EXPORT PROMOTION

A Decision Support Model Approach

Editors

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Chapter 11

Exporter's information requirements: competitive intelligence as an export promotion instrument

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11.1 Introduction

Many firms regard exporting as a means to counter and monitor growing foreign competition, enlarge their market base, and augment profitability. However, despite the financial implications of selling to foreign markets, the process is uncertain and has many potential pitfalls. Exporting requires detailed knowledge of various factors (e.g. foreign business practices, cultures, competition) that could affect a small firm's ability to be successful in foreign markets (Belich & Dubinsky, 1999:45). It is, therefore, clear that if an increasing number of firms move into export operations, gathering and processing the right information will be of critical importance.

All companies require information upon which to make informed business decisions. In the case of exporters, the importance of acquiring the correct information is even greater due to the complexities of exports (Denis & Depelteau, 1985; Benito, Solberg & Welch, 1993; Souchon & Diamantopoulos, 2000). The export environment is politically, economically and socially complex, and lack of knowledge about these complexities, increases uncertainty about the target market and possibly leads to lost opportunities (Douglas & Craig, 1983; Douglas & Craig, 1989). Another complicating factor affecting upon exports is the economic volatility in certain export markets. Export decision support has, therefore, become important in monitoring competitive drivers in export markets and making appropriate management decisions (Richey & Myers, 2001). A decision support model (DSM) developed by Cuyvers (Cuyvers *et al.*, 1995) is one such support instrument from an export information

1 The chapter resulted from the PhD study by ML Kühn at the School of Economics, North-West University.

requirement perspective. The DSM provides indications on the types of export information that is required by exporters of both products and services (see Chapters 4 and 10).

Export information as a field considers what information is required (the types of information) for successful exporting of products and/or services, the way/methods in which it is acquired, the sources and quality of information and the way in which interpreted information is applied in strategic export decisions. One of the challenges an exporter faces is finding the right export market for his product and/or service and once a realistic export opportunity or a market presents itself, exporters need to determine which types of information they require. The various types of information need to be gathered, analysed and interpreted in order to inform the important business decisions. Information can be gathered using a variety of methods and using a variety of sources of information.

Decision-makers in companies and governments are increasingly aware of the need to manage and use information strategically to maintain or increase organisational competitiveness and innovation. With Competitive Intelligence (CI) as an instrument to achieve this, managers are increasingly recognising the importance of CI as a key asset and source of competitive advantage (Darling, 1996). Yet, information gathering and the process of making sense of the information, is often a time and cost intensive activity and therefore, from a competitiveness perspective, it is important that exporters to focus on gathering the right information and then make optimal use of gathered information.

This chapter firstly examines exporters' need for information, the types of information considered important by exporters and the sources consulted for gathering information. Secondly, this chapter considers the manner in which exporters can use CI as an instrument to assist them in identifying the information they need to collect from the available sources and eventually making strategic business decisions based on the results of the CI process.

Finally, this chapter will indicate that the DSM can be used in conjunction with the CI process to provide exporters of products and/or services with an indication of potential markets and therefore the types of market information required, thereby enhancing export promotion activities and export success.

11.2 Exporters' need for information

Export information plays an important role in enhancing a company's internationalisation and competitiveness. An absence or lack of the right information could be a barrier to embarking on exporting and in export expansion (Souchon & Diamantopoulos, 1996; Chetty & Blankenburg-Holm, 2000). The taking of sound business decisions requires that export managers are aware of their export information requirements and the information available to them. Informed export decision-making is also dependent on the availability

and use of the right information in sound export plans and decisions (Zaltman & Moorman, 1988; Menon & Varadarajan, 1992; Crick & Chaudhry, 2010).

In a competitive business environment in which much of the same information is often equally available to all companies, a key source of competitive advantage lies in the manner in which the information types are identified and applied (Zaltman & Moorman, 1988). As the number of companies participating in export activities increases, information regarding the international environment becomes critical to effectively managing corporate ventures.

The importance of access to and use of the right information for export success is highlighted in Leonidou and Katsikeas (1997). This importance has also been recognised by governments through the establishment of export promotion organisations that assist exporters in acquiring the desired information about potential markets for products and/or services (Cuyvers, De Pelsmacker, Rayp & Roozen, 1995; Craig & Douglas, 2000). These organisations focus on export development and export promotion (Craig & Douglas, 2000).

