

*"Vision is the art of seeing the invisible. Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality."*

## **BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE . . .**

I had some discourse with a guy from a retailer (call him retailer A) recently, about his competition. Retailer A was lamenting that his competition (call him retailer B) was brazenly calling him for technical support. Imagine that! One retailer calling another, in this case retailer A's direct competition, to help solve some problem. Retailer A provided the technical support but then complained that he recently had to fix several problems in cars belonging to consumers of retailer B. What should he do?

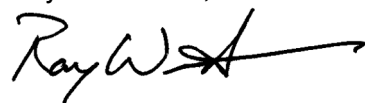
**TAKE THE CALL!** May I humbly suggest that gathering useful and important competitive business intelligence about one's competition does not get a lot easier than that. Oh I suppose it could be somewhat easier if the owner of retailer B would keep a problem and failure log along with his customer contact and complaint list and bring those lists (and some coffee & doughnuts) to retailer A's office every Monday morning. Imagine receiving a list, every Monday morning, of fresh consumers who have relevant problems that you can solve! Absent that unlikely scenario, my advice is to always take technical support calls from your direct competition. The ultimate idea will be to encourage your competition to send his consumer to your store. In the meantime there are several useful tactics where this information about your competition can be used in your presentation to your consumers and his! I am not suggesting **ALOTTA NEGATIVE BS**. That never works well or for any length of time. BUT knowing your competition's weakness and strengths can help you position your presentation.

Dig this... If retailer B is always calling because he has trouble programming the integration device, retailer A might make a point of telling EVERY consumer about the fact that all of his tech's are factory trained and constantly retained on the proper programming techniques for integration devices. The presentation to the consumer goes something like... "Well you know better than I do, you can buy this integration device in lots of places. What makes us different, is our programming expertise. If you elect to shop around be sure to ask the guy about his programming expertise and troubleshooting capability. Watch his face when you mention troubleshooting. That's the part where we really excel. Many places are a little bit intimidated when some real thought and skills are required to make the device perform perfectly. We get it done right." Nothing negative. Just facts about the integration device challenges and your expertise in responding to such challenges.

I am reminded of a story about my wife's grandmother, a GREAT cook! Her friends were always asking for her "secret recipe". Being a nice old lady she was reluctant to be openly rude and refuse such a request. BUT neither was she willing to let her friends in on the real secret to such excellent cooking. Therefore when she delivered the recipe to her friends who then set about the task of reproducing such terrific tasting grub, the result seemed never to be as satisfying as the original...

I am not certain and I never tried to prove it, but I suspect that my wife's grandmother may have forgotten to include ALL of the ingredients in the CORRECT quantities and the proper mixing SEQUENCE required to reproduce the original. The resulting impression; my wife's grandmother remained the best cook in the group of friends and always won the most sincere praise from those fortunate enough to sample one of her meals. Get it...?

At your service,



Ray Windsor