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Vendor Comparison Research Methodology

1. Introduction

Info-Tech Research Group's Decision Diamond vendor recognition program is based on a rigorous review process designed to ensure impartiality and fairness. The following outlines the research process and how outcomes of the Decision Diamond are determined.

The Decision Diamond program recognizes vendors who are outstanding in providing quality products and services to their clients, and helps enterprise IT decision-makers create a short list of vendors for consideration in implementing IT programs.

The Decision Diamond assessment framework includes:

- **Leaders:** top ranked vendors in the Decision Diamond
- **Competitors:** second-ranked vendor category in the Decision Diamond
- **Followers:** vendors whose offerings are worthy of consideration but which do not lead in the particular category.

Decision Diamond Leaders and Competitors will be announced both on the Info-Tech website www.infotech.com/vendors and in writing to each award recipient as studies are completed. Award winners receive an Executive Summary of the report. They are also provided with a digital award logo to place on their Web site, on all employee email signatures, in marketing materials etc. and are encouraged to issue a press release announcing their achievement. Vendors in the Leader category also receive a physical award for display. The full Product Comparison report and related Product Evaluation reports on each individual vendor reviewed in the Decision Diamond process are available for purchase.

Topics for upcoming Product Comparison notes for the next two topic areas will be posted on the Web site. Vendors are welcome to request a briefing, but Info-Tech Research Group reserves the right to determine which vendors will have one-on-one briefings with our research analysts based on research requirements.

The research process for assessment and comparison follows.

2. Summary

One of the key activities undertaken by Info-Tech's customers, IT management, is to make a decision on a product and vendor prior to the acquisition of a major application, software, hardware or service. The Compare, Evaluate and Select activities are reflected as key elements of Info-Tech's IT Lifecycle Model, under the general category of Making Technology Decisions.

Connected Research Introduction to Implementation



The Compare and the Evaluate notes are part of the ITA Premium service. They provide detailed information on specific products and their vendors, allowing the customer to create a short-list of vendors for detailed analysis. The Select notes help customers implement good practices for final selection, negotiation and contract agreement with the vendors that they choose to evaluate in detail.

There are well-defined processes for developing the Compare and the Evaluate notes. These include:

- **Selecting Product Categories:** the process of selecting what types of software, hardware or services will be researched
- **Selecting Products:** the process of selecting leading products for evaluation
- **Researching the Products and Vendors:** the process of collecting up-to-date information about the products and the vendors being evaluated.
- **Developing Product and Vendor Indices:** a consistent process for scoring and comparing products and vendors
- **Developing the Decision Diamond:** a visual tool for easy comparison of competing products.

3. Choosing the Product Categories

The Research Agenda

The Info-Tech Research teams develop an annual Research Agenda, revised quarterly, which identifies the specific topics for notes to be researched and written for ITA Premium subscribers. This Research Agenda identifies the types of products to be included in Compare and Evaluate notes.

Examples of topics for Compare and Evaluate notes include:

- Intrusion Detection Appliances
- Storage Area Networks for Mid-sized Enterprises
- Wireless LANs
- Help Desk Software
- Blade Servers
- Web Content Management
- Application Server Front-Ends
- IP PBXs
- Server Software for Small Enterprises
- Storage Area Networks for Small Enterprises

4. The Product is Our Focus

Compare and Evaluate notes focus on products that are available in a particular category. The strength of the vendor behind each product is an essential part of the analysis as well. However, the focus in the vendor analysis is on the commitment of the vendor to the product category under review rather than their broader business.

5. Selecting the Products for Evaluation

Our target for evaluation in a category is no more than 10 products. The focus of our evaluation is on products that are appropriate for our target market. Info-Tech creates a comprehensive list of all known vendors in the space, based on a broad analysis of publications, surveys, vendor briefings and information collected in analyst calls with clients.

A short-list for detailed analysis is developed based on market penetration or on innovation. Products are included in the evaluation if they have a material market share in the target market, rather than the overall market, where large enterprise sales skew share. Products that have distinctive features are included when Info-Tech believes that their technology or features offer potentially meaningful value to enterprises.

6. Doing the Research

Information about each product is collected in several ways:

- Publicly available product information from the vendor (web site, brochures, white papers) describes the features of the product
- Publicly available corporate information (financial results, size, market share, management changes) provide information about the vendor
- Vendor briefings and interviews provide additional clarification about aspects of the product and the vendor
- Consistent comments in third party reviews and feedback from clients help our assessment of how well a product actually functions after implementation and how well the vendor provides support.

7. The Product Index

Each product is scored in five categories, assessed against several criteria:

Product Pricing, based on

- Purchase price
- Basic support price
- Enhanced support price
- License terms & conditions

Product Ease of Use

- Ease of setup, admin component
- Ease of setup, user component
- Ease of use, admin component
- Ease of use, user component

Product Features

- Basic/baseline features
- Enhanced/differentiation features
- Performance/reliability
- Scalability

Product Support

- Baseline support
- Enhanced support options
- Base warranty
- Extended warranty

Product Architecture

- Maturity of architecture
- Integration with vendor's other products
- Integration with competitive products
- Breadth of supported platforms

The scores for all of the products being assessed are compared. The published Product Index is a measure of the performance of each product relative to the group.

