
Selling and Sales Management in Action: The Sales Force's Role in International Marketing Research and Marketing Information Systems

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Many companies resist global markets because of seemingly insurmountable problems with these markets. Salespeople are often used successfully to gather market information. There is a wealth of market data that can be collected by a company's international sales force and distributors' sales force which can prove to be valuable in surmounting cultural and marketing barriers associated with global markets. The current paper discusses how and with what success U.S. multinational companies are using their international sales forces in gathering international marketing research data.

Introduction

During the 1980s, top CEO's have learned that America's economic future lies in exports and that business needs to take a more global perspective. With varying degrees of success, great numbers of American companies have entered foreign markets (Simon and Button 1990); however, many companies still resist global markets because of the seemingly insurmountable problems (Townley 1990).

Twenty-five years ago, Webster argued that the "use of the sales(person) for gathering information can be much more critical than [their] use for promotion" (1965, 78). More recently, Mellow (1989) observed that salespeople are a likely source of information about marketplace problems. There is a wealth of market data that can be collected by a company's international sales force and distributors' sales force which can prove to be valuable in

surmounting such cultural and marketing barriers (Cavusgil 1985). How U.S. multinational companies are using their international sales forces in gathering international marketing research data, and with what success, is the subject of this paper.

Background

International marketing research is termed "comparative marketing research" by most authors with its principle focus being "the systematic detection, identification, classification, measurement, and interpretation of similarities and differences among entire national systems" (Boddewyn 1981, p. 61). Thus the terms "international" and comparative can be used interchangeably. Similar to domestic marketing research, comparative marketing research is required by the marketing manager to determine marketing mix decisions (Jeannet and Hennessey 1988). International marketing research has the added complexity of understanding a country's cultural norms, and its effects on the implementation of marketing policies, the consumer's purchasing behavior, and the reliability of secondary and primary data gathering techniques.

There are five main challenges a marketing manager faces in planning international marketing research: (1) understanding similarities across countries in order to define a target market; (2) a lack of accurate secondary information; (3) the high costs

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of conducting international research, particularly when primary data is desired; (4) coordinating marketing research across countries, which also involves losing control of not only the research process, but the translations as well; and (5) establishing comparability and equivalence in marketing research instruments (Jeannet and Hennessey 1988). It is the complexity of these five problems which significantly impact a company's decision to conduct international marketing research.

As Permut (1977) and Cavusgil (1985) noted, multinational companies do not use formal marketing research to any large extent. Instead, companies rely on secondary information, information that is often found by hiring outside consultants.

What's keeping companies from obtaining this information themselves? In addition to the five challenges cited earlier, there are problems of language barriers, contacts in the foreign data collecting offices, knowledge of governmental agencies, and most of all, having a person located in the foreign country to do data gathering footwork. In many cases, this person could be the foreign salesperson.

Based on a review of current literature, this research project is predicated on the following assumptions inferred from various sources (e.g. Cavusgil 1985; Hunt and Cooke 1990; Still 1981):

- Given the added political and economic risks involved when selling or operating in a foreign country, accurate and timely market information is even more important than in domestic marketing.
- International marketing research is often more difficult to perform in foreign countries. Its risk of unreliability is higher than in the U.S., and the process is very costly. Consequently, companies are eager to find satisfactory alternatives to this risky and costly process.
- In many cases, salespeople are a company's only link to the customer, resulting in salespeople having (nearly) exclusive access to valuable customer data.

These assumptions provide the focus for this study which is designed to assess the role international sales forces currently play in gathering market data from foreign countries. More specifically, the research is designed to find out what types of information are being gathered during each phase of the marketing cycle, how information is being commu-

nicated to the marketing offices, if salespeople are given the results of the marketing research, and if so, in what format. In addition, is the information system being used centralized or decentralized, and is the system being used formal or informal? What problems do sales managers have in gathering and using marketing research data? How does the market data gathering process done by the sales force in foreign countries differ from that done domestically?

