

How to Decide between Manual Market Research and Market Intelligence



Executive Summary

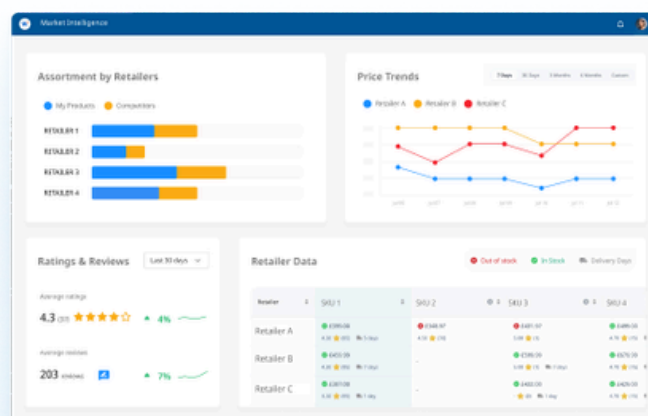
Market-facing teams make decisions every day based on how they believe the market is moving.

Pricing, promotions, assortment, and positioning all depend on an accurate understanding of what competitors and retailers are doing right now and how that behavior is changing over time.

Many organizations still rely on manual market research to answer these questions. Teams pull data from retailer sites, build spreadsheets, create screenshots, and assemble presentations to support specific decisions. This approach can work in limited cases, but it does not scale. It is time-intensive, difficult to repeat, and highly dependent on individual expertise.

Market Intelligence replaces one-off research with a structured, ongoing, category-wide view of the market. Instead of answering isolated questions, it provides continuous visibility into pricing, promotions, availability, assortment, and shopper sentiment across retailers and competitors, resulting in consistent and reliable inputs for decision-making.

This ebook explains the difference between manual market research and Market Intelligence, who each approach is suited for, and how to determine which one fits your organization's needs.



The Core Difference Between:

Manual Market Research

Manual market research is the process of gathering and analyzing market information through ad-hoc, human-led effort. Teams collect data from retailer sites, marketplaces, internal documents, and external sources to answer specific business questions.

This research is initiated when a decision needs to be made, such as preparing for a retailer meeting, reviewing category performance, investigating a competitor move, or validating a pricing or assortment change. The scope is defined by the question at hand.

The work is performed using site checks, screenshots, spreadsheets, presentations, and internal analysis. Data is selected, organized, and interpreted by the team conducting the research, with the output as a report tailored to a specific audience or moment. Teams can adjust the scope, methodology, and level of detail based on urgency, available resources, and familiarity with the category. It allows analysts to apply judgment and context.

The results of manual research are generally point-in-time. They reflect what was observed during the period the research was conducted. Updates require repeating the process, often with slight variations depending on who performs the work and when it is done.

Manual market research remains a common approach for organizations that operate within a limited scope or rely on experienced individuals to interpret market dynamics.

Market Intelligence

Market Intelligence is a structured approach to monitoring and analyzing market conditions on an ongoing basis. It provides an ongoing view of pricing, promotions, availability, and assortment across retailers and competitors, so teams can spot changes, quantify impact, and act with shared context.

Unlike most manual methods, Market Intelligence is not initiated by a single question or event. It operates continuously, using a consistent scope and methodology, collecting and organizing market data so that insights are available when decisions need to be made, not assembled afterward.

This consistency allows teams to compare changes across days, weeks, and months without reinterpreting the underlying data each time, making it possible to distinguish short-term fluctuations from meaningful patterns and deviations, supporting recurring decision-making.

Finally, Market Intelligence is not limited to pricing. While price is a key input, market behavior is shaped by multiple factors, including availability, promotion intensity, assortment depth, and shopper feedback. Market Intelligence brings these signals together so they can be evaluated in context rather than isolation.

Where Each Approach Works Well

(And Who It's For)

Manual Market Research

Manual market research is well suited to targeted, infrequent questions. It works best when the scope is limited and clearly defined, the decision is time-bound, and ongoing monitoring is not required.

