

Ian Nelson:

That's an interesting question because you'll have already read in this chapter about [steeples], which is the areas in which you gather information in the environment of the organisation you're working, and that covers social, technology, economic, political, legal, environment, and ethical.

What steeples tell you is the what but it doesn't tell you how. So what do smaller organisations do to compete with larger organisations who have sophisticated methods of data gathering, research, etc.? And I'd say to them do the same as the big companies do, talk to your customers.

Customers work in the market that you're in, and customers know far more about market than you do, so your customers can tell you why do they come to you. Many companies have large jamborees where they bring together people and ask them questions about the products which they are producing, the service they're giving, and asking their customers, in fact, how this might change.

You can do the same with your customers, you can ask them what's changing in the marketplace, what new services are they looking for, what should you and your organisation be doing, to do, in order to stay relevant within the marketplace.

Also, read things like trade magazines, read newspapers, see what they say about your customers. Trade magazines and newspapers understand what's going on in the market because they're living there all the time; you go into the market to sell but it's their place of life.

Secondly, talk to other people. You have suppliers, ask them what's happening, where they are, how are they changing, their business changing, which in ways that you might not have thought appropriate or relevant because maybe certain things in the marketplace still haven't hit you but suppliers are seeing it happening.

Talk to local and national politicians. Politicians know what is going on, they've got people approaching them all the time. They are people who worth talking to both at a local level and at a national level.

Go to your local library. Libraries, now, have business sections and many libraries will actually do things like surveys for you, so where large organisations can organise their own surveys you can very often get people in the business sections in a library or in a government self-help department. Many countries now you will find government have departments called enterprise, see what they can offer you.

Join local groups, charitable groups, in the United Kingdom they would be referred to like people like the Round Table. There is even, in the town where I live in Edinburgh, a networking jogging group of people, in fact, who network while jogging.

Could I, lastly, just say one final thing, which is I've suggested to you ways of collecting information, when that information comes back into the organisation do not lose it; you've got to have methods of recording it, you've got to have methods of evaluating it, you've got to have ways of being able to judge whether in fact it's useful to you. And that also means people from different parts of the organisation, from marketing, from production, from research, or what have you, maybe meeting in small groups and discussing some of the more interesting information which has come in from your customers.