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INTERVIEW

What HELLA says about GOBENCH

HELLA goes for strategic competitor analysis



Dr. Corina June
Manager Competitive Analysis

Lippstadt. Extensive benchmark data are becoming increasingly important in international competition. HELLA, the automotive components supplier, has realized this and has implemented strategic competitor analysis alongside its classic, technology-driven product development to link up reverse engineering and strategy development. The analytical insights gained from reverse engineering help the business to define objective results and offer a good basis for the extrapolation of development trends. HELLA created the preconditions for these measures at the start of 2012. The company is using INDEC's GOBENCH IQ system.

Prior to 2012 HELLA used product comparison data in a wide variety of formats, mostly in Excel, but often with variable categorization, prioritization and different levels of completeness. Since the introduction of the GOBENCH system the data have been homogeneous, cross-departmental and internationally available in a standard form, as well as easy to handle. Jürgen Meyer, HELLA Vice President Corporate Patents & Licenses: "For us the most important motives for introducing a benchmarking system were regular monitoring of our competition and the examination of rival products, so that we are better able to identify best-practice solutions in the market."

For HELLA - as for many other suppliers to the automotive industry - it is not just a question of recognizing factual or technical product improvements, perhaps by realizing that a bonded version would be more cost-effective, more durable and faster to produce than one that uses screws or rivets. According to Jürgen Meyer the application of the new benchmarking system is also designed "to check for any industrial property right infringements - both in terms of the patented products of our competitors and any infringement of HELLA's rights."

Dr. Corina June, Manager Competitive Analysis in HELLA's electronics division commented: "Nowadays every business wants to know what the competition is up to. One of the critical aspects is how quickly a company can assimilate the results and conclusions from competitor analysis in its own strategy. In this day and age information is increasingly becoming a strategic competitive advantage."

In this regard database-aided strategic benchmarking is designed to provide the greatest possible protection for development know-how, while also facilitating the extrapolation of current factual knowledge as a guide for short-term and medium-term development. Benchmarking expert Prof. Christian Zich (Deggendorf Technical University): "If you tear down a competitor's car today, what you get is the development stage that your competitor defined for that car at the beginning of the development phase three years ago. He is of course continuing to develop the car, which means that if you copy what you can see in the current product, you will be clearly lagging behind. Extrapolation is the real skill that engineers, developers and managers must possess;" Zich (extract from his current study: Product Benchmarking and Reverse Engineering as Tools for Competitive Intelligence in the German Automotive Industry) also expressly demands a benchmarking philosophy from top management: "Mere commitment on the part of management is definitely not enough. In fact, top-level management has to become actively involved in benchmarking projects - be it in terms of initiating these projects, calling for regular reports or attending final project presentations - and making all this part of their routine. The ideal situation has been reached when no one in the organization questions the necessity of something; when instead everyone feels that the results from last time were so great that we'll do it again."

Ingenious product development is generally no longer enough. To be able to strengthen your own competitive position it is ever more important to carry out a systematic analysis of your position, that of your competitors and also of the future market requirements. This does not make the role of the engineer any less important. Zich: "Corporate knowledge can only really be utilized if it is centrally available and can be incorporated in change processes or specifically integrated in performance indicators and requirements for operational work."

Dr. Corina June and her colleagues at HELLA make good use of their benchmarking system every day and from various locations. "The more we know about a particular issue, the easier it is to make a decision. Strategic competitor analysis helps us base our future decisions on sound internal or external facts. If we want to achieve further improvements, we have to learn from our own experience and from the good results obtained by others." A homogeneously constructed database can provide vital support in this respect. Professor Zich goes one step further:

"You can only pull the right innovations out of a competitor-analysis project if you look at the products and processes of other companies who are considerably further advanced than you and who operate not only in your own industry."



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About HELLA

The business has been a supplier to the automotive industry and spare parts trade for over 100 years. It is a globally operating, family-owned company with 100 locations in more than 35 countries. In the financial year 2012/2013 the group turned over 5.0 bn euros. The company has more than 29,000 employees, with 5,600 working in research & development. HELLA is one of the 100 largest German industrial companies as well as one of the 50 leading automotive suppliers worldwide.

www.hella.com

About INDEC

INDEC has been developing competitor-analysis systems and processes worldwide since 1998. The GOBENCH IQ system developed by INDEC provides management with competitive analyses for locations, products, services, processes, patents, organizational structures, employees and capital investment. GOBENCH facilitates complex decision-making in matters of product development, location analysis and any issues that involve precision, structure and transparency within the scope of competitor analysis.

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