Teams often rely on manual research for one-off analyses, exploratory work, responding to a specific request or situations where nuance and judgment matter more than consistency. It allows experienced analysts to tailor the depth and focus of the work to a particular audience or moment, and the question being asked.

This approach is also effective when market complexity is relatively low. Fewer retailers, fewer competitors, stable assortments or limited channels make it easier to gather and interpret data without formal structure.

Manual research tends to work best in organizations where market knowledge is concentrated in a small number of individuals. In these environments, context and judgment can compensate for the lack of standardized data and processes.

Market Intelligence

Market Intelligence is most useful to recurring decisions that require consistent inputs over time. It is most effective when teams need to monitor changes across multiple retailers, competitors, categories, or regions.

This approach supports organizations that make frequent decisions about pricing, promotions, assortment, or positioning and need a reliable baseline to evaluate change. Instead of rebuilding analysis, teams can focus on interpreting trends and prioritizing actions.

Market Intelligence is particularly valuable when multiple teams rely on the same market view. A shared, structured dataset reduces misalignment and ensures that decisions are based on comparable information.

It also works well in dynamic environments where market conditions change quickly. Continuous monitoring helps teams distinguish between short-term movements and meaningful shifts that require attention.

Market Intelligence is well suited to organizations that face recurring market decisions and want consistent context over time. It is valuable whenever teams need to understand how pricing, promotions, availability, or assortment are evolving, even within a single category, retailer, or market. Rather than being defined by company size, its usefulness depends on how often decisions repeat and how much confidence those decisions require.

Why Manual Market Research Breaks Down at Scale

Manual market research is built to answer specific questions at a point in time. A team needs to understand a competitor move, prepare for a retailer meeting, or validate a pricing decision. They gather the data, analyze it, and move on. **The problem then is not accuracy, it's repetition.**

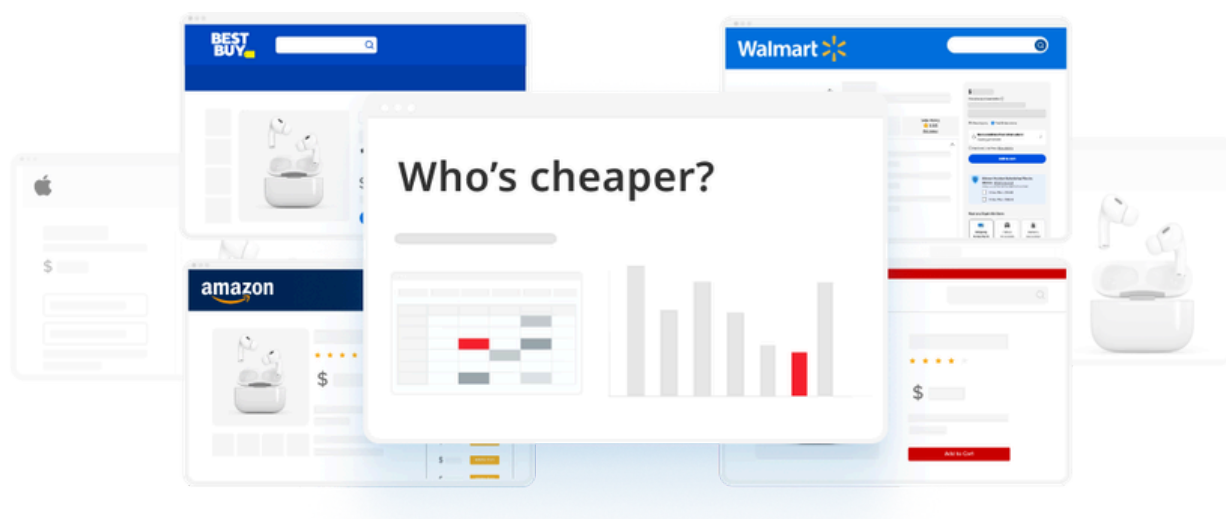
As categories grow more complex, the same questions surface again and again: Who is cheaper? Where are we losing coverage? Which competitors are becoming more aggressive? Manual research requires starting over each time. Data is re-collected, re-cleaned, and reinterpreted, often by different people using different methods.

