Market Intelligence

& Data

Utilizing Market Intelligence & Research

to Improve Your Company

|  |
| --- |
|  |

Getting Information About Your Company and Your Competitors Can Be Very Enlightening!

**If you use the materials in the article to evaluate your market, your competitors and your overall market potential you can learn a great deal about ways to improve your approach in market place.**

**Choosing market segments for your growth is also a key strategic choice made easier by knowing your market potential and your opportunity for growth.**

Market research is a broad term and usually scary to small business owners.

They hear this term and think, this concept is for the “Big Guys” not a small business!

This couldn’t be farther from truth, and in reality the small business owner needs more and better intelligence because the resources of smaller companies are more at risk. The smaller you are the less you are able to sustain significant changes that occur, unless you use your small size to remain nimble and change quickly. That is what intelligence does for you.

What we are going to do here in this material is turn this broad term of market research into a series of targeted arrows you as an entrepreneur can use to improve your bottom line.

**How is a fair question to ask?**

**If I know what I do well and don’t do well, I can fix it faster once I know?**

* How do you know these things for sure?
* How do you know what your customers feel about you?
* How do you know what they liked or disliked that you did?
* How do you know your share of market?

Since there are numerous forms of market research, we will first review the whole enchilada, the big picture. Then we can focus on what items can help a small business owner get better intelligence regarding their market, their competitors, and their own businesses.

**Market research comes in these forms:**

1. **The Market Potential** - What are the opportunities and how to exploit them?
2. **External Research** - The competition and their practices in the market.
3. **Internal Research** - Evaluating your own company practices.

Taken one at a time, the materials here and on the web site deal with how you can use each of these to put operational practices in place in your company, no matter how big or small you are, to get unbiased, unfiltered information directly back to you so you can make better decisions.

What is Operational Excellence?

***“Operational Excellence”*** *is a term we use often in our companies.*

* **It means we have a standard.**
* **That standard is our goal for every customer interaction.**
* **Every customer contact we have is a chance to create an impression/referral.**
* **How do we determine if we are achieving our standards?**
* **The question is – do we? And if not, why not?**

If you subscribe to wanting **“Operational Excellence”** your goals as a small business owner needs to include:

1. Establishing a set of standards for operational excellence in:
2. Sales Contacts
3. Service Contacts
4. Customer Contacts on the phone.

There are many points of contact in each of these areas.

So your information that comes back to you through your research or to your management team needs to identify each of these points of contact within your company. Where do customers actually touch your company?

1. Then create a direct line of information (Intelligence) back to the people in charge of Operational Excellence so they can change. We do this by creating certain types of basic market research. You can call it anything you like, but we call it intelligence. This is nothing more than unfiltered unbiased information that says we are doing things the way we thought they were supposed to be done, or we are not meeting that standard.
2. This is now an independent standard to use with your employees – Not you.

This standard is now easy to work with to get behavioral changes to take place such as:

* Putting rubber gloves on in the home to touch the thermostat.
* Booties on before we enter the home.
* Presenting IAQ options.
* Presenting Service Agreements.

I know the standard response here is “Who has the time” to do this?

The answer is you do – You choose your activities every day, you and I and all of us have exactly 24 hours in each day. So we make choices about what we do with our time.

The idea strikes that “running a business is nothing more than hundreds of small decisions in each day”. We make these decisions and that is what operating really is.

So if I can convince you that you can run a more effective business by getting better information about your business, why wouldn’t you choose that as a place to spend some time? Welcome to the real reason market research got invented in the first place.

Let’s take a closer look at each aspect of Market Research and how you can apply simple, low cost, basic principles into the operating practices of your company to help you get better, more accurate information about your company.

**Once your employees know you are able to accurately know what and how they have performed, and they become aware of this fact, their performance will naturally migrate to whatever standard you have set for performance.**

**Who wants to be embarrassed in front of their peers?**

Market Research Types and Applications

1. **Establishing Your Market Potential**

The first step in any market research is to understand your market.

Very few contractors know how to do this, and many just simply don’t even care!

Why should you?