11.3 Types of export information

Based upon existing studies, the types of information exporters perceive to be important and the sources consulted depend upon such factors as organisational characteristics and the availability of resources (Walters, 1983; Makinen, 1986; Woods & Goolsby, 1987). The extent of export experience also has a direct influence on the types of information exporters perceive to be important and the sources they consult (Walters, 1983; Makinen, 1986; Woods & Goolsby, 1987; Mohamad, Ahmed & Honeycutt, 2001).

Broadly, types of information can be categorised into distinct categories. In a study of US exporters, Woods and Goolsby (1987) distinguished amongst five types of information used by US exporters: political information, economic information (its effect on lifestyles), macro-economic information relating to market potential, export restrictions (tariff, non-tariff, and transportation barriers), and legal information.

In terms of the importance of the various types of information, exporters ranked market information and export restrictions as most important. Literature on the types of information used by UK exporters revealed a similar pattern. Market feasibility information (market competition, buyers' preferences and price trends), adaptation information (product and other marketing adaptation issues), and background information (such as social, political, and economic background, transport infrastructure, and government assistance) were rated as important types of information (Hart, Webb & Jones, 1994; Williams, 2003; Cavusgil, 1984a). This general information about foreign markets ranked as an important area of information (Benito, Solberg & Welch, 1993).

Based on the literature, seven types of information were identified. They are: macro-economic information, political information, regulatory information, market information, export marketing information, competitor information, and information on market-access barriers (Klein, 2000; Toften & Rustad, 2005; Moser, Nestmann & Wedow, 2006; Viviers & Calof, 2002; Julien & Ramangalahy, 2003). These types are summarised in Table 11.1.

Table 11.1. Types of exporter information.

Types of information	Sources
Market information	
<p>Market attractiveness/feasibility as indicated by the ranking of market potential, customer information (buyer preferences, lifestyles and culture) and price levels of products and/or services, product and other marketing adaptation issues (advertising and promotions):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typical profit margins for similar products and/or services; • Market trends regarding market growth or decline; • Technology trends; • Number of potential customers; • Market(s) size of the market (value and volume); • Percentage of imports in relation to total market; • Key countries exporting to target country in this market. <p>List and description of all potential marketing channels;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographic areas with high concentrations of potential customers; • Key drivers and challenges including delivery times, level and type of service expected; • If the proposed product is unique, how is the problem it solves handled currently?; • Issues of importance to customers when purchasing the particular product/assessment of satisfaction with current supplier or the product and price trends; • Customer culture: Attitude of buyers to imported products in this market and factors that encourage buyers to switch suppliers; and • Expected credit and payment terms. 	<p>Cavusgil, 1984a; Cavusgil, 1984b; Hart <i>et al.</i>, 1994; Wright <i>et al.</i>, 2002; Leonidou & Katsikeas, 1997; Leonidou & Adams-Florou, 1999; Woods & Robertson, 2000; Julien & Ramangalahy, 2003; Williams, 2003.</p>
Export marketing information	
<p>Marketing or strategic partner.</p> <p>Market presence including independent sales office, partnership with a local company for an independent sales office, purchase a local company in the target country, agencies.</p> <p>Trade exhibitions and conferences.</p> <p>Trade associations and their recent and service offering, e.g. publications.</p> <p>Advertising and PR agencies.</p> <p>Export incentives.</p>	<p>Deshpandé & Zaltman, 1982; Elbasher & Nicholls, 1983; Kohli & Jaworski, 1990; Leonidou, 1995a; Souchon & Diamantopoulos, 1996; Leonidou & Theodosiou, 2004; Hart <i>et al.</i>, 1994; Koksall, 2008.</p>