8. The Vendor Index

Each vendor is scored in two categories, each assessed against several criteria:

Vendor Stability/Viability

- Revenue and profitability
- Ability to fund growth
- Breadth of market and products
- Strength of brand and market presence
- Leadership quality and track record
- Staffing experience and skill levels
- Level of intellectual capital
- Track record of success

Vendor Strategy Score

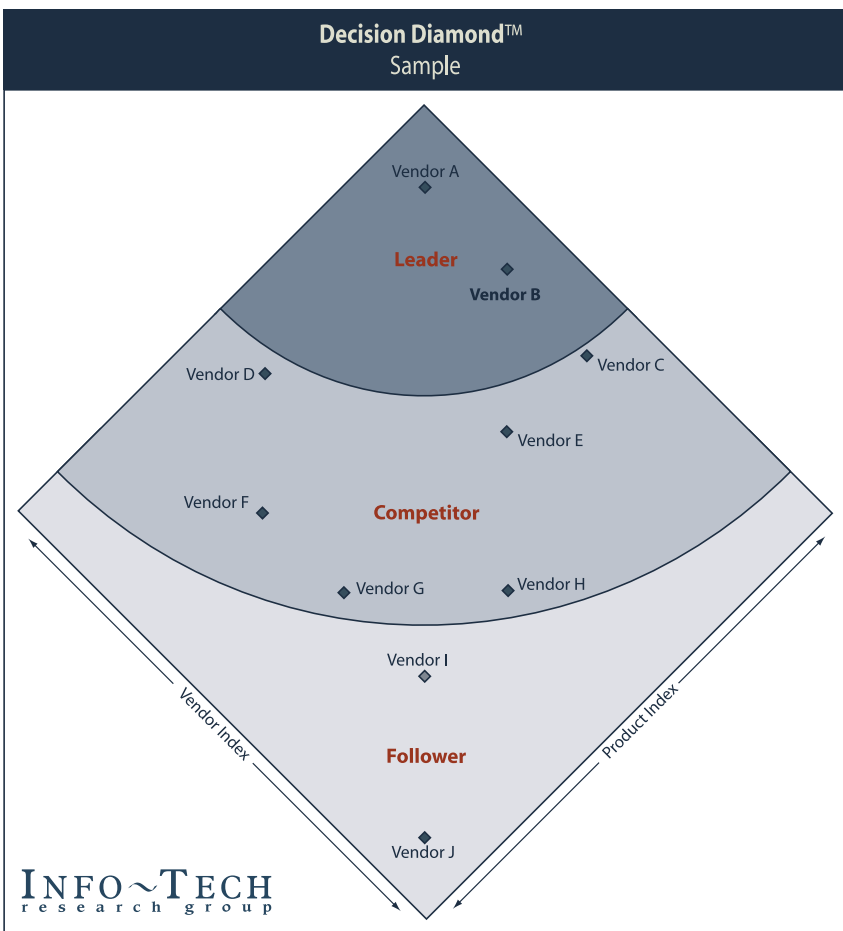
- Quality of client service and support
- Quality of products and/or services
- Level of R&D spending
- Target market applicability
- Clarity of sales/marketing strategy
- Accuracy of market perception
- Effectiveness of the sales and marketing strategy

The scores for all of the vendors of the products being assessed are compared. The published Vendor Index is a measure of the performance of each vendor relative to the group

9. Displaying the Product Comparison

The Decision Diamond

Info-Tech Research Group has developed a simple visual representation of relative Product and Vendor Indices, called the Decision Diamond. The two axes of the Diamond reflect Vendor and Product Indices. Products at the top of the Diamond are classified as Leaders. These are the best in Product and Vendor Assessment. Products that are average in both Indices, or strong in only one, are classified as Competitors. Products that are below average in one index or both are classified as Followers.



10. The Product Evaluation Notes

In addition to the Comparison note that provides an overview of all of the products assessed, Info-Tech issues individual Evaluation notes for each product to provide more in-depth information on that product.

11. Conclusion

Info-Tech Research Group recognizes that our customers need guidance in the selection of software, hardware and IT services. We have positioned Product Comparisons and Evaluations as key parts of our ITA premium offering. The objective is to help our customers make better choices and to make them quickly. The product and associated vendor assessments are carried out in a consistent manner, using a pre-defined set of quantitative scoring criteria. The results are presented to customers in the form of a Decision Diamond that positions all competing products according to relative product quality and vendor capability. Our evaluation notes provide more detail on specific products.

The Decision Diamond Award

The Decision Diamond recognizes Leaders & Competitors in each product and solution category. These are the digital award logos for vendor promotional purposes.