Method

The Sample

The sample consisted of companies who, according to *Standard and Poors Guide to Business* for corporations, had revenues of more than \$2 million, who had international revenues, whose industry entailed personal selling, and who listed names of executives in an international division. This last requirement was needed for telephoning and asking for executives by name, thus assuring a higher respondent success rate.

No more than two corporations were chosen from the same type of industry, thereby preventing any industry bias in the collective data. Industries surveyed included: office products, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, home care products, computer systems, raw metals, air travel and tours, foods, insurance, and several others. In addition, only those companies originating in the U.S. were chosen (i.e. foreign owned companies headquartered in or operating in the U.S. were not chosen). This procedure provided a sample of 26 corporations and resulted in 23 usable interviews and three refusals. Each executive was screened as to his or her knowledge of the international marketing practices of his or her firm and only appropriate, knowledgeable executives were included.

Measures

Phone interviews were chosen as the means for gathering data, as previous studies reported difficulty with mail surveys (e.g. Evans and Schlacker 1985). By contrast, success with personal interviews has been reported (e.g. Cavusgil 1985).

The data were gathered using a structured, in-depth telephone interview (see instrument at Appendix A). The instrument had ten open-ended questions, four of which had three parts each.

The questionnaire was designed to collect 6 types of information: (1) types of information gathered in each stage of the product life cycle; (2) types of systems used to gather and relay information; (3) types of problems encountered in gathering and using marketing information; (4) the role of expatriates in the information gathering process; (5) which types of decisions were made using the information gathered by the international sales force; (6) differences in using sales forces internationally versus domestically for gathering market data.

Results

Use of Data

Because of the necessity of a short questionnaire, the areas which sales force information is used was narrowed to three types of decisions. According to the literature (Cavusgil 1985; Klompaker 1980-81; Evans and Schlacter 1985; Wotruba 1976; Webster 1965), sales forecasting decisions were determined to be the most logical and frequent use of this information, product design a less frequent area, and company/product image making the least likely area for sales force input. It was hoped that the wide span could be used to judge the overall extent to which the sales force's input was used.

It was not surprising that 71 percent of the companies surveyed regularly used sales force information for sales forecasting. Only 35 percent, however, regularly used sales force information for product design, and 46 percent used sales force information for company or product image making. These last two findings are surprising because it was expected that fewer firms would use sales force information when making decisions concerning image.

Problems in Gathering and Using International Market Data

It is important to consider the problems which the sales manager faces in gathering and receiving marketing research data in order to understand how information systems should be designed to help minimize these problems. Problems in gathering market data from international salespeople can be classified as due to situational limitations or problems with the sales force. One-third reported difficulties due to situational limitations. Over forty percent reported problems with the sales force such

Table 1
Method of Input of Market Information by International Sales Forces

Written Survey	32%
Informal Phone	26%
Continuous Communication	16%
Formal Phone Survey	21%
Written Sales Reports	21%
Field Visits	16%
Facsimile	16%
Quarterly Meetings	11%
Tiered Collection System	5%
Monthly Meetings	5%
Telex	5%

* Sum is greater than 100% because respondents reported several methods.

as resistance due to need to generate sales, non-response, lack of objectivity and accuracy, and inability to communicate data to management.

Using data collected by the sales force was reported to be limited by the difficulty in determining the quality of data. Several respondents reported concern that the data may not be accurate if the use of such data is perceived to negatively impact the sales force. Information is also seen as too broad or too local to be of value. These problems could be minimized by collecting specific data regularly, and not just when a decision is to be made. Salespeople who are used to providing specific data would be less likely to question the use of that data and would be conditioned to provide good data.

Information Collection and Dissemination

The methods used to collect information are shown in Table 1. The three most frequently used methods are written questionnaires (32% of the companies), informal phone conversations (25%), and continuous communication (written, telephone, and face-to-face) between the sales force and the marketing department (26%). As seen in Table 1, fax and telex are unpopular methods (11% and 5%), as are formal meeting (10%) and tiered collection systems (5%).

Companies provided marketing research findings to the sales force in many ways (see Table 2). Periodic written reports were mentioned most often (30%), but only one company used a monthly newsletter.

