

Jisc Institution as E-Textbook Publisher project **Competitor analysis**

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Each project that has been part of the Jisc funded e-textbook programme was required to carry out a competitor analysis as part of the early stages of the project work. This blog post talks about the basics of competitor analysis and does so by looking at how we approached our competitor analysis at Nottingham.

The starting point for our competitor analysis was to define the scope of the analysis, or in other words, to define what we wanted to find out about and why. The list below shows the areas we decided to look at, and they can be adapted to other contexts as appropriate:

- Understand market place
- Examine and define price point and commercial model
- Understand licensing options
- Examine and define pedagogic approach
- Evaluate quality of competitor texts
- Understand the current usage by our own students of competitor texts

We were keen to use the competitor analysis to help us understand the market that we were moving into and to help us understand how we might position ourselves competitively in the already busy market of introductory texts in the areas of 'Corporate Social Responsibility' (CSP) and 'Applied Ethics'. The CSP e-textbook was going to follow a commercial path, so it was important to look at price points and consider where we wanted to pitch our own e-textbook. The Applied Ethics e-textbook was to be offered for free under a Creative Commons licence, so while price point was not a consideration, it was important to examine licence choices of competitors. We also wanted to use the competitor analysis to get a sense of what the existing leading texts in the subject areas offered in terms of pedagogic approach were, so for example were they simply traditional textbooks or did they have any accompanying materials or accompanying websites that supported learning. This was especially interesting to us as the authors of both our e-textbooks were keen to move away from traditional text only approaches by providing supporting online activities. This strand of analysis also included an evaluation of quality of competitor texts. Over 50 competitor texts were evaluated and quality scores allocated by the authors.

The final driver for our analysis was a desire to understand how our own students were already using competitor texts as part of their studies, and what the availability of texts was like in our own library. This was important information to us as one of the key aspects of the Jisc project is to examine if self-publication of e-textbooks can reduce the cost of higher education for students. So it was essential to understand how students were already using competitor texts in order to start to unpick that question. The list below shows the specifics of what we investigated for this aspect of our analysis:

- Title Author/Editor Publisher
- Publisher date

- Versions held by The University of Nottingham Library
- Price that The University paid for different versions of the title
- Current open market list price for titles
- Usage data
- Other formats available for purchase (not held by The University of Nottingham) and the current open market list price
- Access to titles or parts of titles through the institutional VLE
- Academic authors view of the current situation
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Several analytical tools and processes were used to carry out the competitor analysis. This included a SWOT analysis for both e-textbooks that looked at what the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats were for the title. The SWOT analysis for the Corporate Social Responsibility e-textbook is included below:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strong links to practice with availability of unique case material - Competency development for professionals with potential for link to certificate courses developed by ICCRS - Exclusive three year agreement with ICCRS to publish a text aligned to the competency framework - Provides a UK perspective - Learner interactive and designed as e-textbook - Pilot audience of students and ICCRS advisors and members available to refine content in early iterations - Developed as a foundation text suitable for non-business specialists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Production of unique case material and content will take time - Text will need to address a broad audience so may lack depth and focus - Slower time to market as university organization develops competence and experience with e-books - Possible tension between needs of student and practitioner audiences - Broad range of experience amongst early ICCRS members so some may want alternative higher level content and may find an introductory text too basic
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Embrace and integrate newer technologies - Provide more interactive and individual learner experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MOOCs and more interactive content may prove more attractive option/substitute

In addition to the SWOT analysis, a review of the main competitor books was also completed. For both e-textbooks this first involved defining what the main competitor texts were. The data gathered about this for the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) e-textbook is listed in the table below:

Title	Author/Editor	Publisher	Date
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Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility	Werther	Sage	2010
The Sustainable MBA	Weybrecht	Wiley	2013
Managing Corporate Social Responsibility	Coombs and Holladay	Wiley-Blackwell	2011
The Sustainability Handbook, The : "The Complete Management Guide to Achieving Social, Economic and Environmental Responsibility	Blackburn, William R	Taylor & Francis	2012

Once the main competitor texts had been defined, the next step was to identify cost and library data on the titles. The data gathered for this for the CSR e-textbook is listed in the table below:

Title	University of Nottingham Library Holdings	List Price	Usage	Other formats available for purchase
Strategic Corporate Social Responsibility	Not in central library stock	£24.99	No usage data is available as not yet in central library stock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Hardback ISBN: 9781118760635 with a list price of £24.99 · mylibrary ebook ISBN: 9781306140904 with a multiuser licence price of £59.98
The Sustainable MBA	In stock as an ebrary ebook	£24.99	No usage data is available as not yet in central library stock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Hardback ISBN: 9781118760635 with a list price of list price £24.99 · mylibrary ebook ISBN: 9781306140904 with a multiuser licence price of £59.98

Managing Corporate Social Responsibility	Not in central library stock	£58.50	No usage data is available as not yet in central library stock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Hback ISBN: 9781444336290 with a list price £58.50 · Paperback ISBN: 9781444336450 with a list price of £24.99 · mylibrary ebook ISBN: 9781283927550 with a multiuser licence of £100.00
The Sustainability Handbook	Not in central library stock	£25.00	4 copies borrowed a total of 178 times since January 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Hback ISBN: 9781844074952 with a list price £55.00 · mylibrary ISBN: 9781281105196 with a multiuser licence of £130.48

For the CSR e-textbook we also carried out a comprehensive review of more than 40 competitor titles to try and understand how they approached the delivery and presentation of their materials. The [table in attachment lists the first 10 titles](#) that were reviewed in order to provide an example of the work that was completed in this task.

One result of the SWOT analysis and comprehensive competitor book analysis was the decision on what pedagogic approach would be taken for the e-textbook, with the lead author deciding to embrace and integrate technology. The SWOT analysis had highlighted the potential for using technology to drive home a competitive advantage and the comprehensive review of competitor titles had shown that very few competitors had taken this approach. Producing a technology rich end product became a core principle and requirement of the design of the book. Another result of the competitor analysis was the decision on commercial model, with the lead author deciding to move away from a standard commercial model, and move to a fermium model where part of the e-textbook would be provided for free and the later parts of the e-textbook would be available by joining a professional Corporate Social Responsibility organisation that would make the full book available to their members.

In addition to the pedagogic and commercial decisions that the competitor analysis underpinned, it also helped to define what subject areas and content should be included in the e-textbooks. The lead authors of both e-textbooks made decisions based on content having reviewed what was available in the

market. A good example of this is the lead author for the Applied Ethics e-textbook choosing to limit the number of chapters in the book to ensure that only high value subject content for the module they were teaching was included. The competitor analysis had shown that many of the competitor texts including chapters that were not immediately relevant, meaning that students would potentially be purchasing texts that had information they would be unlikely to need. Because of this understanding reached through the competitor analysis, the lead author decided to focus in on only 6 topic areas.

So in conclusion, the competitor analysis was essential to the Nottingham project. It helped us take stock of the current position of the market and helped us to understand how we would like to engage with the market. The analysis underpinned significant decisions that we needed to make in the areas of pedagogy, commercialisation; technology, licensing and content. And it also meant that we felt confident that we were making evidence based decisions from the outset.