Types of information	Sources
Macro-economic information	
Background on economic conditions, economic indicators information. Potential investors (names of companies in the particular field that may be open to investment opportunities, venture capital companies that are active in the industry). Infrastructure (financial, roads, rail, sea and airports). Financial incentives.	Woods & Goolsby, 1987; Hart <i>et al.</i> , 1994; Cavusgil, 1984a; Cavusgil, 1984b; Wright, Pickton & Callow, 2002; Klein, 2000; Williams, 2003; Toften & Rustad, 2005.
Political information	
Government assistance, political stability. Security matters.	Woods & Goolsby, 1987; Hart <i>et al.</i> , 1994; Cavusgil, 1984a; Cavusgil, 1984b; Wright <i>et al.</i> , 2002; Williams, 2003; Moser, Nestmann & Wedow, 2006.
Legal/regulatory information	
Standards approvals and licenses required selling the products in the target export market. Labour issues. Issues regarding starting a business, regulations on local shareholding, taxes. Legal system.	Woods & Goolsby, 1987; Hart <i>et al.</i> , 1994; Cavusgil, 1984a; Wright <i>et al.</i> , 2002; Williams, 2003.
Competitor information	
Identification of key competitors and profiles on each including key indicators. Competitor strengths and weaknesses. Competitor pricing. Competitor customers: positioning, segmentation, prices offered. Competitor marketing strategy and where they advertise: trade show participation. Competitor distribution, i.e. locations and channels (dealers, agents, direct, wholesalers). Copies of printed materials of competitors (brochures/technical data sheets).	Klein, 2000.
Information on market-access restrictions	
Tariff and non-tariff barriers. Transport barriers. Barriers of entry.	Woods & Goolsby, 1987; Hart <i>et al.</i> , 1994; Cavusgil, 1984a; Cavusgil, 1984b; Leonidou & Katsikeas, 1997; Sandrey, 2003; Klein, 2000; Williams, 2003; Heritage Foundation, 2010.

Various factors influence the types of export information exporters gather as well as the processing of that information. These are export dependence, the extent of export operations, the stage of export, and export complexity (Belich & Dubinsky, 1999; Souchon, Diamantopoulos, Holzmueller, Axinn, Sinkula, Simmer & Durden, 2003). Given the above information needs of exporters, one of the instruments that exporters could

use to assist in focusing on gathering the right information, interpret, apply and making optimal use of the gathered information is Competitive Intelligence (CI). Decision-makers in small and medium-sized enterprises, large companies and governments are also increasingly aware of the need to manage and use information strategically to maintain or increase organisational competitiveness and innovation. CI as an instrument will be subsequently discussed.

Taking a step back, however, even before the types of information are identified and before CI can be used, it is important for exporters to take strategic decisions on export growth including exploring new export markets and expanding existing export markets. In this regard, the DSM becomes important as it provides exporters and EPOs with information on realistic export opportunities (REOs) that could be explored further.

The next section will investigate CI as an instrument to determine, gather and process important export information.

11.4 Competitive Intelligence (CI)

The basis for CI revolves around decisions made by managers about the positioning of a business to maximise the value of the capabilities that distinguish it from its competitors. Failure to collect, interpret or analyse and act upon competitive information in an organised way can lead to the failure of an organisation. Having the capability to determine the types of information required and then accessing and acquiring the right types of information and making sense of the information is therefore advantageous for exporters. De Oliveira and Vieira (2006) argue that companies that intend exporting or that endeavour to grow their exports often lack the instruments to help them in decision support. There is a basic understanding that CI is a focused and comprehensive approach to information that helps companies gain a better understanding of their business environment, including competitors, suppliers, customers and regulatory matters. It also helps exporters to focus on these issues. CI is, therefore, suggested as a process that could assist especially exporters in obtaining the information they require (Rouach & Santi, 2001; De Oliveira & Vieira, 2006).

11.4.1 Definition of Competitive Intelligence (CI)

CI as a strategic management instrument has been researched by many authors under many different labels including environmental scanning, Business intelligence (BI) strategic intelligence (SI), competitor analysis and market[ing] intelligence (Saxby, Parker, Nitse & Dishman, 2002). Most of these terms have positioned intelligence as the necessary (and sometimes assumed) prerequisite for strategic planning (Porter, 1980). In essence, CI is aimed at gaining strategic competitive advantage (Porter, 1980).

CI is not just about monitoring competition, but also about scanning the entire business environment in which firms have to function. Herring (1998) states the objective of CI as "being able to predict competitors' moves, customers' moves, government moves and so forth." CI, according to the Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals (2011) is "a systematic and ethical programme for gathering, analysing and managing external information that can affect the company's plans, decisions and operations." The ultimate aim of CI is "being able to predict competitors' moves, customers' moves, government moves and so forth" (Gilad, 1996) in order to reduce managerial decision uncertainty. The advantages of using the process of CI in order to identify key information requirements are well-documented. It provides the means to gain and sustain a competitive advantage (Calof & Breakspear, 1999; Herring, 1999) and improves insight into competitors, accurate market predictions and accurate monitoring of trends with significant impact on a company's future (Fuld, 1995).

