How to Monitor Your Business Market

In my last column I shared with you a discussion that I had with some CEOs as I was visiting a SCORE Chapter in a neighboring state. The focus of the discussion was how they can manage their business to be competitive and stay competitive in their marketplace. Based on an article by Rieva Lesonsky, CEO, President & Founder of her company called GrowBiz Media they agreed that there are four primary market factors you should be monitoring:

1. Your Geographic Market
2. Your Demographic Market
3. Your Competitors
4. Your Industry

But the rubber really hits the road when they tried to come up with “how to do this”. Here are some starters.

**How to monitor your geographic market:** The Census Bureau’s Economic Indicators provides a plethora of information on everything from how many rental vacancies exist in your area to average retail sales. Also check out USA.gov’s Business Data page for links to information on census data, employment rates, local economies and more. The Bureau of Economic Analysis offers a variety of reports, and the U.S. Census Bureau is a repository of all kinds of data about American consumers and businesses. On a local level, reading local newspapers, business journals and attending local business organizations’ meetings such as your chamber of commerce can help you keep on top of what’s going on in your market.

**How to monitor your demographic market:** Some of the demographic information you need can also be found in the resources mentioned above. For instance, you might learn from Census data that more young families have moved into your city in the last few years while seniors have started moving out.

You can also learn about your demographic by following the same media your target demographic reads, watches or listens to. For example, the entrepreneur targeting moms would want to be active on Pinterest and Facebook, read magazines or blogs geared toward suburban moms and pay attention to what’s causing a buzz. You might find a growing trend of moms going back to work instead of staying at home, which could affect your target market’s needs and budget.
There are market research companies that compile information and studies on every demographic you can think of, from women over 50 to millennial dads to Latino families. While this research is often available as costly reports, sometimes you can get a lot of the information for free online by looking up press releases, blog posts or interviews from the company.

Finally, you can monitor your target demographic yourself by conducting focus groups or doing regular surveys to see what their needs, interests and pain points are.

**How to monitor your competitors:** Social media is a big help in monitoring your competitors. Follow them on social media to see what they’re doing. If they are public companies, you can get annual reports or use resources like Hoover’s to find information. Set Google alerts on your competitors so you get notified whenever they’re mentioned in the press.

**How to monitor your industry:** Join industry associations and become active in them. By attending industry events, conferences and seminars, you can learn a lot. Make connections and stay in touch with them. Also, you should read industry publications regularly, and follow influential bloggers and journalists on Twitter so you’ll be up on the trends.

By monitoring your market, you can know in advance when your demographic is shrinking or moving out of your area so you can plan how to deal with the loss. You can also find out about new markets you haven’t tapped into before and plan how to capitalize on them. You may spot trends before they sneak up on you, so you can take advantage of them—not the other way around.

____________________

Dean L. Swanson  
Southeast Minnesota SCORE  
c/o Rochester Area Chamber of Commerce  
220 South Broadway, Suite 100  
Rochester, MN 55904  
[www.seminnesota.score.org/](http://www.seminnesota.score.org/)  
*Dean is a volunteer SCORE Mentor and Regional Vice President for the North West Region*