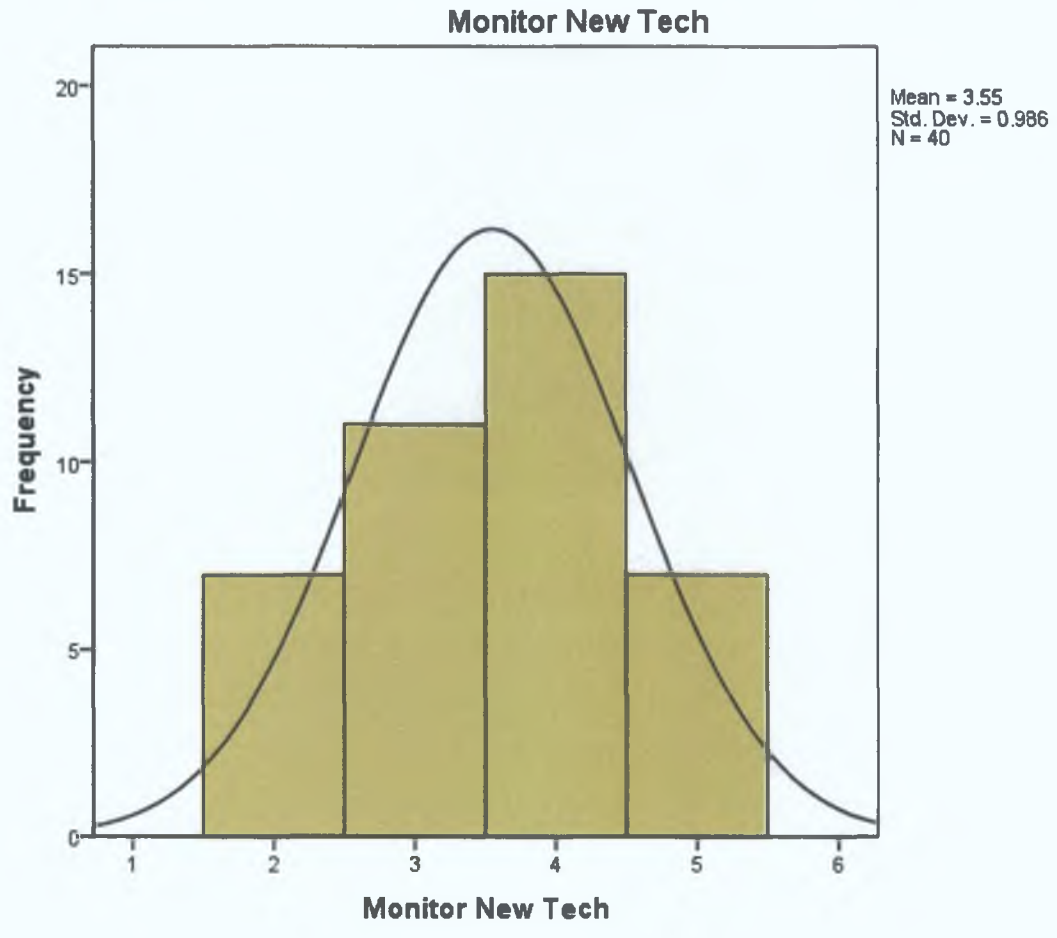
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	3	16	40.0	40.0	65.0
	4	8	20.0	20.0	85.0
	5	6	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

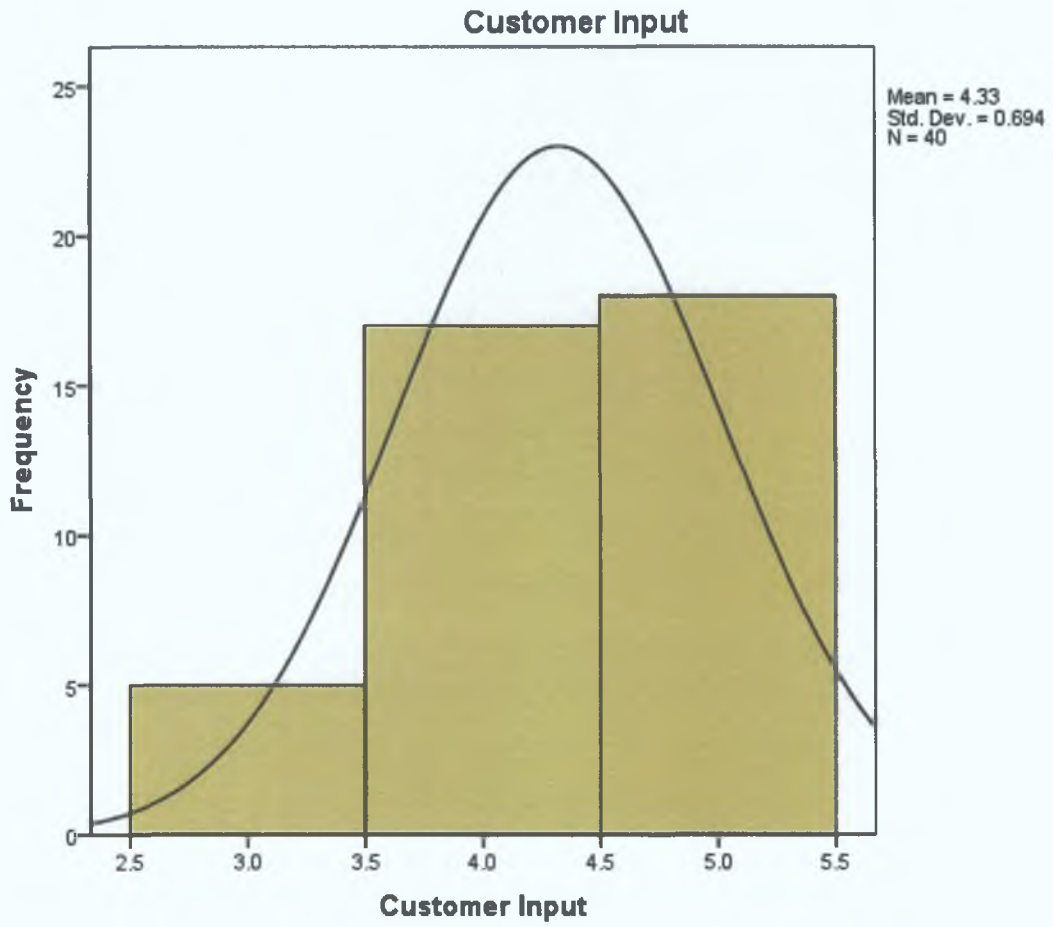
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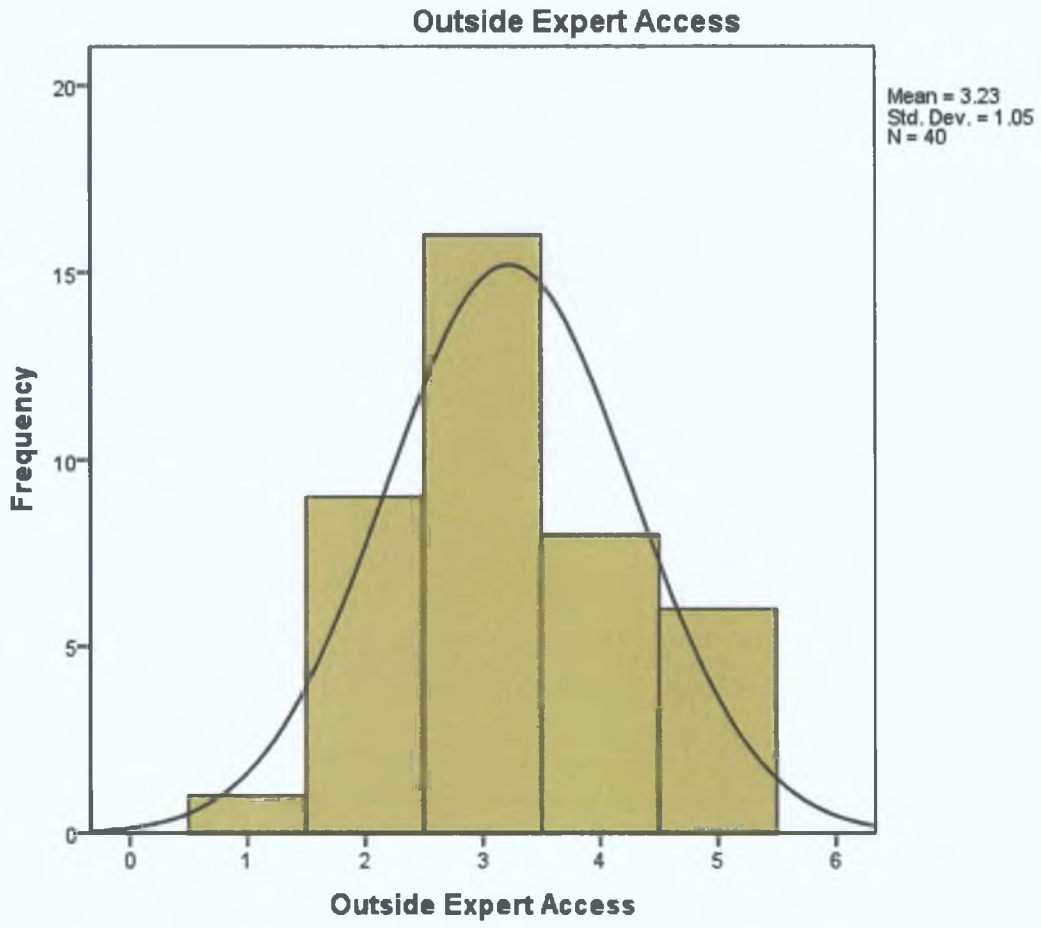
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Valid	1	1	2.5	2.5	2.5
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	3	18	45.0	45.0	72.5
	4	7	17.5	17.5	90.0
	5	4	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

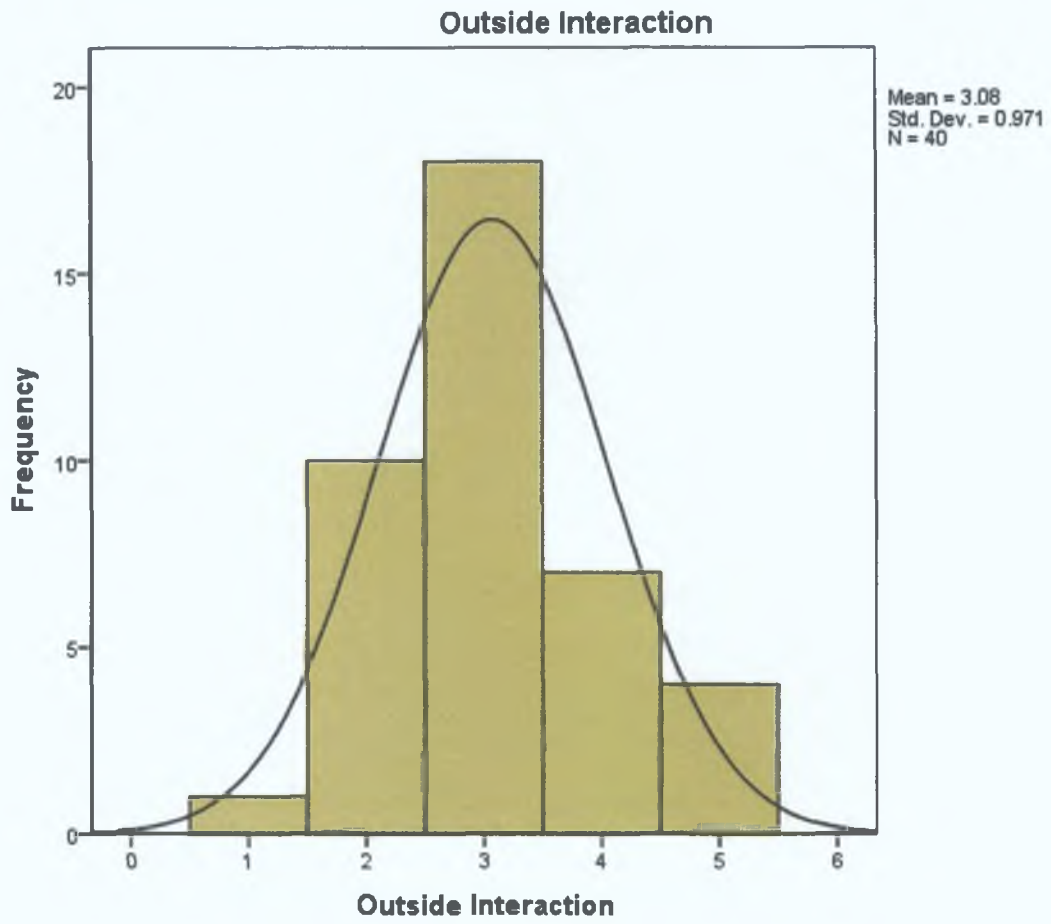
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APPENDIX F



Table 1- SME Characteristics, Wong and Aspinwall (2004) (Supyuenong, Islam and Kulkarni 2009)

<p>Ownership and management structure</p>	<p>Most SME owners act as owner-managers and also play the part of the company's strategic initiator. Their intention to adopt KM systems, including formulating the vision, allocating resources to