

Good business rule: Know the competition

Gaining access to competitive data can help you make better business decisions. Facts and figures that relate to marketing or sales strategies, financial performance and projected growth are just a few of the many information needs that may be satisfied through this type of search.

For business owners who recognize the usefulness of competitive data, the most commonly asked question is: "How do I get it?" For those who have tried, many say that competitors are not so willing to oblige. As one new business owner recently put it, "She told me how she had to find out everything

on her own and how I should too."

THE PROCESS of contacting local competitors to obtain information about their business is an acquired skill and should not be pursued as a "first step" competitive search strategy.

When competitors have been caught off guard, know little or nothing about the person requesting information and are asked to provide answers to many more than just a few specific questions, chances are they won't cooperate.

But there are those who are willing to provide assistance under the right circumstances.

focus: small business



Mary DiPaolo

"If I'm approached at a conference or some other business event by a person who has obviously done his homework about our industry, I'm happy to answer a few questions. I might learn something from him too," one Detroit gift products distributor said. "It's the people who call out of nowhere that turn me

right off."

DEPENDING ON the nature and size of the industry, obtaining competitive data may begin with a secondary data search. Secondary data would include all published and publicly available information provided through industry surveys and re-

ports, trade journals, conference papers, competitors' annual reports, SEC filings, etc.

For example, industry associations often conduct annual member surveys presenting valuable marketing, sales and financial data. The results are often available in report format to non-members at a nominal fee.

Associations may also sponsor conferences where the featured guest speakers or panelists include key competitors. In this situation, obtaining copies of the audience handouts from the association or competitors involved may be all that

is required. A good place to start a secondary search is a major public or university library.

When the competition includes a majority of privately held firms, or when the industry as a whole is quite small, a secondary data search may not offer much in the way of useful information. Next week, we will discuss alternatives in the competitive data search process.

Mary DiPaolo is the owner of *Marketing*, a Farmington Hills-based business consulting firm. She is also producer and host of the cable television series, "Chamber Perspectives."

business people

Michael J. Connolly, former general counsel to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, has joined the Troy law firm of Cross Wrook P.C. He will specialize in occupational safety and health, environmental and labor law.

Lestle J. Mihalak has been named advertising manager at Performance Resource Press of Troy. She joined the company in 1987 as an advertising sales representative.

Tim Marshall is the new executive chef at Wallington's Restaurant in the Embassy Suites Hotel-Detroit/Southfield. He had worked as executive chef for Olympia Arenas Inc.

Ken Lauson and Oscar Parman have been promoted to vice president posts at De-Sta-Co. of Troy, maker of air-conditioning and refrigeration parts. Lauson will be in charge of manufacturing for the industrial products group. Parman will hold the same post for the valve group.

Dr. Robert I. Boorstein of West Bloomfield is the first general surgeon elected chief of staff of Botsford General Hospital in Farmington Hills.

Charly Kerivan and Shellie Maitre of Rochester joined Kolon, Blittker & Desmon Inc. in Troy as account executives.

Susan M. Deale of Birmingham was appointed corporate secretary at Detroit Edison Co.

Irwia Alterman joined the law firm of Kaufman and Payton in Farmington Hills.

Bob Mediel and Cynthia Lamb of Birmingham joined Kolon, Blittker & Desmon Inc. in Troy. Mediel is an art director. Lamb is a copywriter.

Gary A. Hollidge was appointed general sales manager for Newcor Manufacturing Systems Group in Troy.

James M. Herring Jr. of Rochester Hills was appointed manager, automation research center for the Budd Co.'s stamping and frame division in Troy.

Henry R. Nolte of Bloomfield Hills will retire April 1 after 28 years of service with Ford Motor Co. He was vice president-general council of Ford for 15 years. Nolte is joining the Detroit law firm of Miller, Canfield, Paddock and Stone as senior partner and chairman after April 1.

Robert C. Ellis of Troy was promoted to senior consultant by Touche Ross.

Louis C. Doyle of Farmington was re-elected to a one-year term as treasurer of the board of trustees of the Delta Dental Fund.

Walter M. Cygan, manager of client services of Meadowbrook Insurance group, was presented "25 Years of Dedicated Service" award from the American Society of Safety Engineers.

David M. Carlson and Jay D. Scussel were promoted by K mart Corp. in Troy. Carlson was appointed senior vice president, corporate information systems. Scussel was named vice president, systems development.

Jeffrey Miller of Southfield was appointed account executive for WXON-TV in Southfield.

Vera Yardley joined W.B. Doner & Co. of Southfield as vice president, account supervisor.

Larry W. Jernigan was named chief executive officer at Voltrax Inc. in Troy.

