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In Corporate Intelligence, Think Like Israel

When we consider examples of the term “intelligence,” the Israeli Defense Force’s military intelligence capability and Mossad, the company’s intelligence agency, are always ranked at or near the top of the global list. One of the reasons that modern Israel has prospered for over 60 years is that the country’s leaders believe that knowing as much as possible about its enemies and friends is critical to survival. Companies can learn a lot from Israel’s example, and can get some help from intelligence-savvy Israelis in doing so.

Take, for example, the Six Day War against Egypt in 1967. The Israeli Air Force initiated an air strike on June 5th of that year that effectively sealed the outcome of the war; three-fourths of the Egyptian Air Force was destroyed within a few hours. In “[Intelligence in War: It Can Be Decisive](#),” from the CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence (the work of which I have found generally quite enlightening), author Gregory Elde argues that because of their unrelenting intelligence efforts, the Israelis knew:

“the whereabouts of every [Egyptian] aircraft and name/information on the pilot;
the name, background, status, and schedule of every base commander;
schedules and turnovers of Egyptian radar controllers;
reveille and morning schedules for the pilots and ground crews;
the complete Egyptian battle codes and communications networks; and
when senior air officials would be absent from their commands, and unable to direct operations.”

With that kind of detailed knowledge and situational awareness, it’s much easier to have any initiative succeed. A company’s intelligence capabilities can be just as important as a country’s. Knowledge of your business environment, competitors, customers, and drivers of performance can make the difference in many tough situations.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Israeli companies whose executives have intelligence backgrounds are benefiting from this background. I am an advisor to one such company, [Signals Intelligence Group](#). Its founders and leaders have worked in intelligence in the Israeli military. Signals uses software and services to provide companies with detailed intelligence on their business environment. The company has focused on many different aspects of intelligence, but its primary focus is on product development intelligence. What are the “white spaces” where no products or services exist? What do consumers think about the product/service category? What are competitors up to? At what price will you be able to sell the product? They believe that the same intelligence disciplines that powered the Israeli military in the Six Day War can power your product development. Leading U.S.-based companies in the consumer products, info and communications, pharma, and financial services companies are using their capabilities in the corporate intelligence space.

Other types of signals are captured and analyzed by [Nice Systems](#), another Israeli company for which I have spoken in the past. Nice gathers data from phone calls, video, emails, and other sources to tell companies what their customers, employees, or potential fraudsters are up to. The company is quiet about it, but I gather that their systems are also employed by Israeli and other intelligence agencies. I haven't personally worked with [Verint Systems](#), but they are a competitor to Nice that also has strong Israeli roots.

[Business Intelligence Advisors](#), a consulting organization based in Boston, also was founded by senior Israeli intelligence officers. The company specializes in the vaunted "behavioral assessment profiling" used by El Al Israel Airlines. BIA assesses whether your competitors, ecosystem partners, and other important parties are telling the truth. The approach can be just as useful in business as it is in preventing air terrorism.

I'm sure there are other countries that are good at intelligence; Edward Snowden's revelations suggest that the U.S. has gotten pretty good at it too. However, the Israeli passion for knowing what allies and adversaries will do is particularly compelling and historically quite successful. It's made for one of the most successful exports of Israel. If your company wants to succeed in a hostile environment, it should adopt some of that country's approaches and tools.

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