11.4.2 The Competitive Intelligence cycle

From the perspective of export information types, CI is not about all information but about information that affects or potentially affects an organisation's competitiveness. CI is more specifically concerned with turning information into intelligence through a continuous process in a company present in all of the functions of business of the organisation.

Kahaner (1996:23) recommends that companies structure a formal programme of CI internally that includes a formal unit and a systematic CI process. A number of researchers (Calof & Breakspear, 1999; Elizondo & Glitman, 2003) go on to describe CI as comprising various sequential phases whereby raw information is accessed, gathered, transmitted, evaluated, analysed and made available to various users of CI as finished intelligence for use in business planning. Each phase is essential and employs established techniques that are applied to specific questions or issues.

Calof and Breakspear (1999) identified six key activity areas or constructs that collectively form the CI model. These constructs were confirmed by Saayman, De Pelsmacker, Viviers, Cuyvers, Muller and Jegers (2008). Calof and Dishman (2003) acknowledged that the CI process is affected by certain contextual influences, namely organisational culture/awareness, the formal infrastructure available as well as employee involvement. The CI cycle contributes towards this distinction between the CI process and contextual influences (see Figure 11.1).

Figure 11.1. The Competitive Intelligence cycle.

Source: Adapted from Kahaner (1996) and Fleisher & Bensoussan (2003)

The various constructs and contextual influences are subsequently discussed.

11.4.2.1 *Planning and focus*

CI is not concerned with simply collecting information, but it focuses on gathering information on issues of highest importance to senior management (Herring, 1999). For exporters these Key Intelligence Needs (KIN) or intelligence types are typically the types of information they require to successfully export (see Table 11.1). Klein (2000) found that exporters invest many resources worldwide to determine their CI needs. For exporters, meticulous attention to compiling a list of types of information required is a key element in a business strategy designed for the company's success in export markets (Klein, 2000; Elizondo & Glitman, 2003).

According to Herring (1999) a company's intelligence needs can generally be assigned to one of three functional categories namely strategic actions and decisions, e.g. the development of strategic plans and strategies; early warning intelligence e.g. competitor initiatives, technological surprise, and governmental actions; and intelligence on key players in the relevant marketplace or export market including competitors, customers, suppliers,

regulators, and potential partners. Although gathering information from foreign markets significantly raises exporters' probability of succeeding in the export market, the acquisition of foreign knowledge also contributes to exporters' innovation strategies, such as where to allocate research and development (R&D) resources (Wakasugi, Todo, Sato, Nishioka, Matsuura & Ito, 2008).

During the planning and focus component, and guided by the types of information that is sought, resources are allocated for the CI project or process, and the purpose and result of the findings is established. Different types of KINs, therefore, require different types of intelligence operations (Herring, 1999). For example, intelligence to support decision-making usually requires secondary source research with current human-source collection inputs. Early-warning intelligence is critically dependent on human-source collection and monitoring, with analysis serving as the detection mechanism that "signals" possible future development that an exporter should be prepared to act on. Player-oriented intelligence usually takes the form of analytical profiles, sometimes tailored to specific user questions or planned actions.

11.4.2.2 Collection

Information gathering concerns three aspects namely the way in which relevant information is gathered, the sources that are accessed, and how this information flows from the supplier to the user who should use the information in business decisions (Souchon & Diamantopoulos, 1997; Menon & Varadarajan, 1992; Garvin, 1993; Maltz & Kohli, 1996). Once the type of information that is required is determined, that information must be gathered from a variety of sources for examination during the CI process (Lenz & Engledow, 1986a; 1986b). This systematic secondary and primary intelligence collection using various means of collection including environmental scanning is a key element in a business strategy designed for the company's success in export markets (Klein, 2000; Elizondo & Glitman, 2003).

Various gathering methods are discussed in the literature and are summarised in Souchon *et al.*, (2003), Souchon and Diamantopoulos (1997) and Cavusgil (1984a) as comprising mainly formal marketing research, export market research and export assistance (often provided by official EPOs) and export market intelligence. Marketing research and market intelligence as collection methods can entail all aspects of information collection (Kohli & Jaworski, 1990) because export marketing sources often overlap (Diamantopoulos & Souchon, 1999; Williams, 2003). Cavusgil (1984b:262) defines export marketing research as "the research activities of companies carried out either in the home market or in foreign markets for the purpose of reducing uncertainty surrounding international marketing decisions"; it is distinct from other information acquisition modes because it is formalised, systematic, and objective. Finally, export market intelligence is an informal and ongoing

information acquisition mode that includes approaching potential customers, distributors, and competitors and that Kotler (1991:91) defines as reflecting, “a set of procedures used by managers to obtain their everyday information about pertinent developments in the marketing environment.”

