How to Conduct Competitive Intelligence Using a Primary Research Study

In previous posts, I have written about two specific parts of a primary research study: the demographic section of a primary research study and how to discern customer buying preferences.

In a dynamic and fast-changing life sciences landscape, gaining a deep understanding of how you are positioned against your top competitors is critical to your long-term success. In addition to understanding top competitors, it is crucial to identify 'up and coming' competitors or niche competitors that are growing and aiming to take market share.

Similar to developing the customer buying preferences section, the first step with developing a robust series of competitive primary research questions is to identify the best representative 5-10 competitors within your industry. It's important to include the top companies in the marketplace, those you believe are your top competitors, and some 'up and coming' competitors, with the caveat that some companies will fit into more than one of these categories.
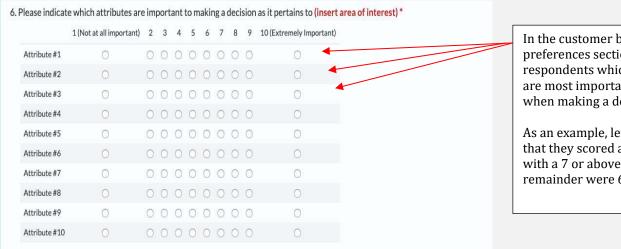
Once the competitors have been identified jointly with our client, it's time to build the questions. The first question we typically like to use at Kineticos is understanding how aware each respondent is regarding the listed competitor: *Please indicate your level of familiarity when selecting a [insert company type]. Please score on a scale of 1-10 (1-not at all familiar, 10-very familiar).* The importance of this question is two-fold: it will provide a semi-quantitative level of awareness for each competitor (unaided recall) and it will also help us tailor the remaining questions to the competitors that the respondent knows. If a respondent selects a score of 6 or lower for a certain competitor, then they will not receive any further questions about that competitor, as they do not have enough ongoing engagement with the competitor to ably fill out the remainder of the primary research.

6. Please indicate your familiarity with the below competitors as it pertains to (insert area of interest) *

	1 (Not at all familiar)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 (Extremely Familiar)
Competitor #1	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○
Competitor #2	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○
Competitor #3	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○
Competitor #4	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○
Competitor #5	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○

> If a respondent selected a '10' for Competitor #2 and less than 6 for the other competitors, then they would only receive questions on Competitor #2 for the remainder of the competitive section.

Now is where we begin to leverage synergies from the previous sections of the survey. Recall from my post on how to develop customer buying preferences when I wrote about asking respondents for the most important attributes that drove customer choice. The next section of questions will ask each respondent about *only those attributes that they deemed significant (a score of 7 or above) and a competitor they knew (again, a score of 7 or above)*. Therefore, each respondent will get a different set of questions based on which competitors they know and which attributes they deem important when making a purchasing decision.

6. Please indicate which attributes are important to making a decision as it pertains to (insert area of interest) *

	1 (Not at all important)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 (Extremely Important)
Attribute #1	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○
Attribute #2	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○
Attribute #3	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○
Attribute #4	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○
Attribute #5	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○
Attribute #6	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○
Attribute #7	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○
Attribute #8	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○
Attribute #9	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○
Attribute #10	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○		○

> In the customer buying preferences section, we asked respondents which attributes are most important to them when making a decision.
>
> As an example, let us assume that they scored attributes #1-3 with a 7 or above, and remainder were 6 and below.

7. Please indicate your familiarity with the below competitors as it pertains to (insert area of interest) *

	1 (Not at all familiar)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 (Extremely Familiar)
Competitor #1	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Competitor #2	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Competitor #3	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Competitor #4	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Competitor #5	○		○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

> As mentioned above, let us assume that respondents were only familiar with Competitor #2 and scored them an 8 out or 10 and every other competitor was a 6 or below.

8. Please indicate your assessment of Competitor #1 *

	1 (Poor)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 (Excellent)
Attribute #1	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Attribute #2	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Attribute #3	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

> Based on the two previous screenshots, in this example, the respondent would only receive questions about how Competitor #2 ranked in Attributes #1-3, based on answers to the previous questions.

Something that is important to note: not every competitor will have the same 'N value' – because some competitors are more well-known than others, the respondents will typically know them more and therefore receive the appropriate follow-up questions. Monitoring the survey closely to observe how many complete responses is crucial – the more, the better.

Once the target N value has been achieved and the survey has been closed, then we are able to overlay which attributes are most important (based on the customer buying preferences section) and which competitors scored higher on those attributes (based on this competitive section). We can then summarize our findings into a nicely formatted slide:

Primary Research	Importance of Attribute	Competitor #1	Competitor #2	Competitor #3	Competitor #4	Competitor #5
Familiarity	N/A	5.4	6.6	4.4	4.2	7.8
Overall Score	N/A	8.0	8.1	7.6	7.6	7.3
Attribute #1	8.8	8.4	8.4	7.9	7.6	7.5
Attribute #2	8.3	8.1	8.2	7.5	7.3	6.3
Attribute #3	8.2	7.8	7.5	7.0	7.2	6.6
Attribute #4	8.1	8.5	8.1	7.9	7.6	7.5
Attribute #5	8.0	8.4	8.7	8.0	8.5	8.3
Attribute #6	8.0	7.6	7.8	7.6	7.6	7.0
Attribute #7	7.8	8.2	8.2	7.7	7.8	7.7
Attribute #8	7.8	7.9	8.1	7.0	7.0	7.0
Attribute #9	7.7	7.7	7.9	7.8	7.7	7.2
Attribute #10	7.3	7.8	7.6	7.6	7.5	7.0

In summary, the competitive section of the primary research study is when all sections of the primary research study begin to build on each other. By leveraging the customer buying preferences section of the survey during the competitive section, we are able to generate customized, impactful insights from our primary research study.

Stay tuned for the next post in my primary research series: how to develop pricing questions that will generate value for your company!

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