

Research Your Competitors

Even if they don't know you yet, you'd better know your competitors. A mandatory weapon in a guerrilla's arsenal is a clear picture of reality. Reality? What's that? It's the difference between the way you are conducting business compared with the way your competitors are conducting their business. The whole idea is to do absolutely everything better than your competitors. But how the heck can you accomplish that? Answer: by doing your research.

Guerrillas spy on their competitors, their industry, and especially, themselves. Just realize that business information is more plentiful than ever and that your competitors aren't really dummies. They're getting smarter every day, and the only way you're going to know how you measure up to them is by actively engaging in regular spying.

Call a competitive company and request some information. If your voice is too well known by those who would deign to compete with you, have a friend make the call. See how you are treated on the phone. See how your information request is processed and how long it takes. See if there is any follow-up and how good it is. Then, call your own company and request the same information. Again, since they probably already know the sound of your voice, engage a friend to help you spy. Are you treated as well as your competitors treated you? Is your information request processed as well and as fast? Is your follow-up better than your competitor's follow-up? If your competitors are doing anything better than you, make the changes so that you are doing everything better than they are.

Seek out competitors in your own field, in your community, in the entire nation. If you ever find one who operates his or her business better than you do, feel good about it because you can learn from it, then make the necessary improvements. Spying is both inexpensive and informative. It should be practiced regularly, at least twice a year, and even more if you're serious about being a guerrilla. Guerrillas know in their bones that the truth is a valuable ally. Truth-finding is a painful job, especially when you learn that you are falling behind, but the opportunities to make your company the best make up for the pain. Here are five ways that you can snazz up your snooping:

1. Order something. Buy something from yourself. Buy something from some of your competitors. Do it by phone or mail or in person. Keep an eagle eye for the smoothness or rough edges in the entire process. There will be more differences than you think. And you've got to do what you must to surpass your competition in all areas. Note especially when they do their follow-up. Bet you can do it faster.
2. Visit your competitors. You yourself, or your trusted co-spy should visit your place as a customer might do it, and then visit the premises of your competitors. Visit their website and take notes on every single detail that is better than yours. Note the little details that win or lose prospects. Keep in mind that all of them are probably nuclear-powered details.
3. Phone your competitors. Focus on the personality and attitude of the person who answers the phone. If it's warmer and more friendly than the person who answers your phone, teach your phone-answerer how to do it.
4. Request something. Maybe it will be a price list or a brochure. See how your request is fulfilled, concentrating on speed and follow-up. Do you handle requests as professionally as your competition? If you're a guerrilla, you handle them with more aplomb than anyone around.

5. Compare everything. Look through the eyes of your prospect and compare your and your competitors' service, pricing, packaging, people, selection, follow-up, signs, quality, delivery and attitude. Guerrillas know they compete in many arenas and must be the superior entry at all times. Only spying will give you honest feedback on how you're doing. The opposite of a spy is an ostrich.

6. Buy something. It always helps you to own the product or use the service of your competitors, because owning is the essence of down-and-dirty spying and enables you to spot your own deficiencies as well as your own advantages. If your competition is a public company, buy a share of stock so that you can spy by means of their annual report and shareholder meeting.

Be prepared, if you're to be a serious guerrilla spy, to face up to some awful truths about your company. There's a tiny chance that you're doing everything better than your competitors, but if you spy properly and learn from your espionage, there's a great chance. Once you've completed your spying, react to what you've learned. Guerrilla spies don't have to cheat, don't have to peek, don't have to engage in sabotage. All they have to do is observe keenly, keep their minds open, and be committed to improving.

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