THE CURRENT STATE OF SOURCE MAPPING

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"Another Saturday night and I ain't got nobody."

– Cat Stevens

For CI professionals, *garbage in, garbage out* means that analyzed information is only as good as the sources from whence it came. With low integrity, strong presentation skills and a high verbal quotient, one might dubiously convert fuzzy facts into important findings without great sources . . . but that's not a good thing (just ask Dan Rather).

We've all seen that memorable picture of the intelligence cycle (plan, gather, analyze, invoice, disseminate). The ability to elicit information from the most well-informed, knowledgeable sources represents most of the travel on that first arc. For many, the least circuitous route to those human source goldmines is what many proposals describe as a comprehensive source mapping strategy.

I'm no fan of creative business language, and I'm also down on the word strategy because what many folks really mean is *a plan*. Getting to the names to gain insight requires an actionable plan, not a long-term holistic view of where these sources are going.

Traditionally, strong secondary research yields a great number of names identified in context. In plain language: your researcher found an article in which the guy you want to talk to was directly quoted and conveyed his expertise. Beyond this, a strong information management effort drives successful project completion by allowing collectors to quickly identify known sources. On top of these proven approaches is the very old game of networking, in which new sources are constantly identified during the shelf life of a project.

But the direct pathways to sources have changed, particularly at or below the vital marzipan layer (directors, managers, etc.). New informational wells have been tapped, ushering in a deluge of human capital information.

Rather than galumph through the information with your pants rolled up, consider understanding several of these resources and mapping their value to your own efforts. Described herein are several tools to set you on your way. (Disclosure: I do not have a financial position in any of these firms, they are just isolated examples.)

BUY IN BULK, EAT FOR WEEKS

Think like a commercial operation: when a large firm implements an ongoing business to business direct marketing campaign, they constantly maintain and refresh a network of list brokers and relevant marketing outlets. Brokers provide company contact information, including key employee listings. But when marketers need to go beyond the top management level, like those pesky financial services telemarketers who require an intravenous lead flow, they go to the off-market list brokers.

Pursuing these types of list arbitrageurs might lead you into an ethical dilemma. These vendors are not publishers or associations selling access to their subscriber and member lists. The focus here is the legion of small shops buying, selling, and trading corporate employee directories. For a few hundred dollars, one might purchase the entire current employee roster (with contact information) for any one of thousands of companies. This is particularly valuable to CI consultants who often source from just a wee list of organizations.

The largest vendor in this space, with a manageable reputation, is known as Corporate Sales Leads in Florida. There are also many black market vendors of such employee information, though I'm reluctant to do them the service of mentioning them within this publication.

WHAT'S A "NAMEGEN" SHOP?

When the recruiting industry was booming several years ago, smart firms staffed up research and name generation (namegen) departments. Recruitment researchers did just one thing all day long: procure names and contacts according to defined hiring needs. Many scoured the internet and worked the telephones to put together tightly focused lists. Then the industry collapsed and the majority of these researchers were downsized (which is a pleasant way to say canned, or fired).

Though there are too many of these formerly indentured recruiting researchers to list here, they tend to congregate in a few places. One of these is the Executive Search Roundtable in New York (ESR). ESR represents specifically the research function within the retained search industry (the guys who get their money up front, not upon placement – many of whom sell research as a core competency). When ESR membership shrank with the market, one resourceful guy named Bob Stein put together a new site where they could all connect with each other and with buyers at *ProspectCity.com*.

Between those two resources, you will quickly find hundreds of researchers who will deliver to you the exact names, titles, and contact information for the people you want to talk to from the companies you must

know. Several of the same members will provide organizational charts along with other cursory intelligence. Rates vary quite a bit, from project fees to hourly fees to per name fees . . . but a top researcher in this category is worth every nickel spent.

ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING IS THE NEW BUSINESS BRUNCH

Many competitive intelligence consultants enjoy using resume databases to harvest names within specific organizations. The problem here is semantics. For example, betting that job-seeking employees of a target organization are more likely to speak at length is presumptuous. Gauging the value of their very-current knowledge is difficult, particularly if they've been cut out of the loop on core activities in anticipation of a termination or job change.

Online social networking sites offer a back door to employee information. Many social networking sites contain biographical information for current employees whether or not they're job seekers (though most will entertain offers according to their own notes on these sites). Beyond such advantages as requesting introductions through common contacts, the real benefit is the validity of the data.

