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Take advantage of information systems to increase competitiveness in SMEs

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Abstract

This study describes usage of information systems in Slovak SMEs in purpose to achieve and maintain competitive advantage. The study deals with various attitudes to information systems (marketing information system, BI, CI) and their tools. The goal of the study is to examine a correlation between work with information and tools of information systems in Slovak SMEs and their growth development. Research was realised in 2015 with managers from 79 various types of SMEs and was compared with researches in Czech Republic and other countries. The study also deals with aspect of ethic in process of information gathering in various countries and in Slovakia.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays companies dispose with a large amount of information due to technologies, internet and many various tools designed to information obtaining and processing. Availability of information as well as globalization of business environment have caused that companies have to seek how to obtain and to keep a competitive advantage. They have to find out what their customers prefer, what they require or how to obtain new customers or penetrate new markets. Then an organization has to maintain its competitive advantage and prevent it from imitation, duplication or elimination by competitors (López, 2005). Therefore, processes in the marketing, business intelligence

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or competitive intelligence are the most effective tools how to get relevant information and to achieve competitive advantage.

Different size enterprises over the world have chosen to practice competitive intelligence (CI) as a tool able to process the most relevant information. In this paper we deal with the role of marketing intelligence system as well as business and competitive intelligence systems and their role in Slovak small and medium enterprises. We publish our research results aimed to the role of information systems, their tools and using within data collection from various sources, in processing as well as analysing of information. We discuss what is legal and ethical in gathering of information related to CI.

2. Suitability of information support provided by information systems in SMEs and its using as a decision-making support

Information is essential in every business – about internal environment as well as external environment in micro and macro view. There is no problem to obtain information, to work with it, analyze it and to make decisions as long as an enterprise has a few customers or suppliers and its competition on a target market is small. But work with information gets complicated when competition is growing and managers of a company have to do important decisions, and those influence their success or even survival (Rud, 2009).

Internal employees are the most important primary sources of information, but if their number is large, it is complicate to gather information and to distribute it. Today every enterprise may dispose with the newest technologies and use their opportunities, but enterprises are not required to have information systems supported by IT. The problem is not the amount of information that can be processed but it is problem to have correct information in correct place in correct time. Other problem is disposing with many various information systems as well as technologies which create different output forms of information. In this case some information is obtained and processed duplicate on several places and another is missing in an enterprise. There can be also problem with refusing to provide information in electronic way among developments within an enterprise because of worry about information leak and employees have to write and analyze it laboriously. It means, there is no problem with lack of information, but with its surplus, relevancy and verity. To orientate in data about enterprise environment can be problem if it is not organized reasonably. Both content and form of information are important. If an enterprise doesn't dispose with the right system for obtaining, processing, sharing and using of information, employees and managers will be lost in information and will not know how to make a decision (Peyrot, et al., 2002; Biere, 2003; Fitriana, 2011; Abbott, 2014).

Impact of these problems is growing when an enterprise has to obtain or maintain a competitive advantage in the business environment hardly. A source of information about desires of clients or future customers can be in marketing information system as well as in analysis of information from Business Intelligence or CI systems of an enterprise and also in systems of competition.

Information is related not only to business but also to marked changes and therefore competition monitoring can be very good source of information. This information is available in media data form from media monitoring or media analysis processed by specialized agencies (Newton media, Anopress, etc.) or PR agencies focused on media content evaluation. It is very important whether to allow employees to process information by themselves or to establish independent post or department within a company, whereas employees have to consider costs and effort of gathering and processing information. Media data sources are paid many times and information obtained by this way is often insignificant or useless if it is not categorized properly or it is not available to right people.

Therefore, an enterprise has to dispose with a lot of specific information convertible into intelligence and afterwards utilizable as a support of business decision-making processes. This information support is created not only as an output of data gathering, processing and their utilizing. The information support have to be created on the basis of planning, collecting, processing, analysing and sharing many various information processes, findings, knowledge, wisdom and intelligence, owned by individuals and located in different parts of an enterprise or its environment. In Slovak companies, especially in SMEs, information can be located in various departments or systems of an enterprise, e. g. in business intelligence or in marketing or market research departments. Outputs of information systems are used in varying degrees of decision making processes (Watson, 2009, Wicom et al., 2011; Kulkarni, 2007, Herring, 2003).

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