

Research Your Competitors

Even if they do not know you yet, you had 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 are not really dummies. They are getting smarter every day, and the only way you are going to know how you measure up to them is by actively engaging in regular researching them.

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 do your research. 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 six 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 have 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 your business. Note the little details that win or lose prospects.

3. Phone your competitors. Focus on the personality and attitude of the person who answers the phone. If it is warmer and friendlier 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 are 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 observing others will give you honest feedback on how you are doing.

6. Buy something. It always helps you to own the product or use the service of your competitors, because owning is the essence that 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 experience how they manage their annual reports and shareholder meetings.

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