Table 2
Methods of Relating Research Findings to International Sales Forces

Periodic Written Reports	32%
One-on-One Meetings	21%
Telephone	21%
Telex	21%
Product Seminars	16%
Word-of-Mouth	11%
Strategy Reports and Directives	11%
Facsimile	11%
Bulletins	11%
Quarterly Meetings	11%
Not Given to Sales Force	11%
Product and Competitive Information	11%
Monthly Newsletter	5%

The format in which marketing research findings are presented is primarily as summarized data (30%) along with guidelines and suggestions (30%). These findings are summarized in Table 3.

It was assumed that executives knew the best way to communicate marketing research findings to the sales force but may be unable to implement their system. Therefore, respondents were asked what they thought was the optimal technique for communicating research findings to the sales force. Their answers included both their currently used methods and future methods and are summarized in Table 4.

One of the primary factors for successful information gathering was felt to be the frequency with which data was relayed to the marketing office (even in non-volatile industries). Those with daily or weekly communication (telephone & telex) with salespeople reported receiving more timely information and expressed a feeling of understanding what was happening "on the front line."

Of those companies who felt their company's information system was good, their reasons were:

- open communication between sales force and marketers
- regular working meetings between sales force and marketers
- continuous exchange of information
- flexibility of system to meet changing market
- autonomy of sales force to make independent decisions

Table 3
Format of Research Findings Given to International Sales Forces

Periodic Written Reports	32%
Guidelines/Suggestions (No Data)	32%
Analyzed Data (No Guidelines)	21%
Revenue Targets	11%
Directives	11%
Not Communicated	11%
Raw Data	5%

Table 4
Optimal Method of Relaying Research Findings to International Sales Forces

Periodic Written Reports	16%
Meetings	16%
Telephone or Telex or Facsimile	11%
Seminars	11%
Monthly Newsletter	11%
One-on-One	5%
Electronically	5%
Brochure	5%
Customer Oriented Applications Reports	5%
Would Not Communicate	5%
Makes No Difference	5%

- it's one of the best
- we're good at it all
- the sales force is our only touch with consumers

Of those companies who felt their company's information system needed improvements, or was a poor system, their reasons given were:

- information exchange is too infrequent
- not enough structure to system
- very rustic system, because not enough research by local consultants (no intention of increasing the use of the sales force)
- need more money
- information exchange too slow
- not enough information to measure effectiveness of product, inventory and distribution changes, or advertising and trade fair promotions
- poor system compared to competition
- not enough historical data
- not all data collected is correct, so must weigh all information with a grain of salt
- system needs automating

The Entry Phase

The sales force's role in the entry phase was considered particularly important to eighteen of the companies interviewed because of the high costs associated with sending research teams to the foreign country or hiring consultants to evaluate new markets. Sales forces, or distributors in some cases, could assume the role of a specialized research team by collecting a substantial amount of information about market potential and entry logistics (price, package, distribution, and import regulations). Prior to market entry, these companies had their salespeople conduct secondary research, collecting all types of market statistics and information on government regulations obtained through published data and through sales experience in similar foreign markets.

Two companies included a salesperson on their five-person research teams which went to the new country to evaluate market potential. The team would be composed of a foreign country expert, an economist, a financial specialist, and a product manager or marketer, a lawyer, and a production expert. The teams were responsible for developing a plan for entry.

As is the case with U.S.-based sales forces, salespeople were often asked to gather competitor information. This included competitive price, product line, market share, number of salespeople, and customer perceptions of competitors' products, delivery and service.

In the case of new product evaluation, four companies thought salespeople were the method of choice for new product trial research, customer expectations, market focus and sales volume predictions were analyzed.

In all cases, the salespeople's information was considered only in combination with data gathered from other sources. Two companies used both a formal research process and the sales force's information, but "surveys only formalized this (sales force's) information."

Essential market data which salespeople collected during the entry phase included:

- competitor information
- government regulations
- entry logistics
- customers' needs & expectations
- customers' willingness to try product
- product trial implementation & results
- customers' awareness of company & product
- natural resource availability for production
- socio-economic climate & political stability
- data from local trade & industry publications
- data from government published statistics
- market volatility

Growth Phase

The growth phase in this study was limited to growth within a foreign country, or within a set of very similar countries. An expanded product line, or growth into a new market segment, was still considered as growth and not entry, in order to assure uniformity of answer classification. Growth which involved entry into a new country, or new set of similar countries, was classified as the entry phase.