This creates inconsistency and delays. Two teams can look at the same market and reach different conclusions because they pulled data on different days, from different retailers, or with different assumptions. By the time research is completed and shared, parts of it may already be outdated. Teams end up debating whether a change is meaningful or just noise, rather than acting on clear signals.

As the scope expands, the effort increases non-linearly. Adding retailers, competitors, or SKUs multiplies the workload and becomes unsustainable. As a result, teams narrow their focus, monitor only a subset of the market, or reduce update frequency, introducing blind spots.

Manual research also concentrates knowledge in individuals. The logic behind decisions often lives in personal spreadsheets, local files, or unwritten context. When ownership changes or teams grow, that context is lost, and the same questions must be re-explained and re-validated.

At small scale, these limitations are tolerable. Over time, they slow decision-making, create internal friction, and make it harder to distinguish structural market changes from short-term fluctuations. In short, manual market research was never designed to serve as a continuous, shared view of the market.



Conclusion:

How to Decide What Fits Your Organization

Choosing between manual market research and Market Intelligence is less about tools and more about how decisions are made inside your organization. The right approach depends on the nature of your questions, how often they arise, and how much consistency those decisions require.

Start with Decisions, Not Data

Consider how often the same types of decisions repeat. One-off questions can usually be handled through manual research. Decisions that recur weekly, monthly, or quarterly benefit from having a stable market view in place. If teams regularly revisit similar questions, such as pricing posture, promotional pressure, assortment gaps, or competitive movement, rebuilding the analysis each time adds friction and increases the risk of inconsistency.

How Much Does Context Matter Over Time

Some decisions require only a snapshot of the market. Others depend on understanding how conditions have changed. If it is important to know whether a shift is temporary or part of a broader trend, historical context becomes essential. Manual research can provide context, but maintaining it over time requires discipline and continuity. Market Intelligence formalizes that context so it does not depend on individual memory or ad-hoc tracking.

Who Needs to Use the Output

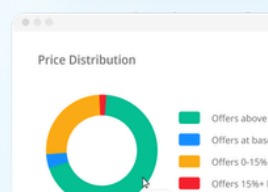
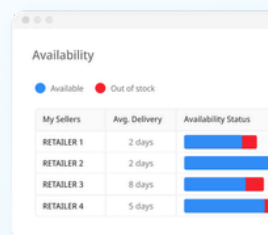
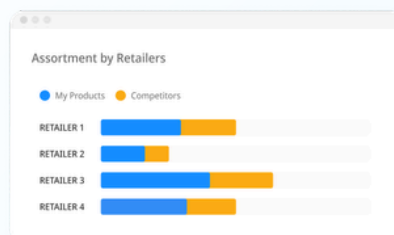
When insights are consumed by a single person or team, manual research can be effective. As soon as multiple teams rely on the same information, alignment becomes harder to maintain. A shared market view reduces debate about inputs and allows teams to focus on interpretation and action, regardless of organization size.

Assess the Cost of Rework

Manual research often appears efficient because the work is familiar. Over time, however, repeated data collection, formatting, and validation consume significant effort. If teams spend more time rebuilding the same views than analyzing what has changed, it may be a signal that a more structured approach is needed.

If market understanding has to be rebuilt for every decision, confidence will always lag behind activity.

Change how decisions are made with a structured market view.





About Wiser Solutions

Wiser equips brands and retailers with real-time intelligence to win the crucial moment when shoppers decide to buy (or not). With visibility across 10 billion products and 600,000 stores, you react first to price changes, shelf issues, and competitive moves, to guide the shopper journey and capture more sales. Trusted by 750+ customers worldwide, Wiser turns data into decisive action, online and in-store.



WISER.COM