



Supply Chain Operations & Technologies
 Supply Chain Vendor Compliance
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 Turnaround Help

Since January 1996

The mission of the 27-year-old Strategic and Competitive Intelligence Professionals (www.scip.org) organization is that it "advocates for the skilled use of intelligence to enhance business decision-making and organizational performance". Competitive intelligence can be found in all sorts of places, from classified advertisements to Securities and Exchange Commission filings to company brochures and web sites to physical observation of a facility's activities (e.g. the number of employees entering and leaving by incremental time of day), to the number and type of inbound and outbound delivery vehicles. You get the idea.

If the above description of competitive intelligence sounds like data mining or data gathering and you read my newsletter of just last month regarding my perspective on the not-really-news-lead of the National Security Agency's data listening program, you are correct. Intelligence about what the competitor is doing – whether the competitor is a country or a corporation – has strategic (and monetary) value. Seemingly disconnected data points are brought together to form a more complete picture, not unlike what happens with identity theft.

Where the concept of competitive intelligence gets kicked up a notch comes from a company called Skybox Imaging (www.skyboximaging.com) as profiled in the July 2013 edition of WIRED magazine. According to the article's statistics: Only approximately 100 of the 1,000+ satellites that orbit the Earth send back visual data, and only 12 of those send back high-resolution (defined as 1 pixel = 1 square meter or less of ground) pictures. Of those 12, only 9 sell images commercially, an estimated \$2.3B per year market, 80% which is controlled by the US government which has priority over all others for satellite time.

Skybox's business model is to ring the Earth with inexpensive satellites equipped with high-resolution cameras and offer to sell its camera time into what is expected to grow into a \$4B per year market by 2018. Okay, sounds like a good business model so far, but wait, there's more.

Because it's not just the pretty pictures that Skybox intends to profit from, but the unsold images it collects and analyzes for data, such as the number of vehicles (and perhaps by type) in a retailer's parking lot by incremental time of day, the number of vehicles (by type, differentiating tankers from passenger vehicles) on a particular roadway, the number of ships (by type) on a body of water, the brightness of a city or town at night, pollution output, land-crop utilization ... I think you get the picture (pun intended).

This data – which could easily be considered competitive intelligence depending upon to whom it is sold and how & why it is used – will provide an information perspective never before available. This could give companies and countries alike a leg-up on their competition, perhaps making level a heretofore uneven playing field.

From data mining sales transactions to data listening of telecommunications to opening up the heavens to allow us to watch our planet-based activities like never before, our abilities to monitor every aspect of our lives are fast approaching an apparent conversion point, with the ethical and legal implications to yet be decided.

Thank you.

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