A variety of sources are accessed to gather information. The choice of sources is influenced by the nature of the information that needs to be gathered. These sources are both within the organisation and external to it. Some examples are sales representatives, research of new patent filings and competitor websites. A survey of Norwegian companies found that exporters place their main emphasis on informal contacts as a basis for information sources. These include customers (external) and sales people (internal) (Benito, Solberg & Welch, 1993). Information can also be found on the Internet itself – most companies are now advertising their services and some specialise in offering information that can be used for competitor research. Other sources include trade shows and conferences.

11.4.2.3 Analysis

The mere fact that a company like an exporter possesses information or has access to information does not automatically translate into competitive advantage. Information gathered must be subjected to a process of analysis and interpretation in order to develop meaningful insights and knowledge. This knowledge then has to be used in decision-making and fed back to an export of company's innovation efforts and strategic planning (Souchon *et al.*, 2003; Wagasuki *et al.*, 2008). In effect, CI's analysis phase is where intelligence is created; that is, information is converted into actionable intelligence on which strategic and tactical decisions may be based (Calof & Miller, 1997; Herring, 1998). Much work has been done in the areas of competitive analysis, environmental analysis and competitive theory (Porter, 1980). Reid (1981) emphasises the importance of information processing in export behaviour.

Typical outcomes of the intelligence analysis area for exporters are competitor profiles, product analyses and export strategy. Such export market knowledge may provide a deeper understanding of the relationships between export market information uses and export performance (Toften & Olsen, 2003).

11.4.2.4 Communication

The results of the CI process or project need to be communicated to those with the authority and responsibility to act on the findings. CI needs to be communicated in a usable and actionable or interpreted manner. CI, therefore, goes beyond providing intelligence; it also includes creating user-friendly intelligence that could influence decision-making (Zaltman, Moorman & Deshpandé, 1992). The mode of communication is also an important aspect of

communication. According to Weiss (2002) there are a number of options including face-to-face, presentations, telephone calls, emails, and written memos. The choice depends on factors such as time and personality.

Communication is not the final stage of CI. Intelligence that is not used has no value, therefore, the final stage of CI is again the first stage namely planning and focus and the actual use of the intelligence in the decision process. This emphasises the continuous nature of CI. CI requires a decision to be taken. Information passed to management and placed on a shelf without being used to guide business actions is not intelligence (Weiss, 2002).

11.4.2.5 Process and structure

Three aspects provide the contextual influences on the CI process. They are process and structure, organisational culture and awareness and the skills set that is required.

In terms of process and structure, CI requires appropriate policies, procedures and a formal (or informal) infrastructure so employees may contribute effectively to the CI system and gain the benefits from the CI process. There is much support for a formal structure and a systematic approach to CI (Porter, 1980; Ghoshal & Kim, 1986; Ghoshal & Westney, 2006). Such a formal structure includes a database of competitive knowledge and appropriate channels to communicate information and intelligence.

11.4.2.6 Organisational awareness and culture

In order for CI to grow in a sustainable manner and for CI to be implemented and used optimally, there needs to be an appropriate organisational awareness of CI and a culture of competitiveness. There has been support for this culture and awareness construct in the area of market orientation (Pole, Madsen & Dishman, 2000; Slater & Narver, 1995). The company-wide participation in the process of CI is important and this includes all levels of a company from the highest decision-makers to the sales staff. Although decision-makers are the drivers and primary users of CI, Kahaner (1996) intimates that information gathering should be the concern of all the company's personnel. Without proper awareness and attitudes that favour both intelligence and information sharing, it will be a challenge to develop intelligence within a company.

11.4.2.7 Skills

De Pelsmacker, Muller, Viviers, Saayman, Cuyvers and Jegers (2005) added a new contextual aspect namely that having the right skills mix is an imperative for effective CI for exporters. The right skills are especially required for the analysis construct of CI mainly because the process of information gathering often leads to concerns regarding information overload and the quality of information. Information overload is exacerbated by a shortage of skills,

particularly in smaller companies, for making sense of and using the information gathered. This shortage often leads to ad hoc information collection when required and decision-making based more on instinct than interpreted information (Calof, 1994). According to Williams (2003), in contrast to Diamantopoulos and Souchon's findings (1999), an oversupply rather than an undersupply of relevant important information creates difficulties. Siriginidi (1996) supports this finding and found that there is a need to train information specialists to reduce the information gap between information needs and sources of information.