This measures your operational practices against the market. A great operator wants to BEAT the market and his/her peers, by growing faster and better (more profitably) than the market as a whole.

Also, we should know what each segment of the market represents. Not all market segments are created equal. So we are interested in what we do as a company to develop these market segments. We may want to grow faster in service and maintenance, so that is where we place our time and energy, so it is nice to know there is a payoff if we have done so.

Follow the models below to determine your market potential. They are not perfect, but they do give you an example of how you can determine the value of the goods and services within your market areas.

This system of modeling gives you an indication of market size, and can help you determine where your company fits into the market. It is always a good place to start a growth plan for any business plan.

1. **External Research**

External market research can come in many forms. The main goal of the external research is to:

* 1. Capture detailed information about how your company is viewed by getting a picture of your brand. Does your brand you hope is being communicated actually get viewed as you hope?
  2. To get specific information – About a topic you care about. So you design a system of research that identifies what you desire.

Here are a few areas you can utilize to capture just this type of information.

Suppliers and Vendors:

Your suppliers and vendors are good sources of information. They can provide many areas of good data, such as:

* Contractors who are willing to sell.
* What key competitors may be planning.
* Successful practices or strategies.
* Detailed market research of their own – Industry data and studies that may help you – They spend money on all types of research to determine consumers attitudes. Ask them for it!

Sales Personnel in the Industry:

Sales personnel in the industry are known for talking. In some cases they are able to provide very good insights into what successful marketers and contractors are doing in non-competing markets.

Be advised that anything you EVER say to a sales person is essentially fair game to be repeated, no matter how much confidence, or how much of a privacy commitment you have received. If you pass it along it is surely public at some point.

Sales personnel are excellent sources of disinformation and can be used as research vehicles for carrying information that is inaccurate to competing contractors and within the market. This is a far more effective tactic, and when tested with information that is unique and false, it is amazing how quickly this information will make its way back to you in the form of a rumor.

Excellent sales personnel are in many cases willing to help support your cause. If positioned and utilized with your direction, they can help you find useful information to help your company grow and become more profitable. Examples include home show questionnaires working the booth, acting as hidden shoppers for your company and so forth.

Professional Research Firms:

Professional research firms are very expensive. They take time from you and are in many cases costly. However, you may want to find someone local who is a vendor that can conduct low cost basic market research. They are around in various markets and usually can be an effective substitute for finding data about your company.

An example of external research is “Focus Group Research”, where consumers that have purchased from your company are surveyed in detail by an independent party. The third party asks questions you have directed, and you typically will sit behind a blind two-way mirror able to see and discuss the information without being seen or heard by the consumers. You can also direct specific questions to the moderator during the discussion.

If you really want to know how people feel about their experiences buying, the selling process, your people, and the entire consumer experience there is NO substitute for this process. It is both enlightening and scary, but it does create incredible resolve around what you need to focus upon and why!

1. **Internal Research**

Internal research is useful to a company because it tells us exactly what is happening on a daily basis.

Here are some of the items we can use as small business owners to collect key pieces of information about our operational excellence.

Customer Feedback Directly to Our Company:

* Demand Service Follow-up

Happy Call Debrief Process with the Consumer

We utilize this process to contact the customer after a service or maintenance call has been performed in the home. During the busier times of the season we cannot and do not contact every service customer, but our teams understand this is random, so it creates a need to maintain the disciplines of the “Perfect Service Call” because the teams never know exactly who, or when they will have a customer happy call follow behind them.

And, since their customer satisfaction rating is part of their performance review, and ultimately compensation, this keeps the “They Know That We Know” in play.

How you put this process in place is very simple. You simply use the service dispatcher log to contact each service customer and answer the questionnaire.

A small percentage of customers will not be around to answer the phone. After two attempts at the phone message and contact, we drop a questionnaire in the mail. This improves the response.

The customer service representative, the bookkeeper or the person answering the phones contacts the customers to conduct the follow-up.

It is also possible to employ a third party company to do this.

The data is then organized as it is collected into a spreadsheet that is kept for each service technician.

In addition, these results are posted weekly on the main goal boards for all to see and compare and contrast their performance with their peers.

