
Case Study 2

Uncovering a Person's Biographical Details

What our client needed

Our client is a public utility. A new senior manager had been appointed to the industry regulator, set up by the UK government. At the same time, there was considerable public interest in the regulation of public utilities overall. Our client had been invited to a meeting with the regulator and wanted to know the attitudes of the new recruit. We were asked to find out as much about this person's career as possible, including their employment background and experience.

How did we get it?

A news search using an online subscription service turned up a number of references – including details on the new manager's leadership position in a student organisation in their native country (They had been born and educated outside the UK). The articles gave an insight into the recruit's background, attitudes as well as their political and religious beliefs. We also contacted the regulatory organisation directly, asking if there were any copies of speeches or presentations that the new recruit had given. We were referred to two magazine articles in specialist journals that were not included in the online subscription services used. These provided additional information.

From the available information, we created a curriculum vitae (résumé) for the new recruit.

How was the information used?

Our client went into the meeting considerably more prepared than competitors – to the extent that they later heard, through the industry grapevine, that the regulator had praised them as the only company that had a full understanding of the issues being looked at.

Lessons to be learned

- 1) People make the difference. Understanding people's attitudes and views is particularly important for competitive intelligence specialists. People make decisions – not companies, so knowing how key competitor management think and react can allow an analyst to predict reactions and thus plan next steps.
- 2) Online information sources – however good – do not hold all available information. Although these sources (examples that we have used include DataStar, Dialog, Reuters Business Briefing and FT Profile) are good, there will always be some sources that are not covered. Sometimes key information will not be held online – and the competent analyst should be aware of this, and attempt to obtain such information from other sources if possible.

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