11.5 CI use according to size and stages of exports

Many studies have been conducted into the use of CI and especially export marketing intelligence in small- and medium-sized companies (SMEs) and into the CI practices of exporters in various stages of export (Balabanis, Theodosiou & Katsikeas, 2004; Leonidou, 2004; Doole, Grimes, & Demack, 2006; Williams, 2006). Having discussed the importance for exporters to have the right types of information available to enhance export promotion and the use of CI to achieve this, the next part of this chapter will examine the CI practices of small and larger exporters as well as the impact of the stage of exports on the CI practices of exporters. Thereafter, and based on this discussion, recommendations will be made.

11.5.1 CI and size of exporters

Available empirical research indicates that there are widespread differences between SMEs and large exporting companies in both their CI practices and the context within which CI takes place within a company (De Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2005). In particular, large exporting companies exhibit better data collection, analysis and communication skills than smaller companies, which give them an edge in the CI practices over SMEs (Calof & Dishman, 2003). According to Calof & Dishman (2003), CI may be even more important for small companies than for larger ones, since smaller companies cannot absorb market mistakes in the same way that large companies can.

In terms of planning and focus, the types of information required by small and large exporters are by nature similar. Viviers and Calof (2002) found that small- and medium-sized South African exporters regard information related to market access conditions and market intelligence to identify buyers as the most important types of information requested by users. This is confirmed in the literature as described in Table 11.1. Benito, Solberg and Welch (1993) confirm in a survey of 221 Norwegian exporters of various sizes, that the decision-making issues for which information is sought, entry into a new market and developing a distribution network were singled out as the most important. General information about foreign markets was ranked as the most important area of information.

Regarding the collection activity, Groom and David (2001) found that the intelligence gathering activities of small companies is largely informal, despite the fact that the potential returns from CI are greatly valued. Most of the information an exporter might need is accessible in the public domain. Many studies have been conducted into the use of export information in small- and medium-sized companies (SMEs) (Balabanis, Theodosiou & Katsikeas, 2004; Doole, Grimes, & Demack, 2006; Williams, 2006). The information gathering activities of small firms is largely informal. Sources of information that are accessed to gather the required information differ according to the size of an exporter. Smaller exporters with more limited resources might be more likely to use government assistance. Barnea (2006) found in research on small- and medium-sized Israeli exporters that they conduct CI independently, but do expect the government to supply information on global markets through state commercial organisations. This support is more relevant to small- and medium-sized firms because they do not have the resources to develop their own CI capabilities. Previous research has also found that most small firms do not have the resources and/or expertise to track down and analyse the relevant pieces and do not realise or recognise that customers, suppliers and company employees collectively possess most of the competitor information they seek. They continue to rely on outside agents, for instance distributors, freight forwarders and consultants to perform most of the information gathering and processing for them (Doole, Grimes, & Demack, 2006; Williams, 2006). Benito, Solberg and Welch (1993) confirm that customers (external) and sales people (internal) emerged as being of particular importance as sources of information.

Regarding the analysis phase of CI, Calof and Dishman (2003) found that there are few differences between the intelligence practices of smaller and larger companies, with the exception that large companies conduct more formal analyses and make greater use of their employees mainly because they have the resources (Calof, 2003). It can thus be deduced from past research that because an exporter's ability to gather and use information is likely to depend on resource availability (Samiee & Walters, 2000), and thus on size, large exporters have more resources available to allocate to CI activities than do small exporters (Denis & Depelteau, 1985; Hart, Webb & Jones, 1994.)

However, one key advantage for SMEs is the rapid dissemination or communication of information among fewer personnel than is the case in very large firms, and the speed and flexibility with which decisions can be taken (Haley, 1999). Research into the personality characteristics of entrepreneurs has found that many have the attitude that the owner or manager knows the market in which the firm competes and does not need intelligence gathered in a more systematic approach. However, it may be equally important for small firms to have the capability to assess the external business environment properly (Groom & David, 2001).

