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InternetView: Farming The Web

By [Jason Levitt](#)

News



The Internet has shaken up the world of business intelligence, especially in the retail sector. Want to find out what your competition is doing? Just log on to the Internet, and browse their online catalog.

Community

Never has retail competition been so fierce, and never has business-intelligence data been so accessible. Online catalogs are a mother lode of your competition's pricing and inventory data, and it's in a machine-readable form. But getting at the data in online catalogs in a consistent way isn't always easy. Online catalogs are often vast and have relatively complex layouts.

Business Center

The idea of extracting business intelligence from your competition's Web pages can be described as "Web farming," a term created by Dr. Richard Hackathorn. In his book, *Web Farming for the Data Warehouse* (Morgan Kaufmann, 1998), Hackathorn defines Web farming as "the systematic refining of information resources on the Web for business intelligence."

Services

Pricing and product information is core intelligence data for retail-product industries, and many retail E-businesses employ intelligence gatherers who track the online catalogs of the competition. Automating this gathering effort is a necessity, and various software applications are emerging that make it fairly straightforward.

This category of products and services is still quite young. Hackathorn's book is the definitive reference, and his Web site (www.webfarming.com) tracks many of the products and related standards. He argues eloquently that the "benefits of Web farming can be global in scope for the enterprise." And I agree.

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