In the growth phase, companies use their salespeople for gathering information on the competition and any new market requirements. Of the two companies which felt this was the most important phase for using the sales force, the first company used salespeople primarily for gathering information on service needs and satisfaction once the product was in place. The second company concentrated on customers' likes or dislikes of its product and of competition. This information was used to detect a customers' intent to switch products.

One company's very sophisticated competitor intelligence system had the sales force gathering tactical information on competitors' moves. This included information about competitor pricing, sales force increases or decreases, increased/decreased advertising, changes in distribution, and plant expansions or alliances published in local journals. The sales force was also the eyes and ears for early detection of new market competition. Another company used sales volume statistics and predictions from the sales force to balance volume versus start-up costs to determine the size of growth which should be attempted.

Three of the companies changed from a centralized system of market research in the entry phase to a decentralized system in the growth phase so that information from the sales force was no longer available for consideration at the headquarters' office. More foreign office independence in the growth phase also resulted in less direct contact with the sales force.

Essential market data which salespeople collect during the growth phase include:

- competitor information
- new market requirements
- customer surveys
- product quality and features
- relationship of customer, with end consumer
- which areas are most profitable
- whether or not to expand
- volume vs. start-up costs to determine growth size
- distributor survey for customer satisfaction index

Maturity Phase

Very few of the companies considered themselves in the maturity phase; however, information was gathered from those companies which had products in the maturity phase. For this reason, it is in this phase that the least amount of data was gathered from the respondents.

One company felt that using the sales force was most important in the maturity phase, and this was because of the significant amount of capital which had been invested up to that point. This sales force gathered mostly market information. The company felt that its increased risk warranted increased amounts of information from the salespeople. This company is in a supply driven market, meaning that the maturity phase requires assemblies working at full capacity and large inventories. No other company interviewed was in this situation, so a comparison was not possible.

One company with a very sophisticated intelligence system uses the sales force during product maturity as part of an "Early Warning System" to detect significant incoming competition. The salespeople are used to gather pre-specified key information which signals the competitive trend. Data collected by the salespeople include factors such as: salespeople being hired away, a change in the institutions which supply salespeople and technicians, and/or slack in product demand.

Essential market data which salespeople collect during the maturity phase include:

- competitive information
- government data on product usage
- type of businesses using the product
- improved means of distribution
- customers' desire for product changes

- new customer needs
- what new products could replace mature product
- product weaknesses

Structure of International Marketing Research Functions

The type of structures used to conduct international marketing research functions was mixed. Eight of the companies studied used a centralized structure, while five used decentralized approaches in their international marketing tasks. Three additional companies contacted but not included in research results used such decentralized systems that neither the international sales nor marketing departments could answer questions on the survey because they had so little knowledge of what went on in the decentralized marketing offices.

In some cases the current market stage which a company was in was a strong determinant in whether a centralized or decentralized approach was used. For example, three firms had gone from centralized marketing systems in the entry phase and then switched to decentralized systems once established in the foreign country and well into the growth phase. Only one company went from a decentralized system in the entry phase to a centralized system in the growth phase. In addition, one company used both systems and based its decision of centralization versus decentralization on economic climate and other situational factors within the foreign country.

Gestetner (1974) outlined two main factors determining a centrist versus decentrist sales management approach, which is closely transferable to this research analysis. First was the size of the home market:

Companies with a large home market tend to be centrist, while those with a small home market tend to be noncentrist. If a company is successful in a large home market before it starts exporting, its management tends to assume that its approach to the domestic market must be effective in every market. Further, managers are often afraid to change methods they know and understand. (p. 103).

Since all the interviews were conducted with companies who were first successful in the home market (U.S.), this research does not support Gestetner's centrist theory.

