



Should you even mention the competition?

When I tell people that I do testing for a language certification syndicate in Germany, I often get asked how our products compare to the Cambridge exams or the ones set by the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI). I am generally happy to talk about the comparison because I think competition is a good thing. It is a great form of motivation and keeps corporations on their toes. It is in the interest of customers to have freedom of choice. We just have to be mindful about how we talk about competitors.

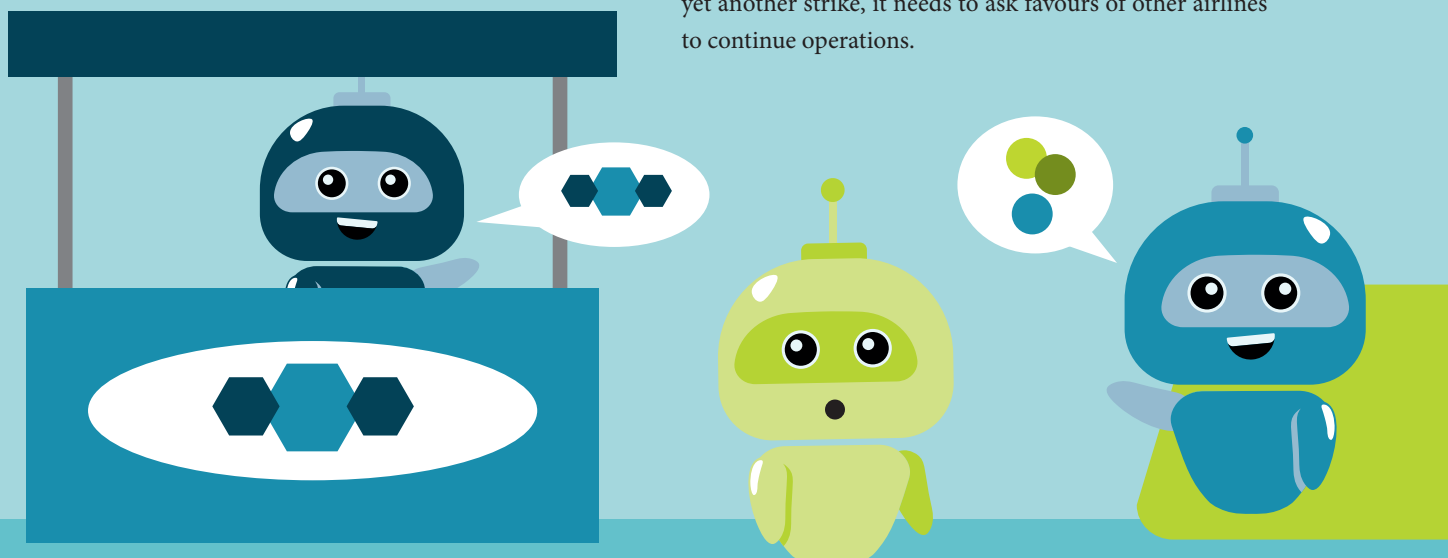
by Ming Wong

Be well informed about your competitors

If you don't know much about who else is in your line of business, it sends the signal that you don't know much about your industry, or that you're a newbie without much experience. Do your homework diligently before you go meet a potential investor or client. These might already be knowledgeable about players, events and prices in your field and will not be impressed if they know more than you do. 'Yes, of course, we know ABC. We run into them at trade fairs and industry events quite often. We have a friendly relationship with them.'

Speak well of your competitors

It is only professionalism on your part to acknowledge other companies in the field that have done well. 'Yes, Liebherr is a big name, and they deserve their success. They've opened the way for other German firms like us to expand abroad.' If you speak of them disparagingly, it might sound like petty jealousy. Instead, celebrate their success by sending a congratulatory note if they have a landmark occasion or won some award: 'We were so happy to be invited to Smith & Johnson's recent anniversary celebrations.' You never know when you might need the help of a competitor. Think of the alliances of airlines and hotels. If Lufthansa is strained by yet another strike, it needs to ask favours of other airlines to continue operations.



Promote your unique selling proposition (USP)

Instead of downplaying your competitors, emphasise what your business can offer. 'Yes, Cambridge is a big name in the language business, but The European Language Certificates (TELC) are recognised by government bodies within the EU.' 'We're a small company but that means we can give more time and more personal service to our clients. We know them all personally.'

Some clients will be attracted by the fact that your offers are more affordable or service-oriented or less commercial (have you noticed that Smart Business English is devoid of advertisements?) or even the idea of starting a new journey together: 'We're offering a very affordable package for our first fifty customers. And if you're still with us at the end of the year, that is going to be worth a special celebration.'

Get endorsed by your stakeholders

If a customer likes your product or service, or if a supplier likes working with you, ask them if they would mind endorsing you publicly. You can use their comments or feedback on your website, brochures and other publicity material. Customers like peer-to-peer recommendations. 'Would you like to talk to some of our other clients? We were the project manager for the Oderweg 17 apartment block. I'd be happy to show you the recommendations of some homeowners or make arrangements for a few phone chats.' Self-confidence can be very attractive.

There are many synonyms for 'competitors':

1. Coca-Cola and Pepsi have been rivals/adversaries for years.
2. In the mobile phone business, Apple's main challenger/opponent is Samsung.
3. All the contestants in the TV quiz were told to arrive two hours before showtime.
4. Oh, Nicole's not only the major contender for this position; she's Sarah's nemesis. In all the projects that we've had, it's almost always come down to Sarah or Nicole.

To talk about a business's position in the field, you can say:

- Edeka is still the top dog in the supermarket business in Germany even though many new companies are nipping at their heels.
- Netflix used to be ahead of the curve in the streaming business.
- Ennio Morricone is nonpareil/unrivalled/matchless in the field of film music.
- Our company's already ranked number 2 among the gaming start-ups though we only joined the industry two years ago. We're aiming for number 1, of course.
- Roger Federer is without equal/without comparison in his achievements in tennis.

Vokabeltraining

devoid of
frei von

disparagingly
abwertend

to keep so. on
his/her toes
**jmdn. auf Trab
halten**

to nip at
someone's heels
**jmdm. auf den
Fersen sein**

