Guide 12: Research the market and show a finding

Unit 2, Task 4

Your goal

Use existing information to understand your market and competitors. Create a chart that communicates a genuine finding from your primary or secondary research.

Your interviews help you understand individuals. Wider research helps you consider other businesses, market conditions, and the limits of your own sample.

What to produce

Prepare findings about the competitive landscape and a data visualisation. A data visualisation is a chart or graph that helps people understand data.

Keep your sources and original figures with your work. The suggested research notes below are support, not extra official requirements. Use paper or your own document.

Key terms

- **Secondary research:** using information already collected or published by others.
- **Competitive landscape:** the businesses and alternatives serving a market.
- **Direct competitor:** a business offering a similar product to similar customers.
- **Indirect competitor:** an alternative that addresses the same need differently.
- **Source:** where information comes from.

A competitor's product page can provide a current advertised price. It does not prove that the product is popular. A customer review is one person's account, not a measure of all customers.

Step 1: Choose research questions

Start with a decision your research can help. For example:

- What alternatives can our target customer already choose?
- What prices and features do those alternatives offer?
- What reliable information describes our possible market?
- Where might there be an opportunity or a serious barrier?

Check direct and indirect alternatives. “No identical product” does not mean “no competition.” A customer can keep using an existing solution or decide not to buy.

Step 2: Find and check sources

Possible sources include government statistics, trade associations, business publications, company websites, libraries, and reports supplied by your teacher.

For each source, check who produced it, when, how the information was collected, and whether its location and customer group match your question. Look for a sales purpose or another reason the source may present only one side.

Record the title, publisher, date, page or web address, and the exact fact you used. If you cannot verify a claim, leave it out or mark it as uncertain. An AI summary is not a substitute for the source it describes.

Step 3: Compare fairly

Compare similar quantities, currencies, locations, and time periods. A delivery charge can change a price comparison. A bulk price may not be available to someone buying one item.

Keep each finding separate from what you think it means. Explain how the evidence could affect your product, customer group, or competitive plan. Do not turn a national population figure into a claim that all those people will buy your product.

Step 4: Choose and build a chart

Use actual numbers from your research. You may use primary findings from Task 3 or figures from secondary sources.

- A **bar chart** compares categories, such as feature preferences.
- A **stacked bar chart** shows parts within categories.
- A **line graph** shows change over an ordered period.
- A **pie chart** shows parts of a whole that add up to the whole.

Give the chart a clear title, labels, units, period where relevant, and source. A bar chart normally starts its number scale at zero. Avoid decorative shapes that make small differences look large. State the sample size for survey or interview counts.

Explain one finding and one limit in plain words. A clear chart should communicate more than “these are our results.”

Example: Ready Pouch

Ready Pouch is our fictional example business. Its proposed product is a small pencil pouch for students.

This is a fictional illustration. It does not report real products or market prices.

Ready Pouch plans to compare ready-made pouches, bag organiser inserts, and the option of using existing bag pockets. The team would check advertised features and full customer costs, not assume that a low headline price is the full price.

For its chart, it uses the invented Task 3 preference counts: four people prefer a compact pouch and two prefer extra pockets. A bar chart would label the categories, the number of participants, and the fictional sample of six.

In your project, use your own genuine figures. The example does not establish demand, market share, or a competitor's actual performance.

Your turn

1. Record useful market and competitor findings with their sources.
2. Explain what those findings suggest for your business and what they cannot show.
3. Create a chart from real research data.
4. Add labels, units, source, and any relevant period or sample size.
5. Write a short explanation of the chart's main finding and limit.

Check your work

- My sources can be traced and fit my question.
- I compared alternatives fairly.
- My chart matches the original figures.
- I used an appropriate chart and labelled it clearly.
- My conclusions do not go beyond the evidence.

Next: Build and test an MVP

In Unit 2, Task 5, use your research to test a simple version of the product and its brand identity.

Independent guidance based on the AP Business with Personal Finance CED, printed pages 163-164. This is not an official College Board resource.