Second, Gestetner (1974) found that the way a company began selling internationally affected the marketing management structure:

Some companies start by making a definite decision to get into the export market. They usually adopt a centrist policy and set up an internal international division, which becomes a copy of the home selling division. (p. 107)

Although almost all companies interviewed had an international division, only about half have centralized approaches. This data does not support Gestetner's centrist theory of marketing management but supports a situational model based upon such factors as management structure, market cycle, product type, market type, market size, and knowledge or type of foreign culture.

As an interesting side note, Gestetner also found that "U.S. companies generally tended to be centrist, European companies noncentrist, and the Japanese companies combined these two approaches in a unique way." The fact that Gestetner studied U.S.-owned companies as well as foreign-owned companies could explain this discrepancy in findings.

Twenty companies responded to the question concerning formalization of information flow. An informal system is defined as a sporadic system, used without uniformity; whereas, a formal system conducted research on some sort of periodic bases and consistently used the same methods. Ten companies used informal programs, nine companies used formal programs, and one company entered the market using a formal system, but once in the growth stage, changed to an informal system.

There was not a pattern in the types of industries companies were in with respect to the use of formal or informal systems. Companies with very volatile markets were found to be using both formal and informal systems; however, almost all of these types of companies collected data daily. One of the companies surveyed whose market was very volatile had a marketing representative in each foreign country whose job was to collect information electronically on a daily basis but to relay research findings back to the sales force through sales quotas and sales suggestions in a one-on-one situation.

With one company, the method used, the extent of information gathered, and the frequency of reports are dependent upon the size of the sales contract and the country where the sale is taking place. Each sale is seen independently because of the type of product being sold.

International and Domestic Differences

Respondents were asked what they thought was the most significant difference, or the difference which they were most accustomed to dealing with, between international and domestic sales forces when gathering market information.

Five companies' executives commented explicitly that there was no difference in the "way" information was gathered and that the differences were in the "types" of information needed. These informational differences found in foreign countries included:

- not as much information available
- information being harder to attain
- information being less reliable, resulting in the need for time consuming cross checking
- because of the many complexities and increased competition in a foreign market, there are more types of information needed
- international sales depend more on relations, so there are more areas to monitor, and more representatives who need the information
- our U.S. strategy is to copy, but increased competition internationally necessitates the need for more market information and market research for more aggressive market strategies

Other respondents noted that the differences lie in the sales force personnel. One respondent felt that international salespeople had a broader mentality and out of necessity were not culture bound. In direct contrast to this, one respondent felt that international salespeople, as well as their customers, were much less sophisticated. Another respondent felt that the problem was with management: "Although local salespeople understand customer and market needs, sales managers and marketers in the U.S. headquarters don't understand the different customer and market needs in the foreign country."

Accessibility of the sales force in a foreign market is quite different from the domestic market where the sales force is not only easily accessible, but so are the customers. Difficulties were attributed to the limited number of international salespeople as compared to the U.S. market, to the geographical accessibility of the sales force, and to language translation problems. Internationally, distributors or country sales managers are frequently seen as a

barrier to directly contacting the sales force. Dealing with the sales force through these intermediaries caused the information gathered to not be as representative.

One respondent had experienced this phenomenon first hand when the company distributed a questionnaire to two groups of salespeople. The Canadian sales force was contacted directly, but the European sales force was contacted through a regional sales manager. The Canadian responses gave much more "creative solutions" and more "specific information" than the European sales force. The respondent attributed this problem to the European sales manager who distributed the questionnaire to only some of the sales force. Frequently, only subordinate sales managers were asked to complete the questionnaire, instead of giving the questionnaire directly to the salespeople.

Lastly, only four respondents mentioned cultural assumptions as part of the main differences between domestic and international data gathering by the sales force. One respondent noted that "after living in Asia for five years, and learning to speak the language, it was not enough to overcome the cultural barriers to gathering reliable data." Consequently, he recommended using only local sales people for marketing research. Another company with a very successful intelligence system found that the key to overcoming cultural assumptions was to have a truly "global perspective" like his company did. He described this as not trying to compare each country with the U.S. for differences, but to compare like countries for similarities in markets, customers and competition.