facilitate KM processes, setting up organisational procedures, etc., may set the tone for KM (Senge, 1990, Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995, Wickert and Herschel, 2001, Lee and Kim, 2001, Drucker, 1988, Cook, 1999). Management support is proposed to be the most important factor in successful KM adoption (Cook, 1999, Wickert and Herschel, 2001). A flatter organisational hierarchy in SMEs leads to greater flexibility in work but with a limited or less clear division of responsibilities. There is lower degree of job specialisation with more generalists. Communication lines are shorter, which allows for easier and more direct information flow. This structure leads to higher levels of coordination and cooperation.</p>
<p>Customers and markets</p>	<p>SMEs depend on a small customer base and focus on local or regional markets, with a few international markets. They usually have limited product/service lines and sometimes cater to niche markets. Employees have close relationships with their customers. Customer satisfaction is one of the main criteria in measuring performance because SMEs use word-of-mouth as their primary mechanism for growth. Moreover, because of the closeness of relationships, specific requirements of the customer are more easily understood.</p>
<p>Systems, processes and procedures</p>	<p>SMEs have simple planning and control systems, and informal rules and procedures. There is less standardisation of work processes. The operations are less complex. Processes are more fluid and are adaptable to various situations. SMEs also have a narrow scope and mostly focus on operational, rather than strategic, processes. Rather than creating knowledge repositories, they are more adept at sharing tacit knowledge (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995, Desouza and Awazu, 2006).</p>
<p>Human capital management</p>	<p>Owing to limited number of expert personnel, human capital is an important resource and high turnover rates can severely affect operations (Huin, 2004). An ERP service is a complex task, the project team needs to possess diverse expertise and knowhow. Since SMEs have less clear employee responsibilities, a lower degree of job specialisation occurs, leading to greater employee versatility. Human capital development is done according to specific needs in an ad hoc manner. Employee performance evaluation is not standardised.</p>
<p>Culture and behaviour</p>	<p>SMEs usually have an informal, organic, and unified culture. The size of the organisation fosters recognising the company as a whole instead of looking at single departments or functions. The behaviour of employees is more easily influenced by the owner-managers philosophy and beliefs. An open culture that allows employee to work independently not only enables the knowledge creation process, but also allows knowledge to flow easily among participants, a phenomenon that Cook (1999) called "the shadow system" of the organisation for knowledge sharing.</p>