Perhaps due to the freshness and buzz surrounding these sites, members update and maintain their profiles, offering up the equivalent of a speaker biography in the absence of any particular event. Major sites for online social networking within the category of business in the USA include *LinkedIn.com* and *Ryze.com*. At my blog, *PassingNotes.com,* you'll find a directory of over sixty other such offerings, including European versions of these business networking sites.

For a savvy CI professional, these sites also offer a unique resource for other areas of intelligence gathering such as preliminary social network mapping and accidental eavesdropping.

For example, when you are part of a message-forwarding request chain, you will perhaps see a social connection that might never have been apparent to you (it's like seeing postcards; the messages are all displayed openly while en route).

BUY, SELL AND TRADE

When social networking sites took off, some folks were outright flustered trying to establish online rapport through common contacts. Recruiters, job seekers, sales people, entrepreneurs – all of them just wanted to get their messages through but lacked access to current contact information. Online social networking sites employ permission level viewing policies to prevent aggressive outreach (read: no phone numbers, no email addresses). Of course with a name and an employer, one might simply go online or pick up the phone to get the information . . . but why even bother?

Bartering names is old news to sales people, recruiters, and others who are constantly in pursuit of new attentive

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A unique resource for social mapping

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ears. This bartering traditionally takes place via private electronic listserves and newsletters, or direct person-to-person exchange.

Recently, a couple of former sales professionals saw an opportunity to build what looks and feels like an online business card swap at *JigSaw.com*. Same idea but a thousand times easier, it just requires a machine and an internet connection. One joins for free and has the option to buy, sell, or trade contact information. You won't see much more than name, title, and direct contact details, but in many cases that is just what one needs. Other information about the sources might be found through an alternate resource, such as a human capital search engine.

HUMAN CAPITAL SEARCH ENGINES

As interest in focused search engine offerings continues to rise, clever approaches to segmentation are maturing. While sites such as *Scirus.com* cater to scientific and technical research, still others go deeper in pursuit of the same elusive goal: getting you all of the information you want about just one type of thing. For example, Google has offered Froogle for product price research, putting a new face on a moth-eaten idea. Search engines are also beginning to open up their API's (programming interfaces) to outsiders who wish to slice their queries for their own niche researcher audiences.

Very new to the plate are search engines carving out information about just human capital. Sites such as *CompanyPay.com* gather compensation information for tens of thousands of executives while sites like *Ziggs.com* gather detailed biographical information for millions of leaders and managers in business. Both are similar in scope to information offered by such sites as Hoovers with one distinct difference: the information does not cost money.

Moving below the executive level, where the creamy center of competitive intelligence sources exists, is one clear first mover in this field. Using natural language queries and an imaginative approach to this challenge, *Eliyon.com* has built a database of over 20 million individuals at hundreds of thousands of companies. They offer advanced search options and features for money (e.g. search for all product managers at Company X with keyword Y in the biography). They have a free offering as well, though it is of far less value for volume research needs.

COPY OTHER SMART PEOPLE

When it comes to the next new thing, the next JigSaw or Eliyon or ProspectCity, consider keeping tabs on the people who really live and die by just the names: headhunters.

Recruiter newsletters, magazines and listserves abound. Unfortunately, most are mediocre or bear little relevance to general competitive intelligence practices of interest. What should matter to you within this dizzying array of specialized recruiting functions and roles is the headhunting practice called sourcing.

Sourcing is about finding the bodies to fill the open positions, the names, the resumes, the referrals, whatever gets it done. Sourcing doesn't fill jobs, people do. Understanding how sourcers work and think is unusually valuable and quite analogous to some processes employed in competitive intelligence. If there is one resource that speaks most loudly to this function within this audience, it is the Electronic Recruiting Exchange (aka 'ERE').

At ERE you'll find many folks to connect to directly, including members of the aforementioned resources (like ProspectCity). ERE hosts a number of special interest groups created by members as 'miniature communities of interest.' One such special interest group is specific to competitive intelligence for the human resource function, founded by yours truly. It already counts several SCIP members as active participants – in fact, there are numerous SCIP members already well nested within ERE. While the CI for HR group doesn't deal with sourcing specifically, it might offer any interested readers a short path to network directly with dozens of other active SCIP members thinking about these issues.

Limited space makes it difficult to examine details of the many additional resources within those categories described in this piece. Rather, this column serves as an informative introduction to the great lakes into which many current source rivers flow.

In the end, your own comfort level with technology, people, and separating from money will dictate how the future of your own source mapping efforts plays out.

Good luck.

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