Regarding the contextual aspect of process and structure, studies on CI practices of exporters of various sizes demonstrate that many large companies are more likely to have CI functions at multiple levels in four strategically significant areas. These are:

- (i) Support for strategic decision-making;
- (ii) Early warning of opportunities and threats;
- (iii) Competitor assessment; and
- (iv) Tracking and support for strategic planning and implementation (Caudron 1994; Attaway 1998).

Larger exporting companies also have a better formal infrastructure for CI (De Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2005). This notion supports previous findings by Bergeron and Hiller (2002) that smaller companies lack the formal infrastructure to conduct CI successfully. However, in contrast to Bergeron and Hiller (2002) who indicated that smaller companies lack employee expertise, research of South African and Flemish exporters (De Pelsmacker *et al.*, 2005) indicates that the involvement and understanding of CI among employees are better in smaller than in larger exporters. This lends some support to the notion of Haley (1999) that smaller companies find it easier to rapidly disseminate information among their staff and the advantage that decisions can be taken with more speed and flexibility, because the owner/manager knows the market in which the company competes. A survey of Spanish exporters found that a formal approach to competitive intelligence that includes a programme of creating awareness and a culture of competitiveness, rather than informal or discontinuous approaches, gives businesses of all sizes competitive advantage and justifies the value of its implementation, but that few exporters implement systematic programmes to benefit from the intelligence effort (Postigo, 2001). Most research into company CI practices focuses on larger (e.g. Fortune 500-level) firms and most management theory is founded upon the systematic analysis of managerial actions in large firms (Haley, 1999). For example, a survey of 85 firms from Business Week's *America's 1,000 Most Valuable Companies* indicate that only 24% of the sample firms had advanced competitor analysis programmes in place, and more than 41% had some competitor analysis function in place (Subramanian & Ishak, 1998). A 1997 study noted that although all of the responding firms had some sort of intelligence gathering function, only 60% had official systems (Futures Group, 1997). The challenge that becomes apparent with regard to smaller companies is that it is difficult to develop and sustain formal CI systems. While SMEs face similar problems and decisions to larger firms, Belich and Dubinsky (1999:53) found that, despite the need to understand foreign markets; smaller firms are less likely to integrate information processing into their corporate systems. On skills, smaller exporters often lack the advantage of expert personnel and extensive resources to implement formal CI systems (Bergeron & Hiller, 2002). A small company may have to obtain training to improve analysis skills or seek outsourced assistance.

11.5.2 CI and stage of exports

When examining the effect that export experience or stage of exports has on the CI activities of exports a few important differences arise.

Previous research has found that companies pass through various stages as they develop their international activities before their foreign activities reach maturity (Viviers, Kroon & Calof, 1996). In each successive stage, the types of information and the nature of assistance required changes (Silverman, Castaldi & Sengupta, 2002). Various authors describe the stages of export. Viviers *et al.* (1996) describe three stages in a study of the export behaviour of South African SMEs: passive exporter, involved exporter and committed exporter. Bilkey and Tesar (1977) identified six export stage profiles in their research on Wisconsin manufacturers:

- (i) Management is not interested in exporting;
- (ii) The company fills unsolicited orders but does not actively pursue export markets;
- (iii) The company's management actively explores exporting (passive exporter);
- (iv) The company starts to experiment with exporting;
- (v) The company becomes an active exporter; and
- (vi) The company becomes a committed exporter.

From a CI planning and focus viewpoint (see section 4.2.1), what is apparent from previous research is that exporters' information needs and the sources of information that exporters use are influenced by their stage of export (Cuyvers, Dumont, Viviers, De Pelsmacker, Muller, Jegers & Saayman, 2008; Souchon & Diamantopoulos, 2000; Viviers & Calof, 2002). Adequate supply information about export is an important factor in completing the current stage in the export process (Weaver & Pak, 1990). This is also highlighted by Leonidou (1995a), who revealed that limited information for locating and analysing foreign markets was the greatest impediment to export. Exporters lacking export experience are likely to have greater information needs in order to deal with export matters, as they cannot rely on past knowledge and experience or internal expertise (Gronhaug & Graham, 1987). They are, therefore, expected to make greater use of information than experienced exporters. Kedia and Chhokar (1986) state that the significant impediments to export activity amongst the companies they studied (machinery manufacturers and food processors) vary according to the respective companies' stage in the export process. While information barriers dominate the decisions as to how and where to export, financial and marketing ones prevail once companies are already exporting. Adequate supply information about exports is an important factor in completing the current stage in the export process (Weaver & Pak, 1990). Leonidou (1995a) also emphasises this and revealed that limited information for locating and analysing foreign markets was the greatest impediment to export.