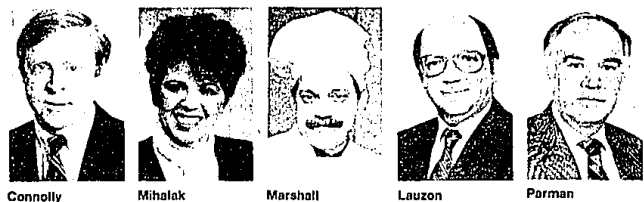
John D. Mandich was appointed business development representative in the southeast region at Michigan National Bank in Farmington Hills.

Emil Sdao was promoted to associate of James P. Ryan Associates, architects and planners of Farmington Hills.

Robert M. Abell and David A. Schafer were elected vice presidents of Leo Burnett Co. Inc.

Prince E. Holliday was appointed president/CEO of Metrostaff's business services division in Lathrup Village. The new entity will be known as Prince Holliday Enterprises Inc.

W.D. Gallentine was appointed supervisory sales consultant in Michigan and northwestern Ohio for Boehle Chemicals Inc. of Southfield.



Connolly Mihalak Marshall Lauson Parman

Thomas D. Hitehman of Bloomfield Hills joined the marketing and product planning staff as a senior analyst in the North American truck and vehicle capacity planning group for General Motors Corp.

Jeffrey M. Floyd and Janet C. Levin joined MVP Communications in Troy.

Carol Schauer was appointed the first sales manager of Moran Mitsubishi in Southfield.

Stephen S. Saffee of Rochester Hills was named president of Lambrecht Co.

Bruce Clayton of Bloomfield Hills was promoted to account executive at Simons Michelson Zieve Inc. of Troy.

Mary Hopkins was promoted to assistant cashier at Bank of Commerce.

Al Upchurch of Farmington Hills was named senior producer of WXYZ-TV/Channel 7 Action News.

Dan J. Comrie Jr. of Troy was promoted to executive vice president and chief financial officer of Michigan Health Care Corp.

John A. Risbel III was promoted to senior vice president in the retail business unit for the outstate region at Michigan National Bank in Farmington Hills.

Michael R. Edwards was appointed vice president in charge of human resources of Lear Siegler Seating Corp. in Southfield.

Elaine Albin, Steve Drexel and Christine Mazzorin were promoted at Kelly Services in Troy. Albin was named director of corporate accounting. Drexel was named director of treasury operations. Mazzorin was named director of budget and analysis.

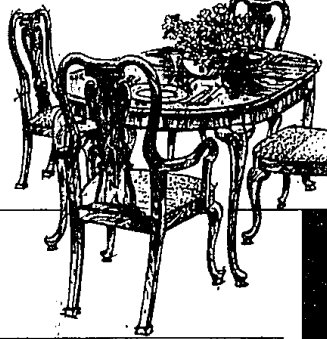
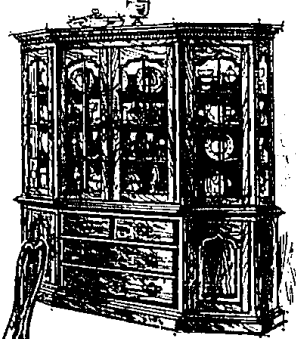
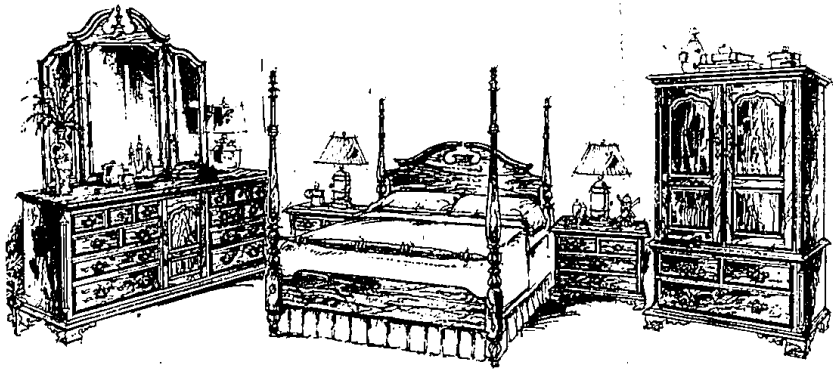
Mark L. Walley was appointed director of commercial brokerage for Lambrecht Co. of Southfield.

Steven D. Gesterle of Bloomfield Hills was promoted director of merger and acquisition services for the north central region of Ernst & Whinney.

Please submit black-and-white photographs, if possible, for inclusion in the business people column. While we value the receipt of photographs, we are unable to use every photograph submitted. If you want your photograph returned, please enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Indicate in a margin on the front of the photograph that you want it returned. We will do our best to comply with your request. Send information to: Business Editor, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150. Please include city of residence and a daytime telephone number where information can be verified.

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