Using a U.S. Expatriate

Of the companies surveyed, eight didn't use expatriates, one used all expatriates, and ten used both expatriates and foreign salespeople. Out of the ten companies who used both expatriates and local salespeople on their foreign sales forces, only three used both types of salespeople exactly the same to gather information. The majority of the companies employing both types of salespeople (six companies) used expatriates and local salespeople differently, and one company didn't have enough knowledge to answer the question.

One company felt that its expatriate salespeople gathered more detailed information because they were more used to marketing data techniques and the usefulness of the input. In contrast, two com-

panies felt that because of the cultural barriers an expatriate faced, information gathered by the expatriate tended to be less credible. Another company said that the effectiveness of using expatriates to gather market information depended both on the individual and the complexity of the foreign environment. While a local salesperson was better at gathering valid information because of his or her cultural advantages, the expatriate was typically felt to be better at communicating information to the headquarters' office.

In sum, the use of expatriates is not a universal process. The data indicate that many practices are in use.

Conclusions and Implications

Cavusgil (1985), in a study of U.S. export market research, reported that companies typically had information overload and information was frequently found to be conflicting. He concluded that the real task for his respondents, as is for this study's respondents, is to determine which information is more accurate, secondary information or that gathered by the salespeople. In many cases, the information gathered by salespeople was compared to data gathered by U.S. and foreign agencies to comb for discrepancies in the published data. Discrepancies were particularly prevalent for developing countries.

Evidence from the present study clearly shows that multinational companies frequently use international salespeople as sources for both marketing intelligence and marketing research data. Data gathered by international salespeople are consistently being used to make sales forecasts and company or product image decisions. As is true in domestic markets, data collected by salespeople are still not used routinely in product design decisions. Given the need for information by multinational companies regarding customer needs and preferences and the high cost of international research consultants, multinational companies should consider their salespeople more for product design information than is currently the case.

Five of the companies interviewed appeared to be frequent collectors and users of data. This finding surfaced the "chicken or the egg" dilemma: were more decisions made because more timely data was available from the sales force, or was more information gathered because of the many decisions re-

quiring this data? Empirical research on this subject is needed to clarify this relationship.

It was found that salespeople play a more significant role in the market entry stage than in the domestic marketing cycle, primarily because of their close proximity to the market, a position which is not easily attainable by marketers located outside the foreign country. Likewise, when market research teams are brought to the foreign country for market entry studies, it is not unusual to include salespeople for their invaluable input the critical entry strategy formulation. Involving international salespeople in the entry phase could well be a catalyst for continued support from the sales force in subsequent marketing stages, but empirical research is needed in this area.

Beltramini (1988) addressed which methods should be used to disseminate marketing data to the sales force. Important to the effectiveness of any system is that it (1) be customer oriented; (2) be easily processed by the salesperson; (3) be related to the salesperson aiding in product development; (4) show corporate commitment to the customer, thereby demonstrating that the salesperson works for a company which has a consistent and strategic presence in the marketplace; and (5) involve direct interface with their organization's decision makers.

Therefore Beltramini recommends the implementation of:

- time-saving summarizations
- explanations of how particular programs fit the "big picture"
- innovative presentation formats
- matrix comparisons rather than narratives
- on-line data bases
- video cassette briefings

Although Beltramini's (1988) suggestions are targeted toward high-technology salespeople, many of the techniques apply to sales personnel in all types of industries.

Why should multinational companies rely more on their international sales force than their domestic sales force? "Lack of accessible information" is cited most often in the current international marketing research literature and is certainly supported by this study. However, more complex reasons for multinational companies to rely more on international sales forces than domestic sales forces for market data include:

- Foreign published data is often unreliable, necessitating primary information gathering for cross checking.

- U.S. management doesn't understand foreign customers or foreign sales techniques to make effective, educated decisions on marketing strategy.
- International sales in many countries rely more on relations so that more information areas need monitoring and more people in the marketing and sales process need the information.
- In a volatile market, close monitoring of the market may only be possible through use of the sales force, since by the time information was released, it would be obsolete.
- The increased complexity and competition in foreign marketing result in more information being needed to formulate successful marketing strategies.
- Too often, domestic strategy is copied, but increased competition in international markets necessitates the need for more information and marketing research by the sales force to design "aggressive" marketing strategies.