From an information collection perspective, research has found that exporters that acquire and use export market intelligence serve more global markets than non-users do (Hart *et al.*, 1994; Leonidou, 1997). One explanation for this is that companies pursuing global markets search for additional sources of information (Cavusgil, 1984a). However, owing to the distinct characteristics of different countries and the nature of companies, the extent and amount of information required varies.

A company's inclination to consult wider sources of information is also a function of its internationalisation stage (Cavusgil, 1984a). He found that as companies progress through their internationalisation process the nature of the sources they require and use will change from general market information for the experimental exporters, to industry/business publications and trade show contacts for both the experimental and active exporters. Exporters' need for information also vary according to their export destinations (Bodur & Cavusgil, 1985). As a result, companies employ a wide range of information sources to improve the likelihood of success in their export efforts and these sources of information that exporters use are also influenced by their stage of export (Souchon & Diamantopoulos, 2000; Viviers & Calof, 2002).

Cavusgil (1984b) also found that more internationalised companies are using a wider variety of data sources and have a greater network of sources of information. De Oliveira and Vieira (2006) found that beginner exporters largely make use of government trade promotion organisations to supply the types of information they require emphasising the fact that such exporters' networks are still limited. Cavusgil (1984a) found that as companies progress through their internationalisation process, they would commit more financial and managerial resources to market research, reflecting the need for a more thorough analysis and assessment of potentials in foreign markets. This also means that they would have a greater availability of the required skilled resources to conduct CI effectively.

Regarding the process and structure of CI, previous research into the CI practices of exporters in various stages of exports is limited. Cavusgil (1984a:206-207) found that as exporters become committed, they will find it necessary to develop an internal information system for market research. A study by De Oliveira and Vieira (2006) showed that exporters in the beginner or low intensity stages of the exporting process do not have formalised CI systems in place despite the fact that competition is forcing them to gather and use information about the competitive environment. Although there is little evidence of differences between the CI practices of exporters in various stages of exports, two aspects are notable. One is that the types of assistance that exporters require changes in each successive stage (Bilkey & Tesar, 1977; Czinkota & Johnston, 1985; Silverman *et al.*, 2002) and secondly, as exporters become committed, they will find it necessary to develop an internal information system for market research (Cavusgil, 1984a:206-207). It can, therefore, be said that as exporters gain

more experience in the export process, they would require less external assistance and will develop more effective internal CI capabilities.

The link between an exporter's size and experience and an effective CI capability has been established. It is also clear that the more experienced and CI independent an exporter becomes, the less it is dependent on external export promotion assistance.

Regardless of size or stage of exports or the nature of an exporter's CI capability, the types of information that exporters require do not differ significantly. However, exporters do require certain types of information as indicated in Table 11.1 and in this regard, the DSM provides the starting point of key information requirements by providing specific indications of new export markets or opportunities for new products and/or services in existing markets.

11.6 Conclusion

It is apparent that exporters need different types of information and that such information needs to be gathered from a variety of sources using a number of gathering techniques. It is also apparent that information itself does not guarantee export success and a competitive advantage. Information needs to be turned into intelligence through a process of analysis in order for it to become useful. Indeed, decision makers in companies often have the information they need, but they do not use it for a variety of reasons, including the fact that there is often an overload of information and a lack of intelligence. In order to prevent an overload of information that potentially has value, but in its current format is unusable; exporters could consider building a formal CI capability.

From a decision-making perspective, it is true that the same information is often available to competitive firms at the same time. This means that competitive advantage is found in the use of information in decision-making rather than in who does or does not have it. In this regard, CI can play a role in the sense that it is an instrument for exporters to accurately define their information requirements, to gather the right types of information and to subject that information to a process of analysis and interpretation in order to supply intelligence in an actionable format to decision-makers.

In conclusion, research has shown that CI, used in conjunction with the DSM, are indeed valuable export promotion instruments to both small and large exporters and to exporters in various stages of export, as well as EPOs, whether it is conducted internally or with the assistance of external experts. Although the literature base on the effect and benefits of CI for exporters of various sizes and stages of exports is still limited, the examination of the benefits of CI leads to the conclusion that a formal CI system, including a systematic CI process, will have great benefits to all exporters. This is especially relevant during the planning and focus phase where the specific information requirements or types of information that an exporter needs are determined.

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