

Competitive Advantage and Analysis

Background

CSR's client, a global management consulting firm, planned to launch a new practice area, and needed to identify how best to differentiate its offering from those of other firms. This company retained CSR to:

- Understand the definition and importance of this practice area among potential clients, specifically, C-Suite executives at Fortune 500 companies
- Determine the criteria by which prospective clients select consulting firms to support them in this practice area
- Test the concept of the new practice area, and identify which consulting firms that prospects most associated with this area of expertise and why
- Identify our client as a potential provider of services in this new practice area, probe on reactions, and provide recommendations to our client based on prospects' suggestions and reactions

The Approach

CSR specializes in gaining insights from C-level executives. For this initiative, we recruited and conducted in-depth interviews with two dozen Fortune 500 consulting services purchase decision-makers across functional areas, including operations, strategy, finance and marketing. Interviews lasted 40 minutes on average, and were conducted by phone, using a structured questionnaire comprising mainly open-ended questions.

Executives responded to a brief description of our client's proposed new practice area without knowing which consulting firm would be offering it. They were asked to identify, in their own words, the benefits and drawbacks of this new service, and which consulting firms they most associated with this practice area. The CSR interviewer then revealed the identity of our client, and probed on whether and why this affected the value of the offering.

These interactions were also used to supplement our client's sales efforts. CSR asked executives who were interested in the product concept if they would meet with a representative from our client's new practice area. CSR scheduled in-person business development meetings with 16 of the 24 C-level executives interviewed.

Results

In addition to the meetings that CSR scheduled on behalf of our client, which generated multiple million-dollar new revenue opportunities, results from this research were used to develop sales and marketing materials tailored to the needs of its prospective clients. Executives emphasized the need for our client to provide detailed “Success Stories” in order to support the promises made in the product concept. This approach, along with specific criteria for what the consulting firm would need to demonstrate in order to prove that it had successfully executed engagements in this area, enabled the consulting firm to showcase its capabilities in the way that was most convincing to prospective clients.