Despite the virtues of having marketing information gathered by the salespeople, the problems sales managers face in collecting data (primarily time, information availability, and sales force resistance) must be addressed by multinational companies. Specific solutions to these problems were not addressed by this research. However, previous research (Churchill et al. 1985; Evans and Schlacter 1985) recommends keeping marketing information systems easy and clarifying these activities in a salesperson's job description. Reviews of effecting international sales force marketing information systems supported this recommendation.

The effectiveness of expatriates in international business continues to be a debated topic (Black and Mendenhall 1990). This study's findings on the effectiveness of expatriates in gathering market information is particularly timely. Multinational companies which use expatriates to gather primary market data involving personal interviews must be sure that cultural nuances (frequently misunderstood by an expatriate) do not distort the information gathered. However, in the collecting of secondary data and some tabulation-oriented observation studies, expatriates can be equally as effective as local salespeople and in some cases better.

We found that in some companies, the expatriates are better at gathering more detailed market data and communicating it more clearly and con-

cisely. This advantage is attributed to their familiarity with these techniques in the domestic market. Since secondary data and market observations were found to be the most frequent kind of information collected during the entry stage and the salespeople were used the most during the entry stage, it serves to reason that sending qualified expatriates for market information during the entry stage would prove effective, if not more effective than local salespeople. Conversely, during the growth and maturity stages when more "soft data" is collected, primarily by personal interview, local salespeople would be more effective in foreign countries.

Centralized and decentralized marketing management structures were used equally, as were formal and informal systems. Neither, however, was proven to determine the success of the marketing information system. What does tend to be an influencing factor is the ease and frequency of communication between the sales force and the marketing staff. For this reason it is recommended that multi-national companies select the system which best facilitates good relations and timely communications between the sales force and the marketing staff. Regularly scheduled working meetings, field visits, and daily or weekly telephonic or electronic communication between the two groups should be one of the highest priorities in implementing any successful marketing information system. Marketing professionals should be careful to present marketing findings with this in mind. Data should be summarized and translated into sales guidelines and suggestions and electronically sent to the sales force.

Although structured research with sales and marketing executives of multinational companies has proven difficult, future empirical research on the effectiveness of these marketing information systems would greatly enhance the analysis of international marketing information and research systems. Likewise, research which included interviews with both U.S.-based marketing/sales executives and interviews with sales personnel in foreign countries would help define the intricate problems with these systems. Multinational companies clearly believe regular input from the international sales force is needed, and they benefit from the close working relationship between international salespeople and marketers.

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Appendix A
Interview Questions

1. Is your international marketing research more centralized or decentralized? (Explain) Does this policy of _____ change with the product life cycle?
 - (A) Market Entry Period?
 - (B) Market Growth Period?
 - (C) Market Maturity?
2. What topics or kind of marketing information does your company's international sales force gather during:
 - (A) Market Entry Period?
 - (B) Market Growth Period?
 - (C) Market Maturity?
3. In which stage of the marketing cycle is the salesforce's role of collecting international marketing research data most important: Market Entry, Growth or Market Maturity?
4. Does your company have a formalized plan for the exchange of marketing information between the sales force and sales management?
5. How does the sales force receive marketing research findings?
6. Are these findings presented as: raw data; statistically analyzed data; summarized data; or data interpreted into suggestions or guidelines?
7. How would you evaluate your company's international salesforce market data gathering techniques?
8. Does your company's marketing information exchange differ when you use an expatriate sales force versus a local sales force?
9. What do you think would be the best way to communicate international marketing research data to the sales force?
10. What do you think would be a sales manager's most difficult problem in gathering international marketing research data?
11. What do you think would be a sales manager's most difficult problem in using international marketing research data?
12. Does your company's senior management consider information gathered by the sales force before making decisions in the areas of:
 - (A) Forecasting sales?
 - (B) Company/product image making?
 - (C) Product design?
13. What are the main differences in sales forces conducting and using marketing research internationally versus domestically?