We have even been known to create an employee award/contest around the top performers if they meet/exceed a standard. Not just one potential winner but also anyone who crosses the standard gets the award.

Not every company will be ready to implement this process. It costs time and at least some money.

What is gives you is exceptional visibility into what you are doing daily inside the home. Review the service questionnaire. Customize your own for your process, and begin learning how you perform. More importantly, your field service teams will immediately get that you know have a method to determine their performance on every single service call.

Combine this method with the few extra methods you are about to learn about, and you have an incredible tie to your operational practices on a daily basis so you can monitor them and change if necessary.

Debriefing Technicians by the Dispatcher/CSR

The CSR or dispatcher can debrief the technician after each call before dispatching the next call, and if your company is able, capture key data regarding the service call and equipment into a database.

Even if you cannot capture this in a database, you can learn from the technicians call.

1. Accessory opportunities.
2. Indoor Air Quality opportunities – Air advice placement.
3. Cut-In opportunities for Air Distribution for slower periods.
4. Maintenance Disposition – Offered or not.

So we are not only interested in what the customer data tells us, but what our internal operations are doing and why.

Using the goal boards, we can publish and track this information publicly, so we can adjust and train where needed.

Service Invoice Questionnaire Cards

The service invoice should contain several items that help us collect market research on our customers.

A research card customer questionnaire that is pre-stamped for return to us. It is critical to give comment space on these cards! You can see a sample of a card below. The purpose of this is twofold:

1. To allow our field personnel to know we are able to have access to the customer feelings about our performance.
2. To be able to reward and compensate our field service force based on high quality results from this feedback.

This helps us adjust to the training needs we see based on the customer feedback and how we are rated. This applies to customer service and also the questions that are asked for specific company purposes.

Sales Follow-Up

After a lead is created – What happens? We sell the job, or we don’t. There are numerous possibilities for the “Don’ts” and in the end we have to decide why we lost the job or what the disposition of the job is.

Here are some guidelines for internal research regarding the selling processes:

Survey for Follow-up:

* Lost Sale Follow-up Survey.
* After the Sales Follow-up Survey.

After a sale is made, the company should consider conducting a follow-up process with the homeowner regarding the experience with the company, the Comfort Advisor, and their happiness with the performance for referral potential.

Hidden Shopping Practices

When the topic of hidden shopping comes up, it is often disregarded quickly by contractors as too time consuming or somehow disingenuous.

**Why?**

As if checking in on our service that we have set standards for, communicated standards for, and PAY to have performed is also the same as making the assumption that the standards are met? Not likely!

The reality is it is neither time consuming or expensive, nor it is definitely not unethical. What you do and how you deal with the data is the real question?

Shoot first; ask questions later, it isn’t going to create trust. However if you use the information you gain from hidden shopping well, you not only will not expose the hidden shopper, but you will create an awareness among all your employees that you are serious about your customer service standards and they know that you know.

Hidden Shop Your Service Department

1. Check on answering the phone.
2. Check on the timeliness or arrival.
3. Check on paperwork.
4. Check on the steps in the perfect service call process – The booties, the gloves, the image, truck, demeanor etc.

Having a friend schedule a call with a debriefing sheet and checklist is about as basic as it gets. Then debrief with the hidden shopper.

Hidden Shop Your Comfort Advisors or Sales

The same process holds true with the Comfort Advisor. The process of determining whether we are completing the sales process as defined in the Comfort Advisor Manual is important. We came up with a sales process for a reason it works. Having the sales department hidden shopped will give you direct feedback as to how the presentations are being done when you are not there. Ride along calls and on-site coaching is terrific, but what about when you are not there to remind people about how your company does things?

Why is this critical to your success?

* Conducting market research is a key to knowing your potential for growth.
* Market research comes in many flavors, and the more quality information you have, the better you are at determining what you do well, or what may need some work.
* Conducting internal company research allows you to create unbiased information about how well your company performs and there are no filters between you and the operational execution.
* Understanding your market potential allows you to prioritize your company resources for growth, which improves your profits in a significant way.