First Steps with SimVenture

Overview

This short guide has been written to help you use SimVenture for the very first time. The guide does not cover all aspects of the software but will help you to understand how you can setup and run a virtual business for a few simulated months.

To find more about using the software, visit the 'Learning Zone' on the website www.simventure.co.uk and download the 'Teaching & Training with SimVenture' file which can be found on the Teaching Resources page.

Installation

First install SimVenture onto a PC using either the download file or CD supplied to you. Once installed, you will see the screen shown below on your computer.

This is the front screen that you will see when you first install the software on your computer. Note, if you are using the software in demo mode, you will see the 'Unlicensed' message on this screen.

New Game

To start a new business, click the 'New Game' button on the front screen. You will be taken to a suite of options where you can make decisions about how you are going to run your business. The easiest way ti start is to give your new company a name, select 'Easy' level, do not override Starting money and leave all the other options as they are. Then click 'OK'.


This section allows you to personalise how your business will start. The decisions you make now will affect how the simulation works.

Scenario Briefing

You will now see the Scenario Briefing screen which explains your position. This is the default point for all new games. Read the Scenario to understand what is happening in your business before you make any decisions.

Be aware that the Scenario has been designed in this manner because it closely mirrors what happens for most people when starting in business in the real world. Whilst the simulation reflects a business that makes computers, no prior knowledge of this industry is beneficial. Moreover, SimVenture has been designed to help people develop a greater understanding for business and entrepreneurship principles.
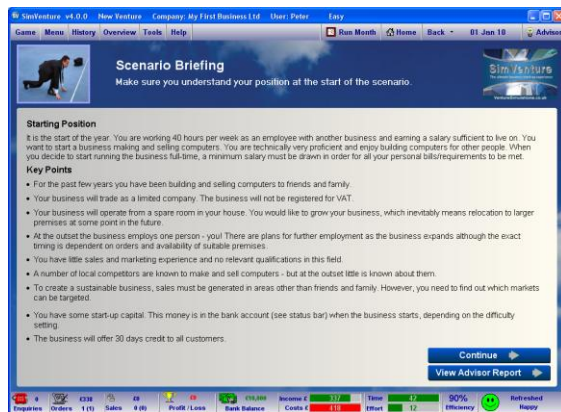
Read the Scenario Briefing to understand your starting position before making any decisions about your business.

Help

In the bottom right hand corner of the Scenario Briefing screen are two buttons: 'Continue' and 'View Advisor Report'. First, click the 'View Advisor Report' button. This will take you to a short report which in essence outlines what you need to do to find early success in SimVenture.

By pressing the 'Continue' button, you will arrive at the 'Help Overview' page. Here you find that information has purposely been provided in various formats to support people wanting to learn more about the game. Audio visual tutorials, written text and explanations 'How do I?' are all provided as well as an opportunity to simply learn by doing – 'Dive In'. You can spend as long as you like reviewing this information and come back to it via the 'Help' button in the Menu bar at any time.

The Game

Once you have looked at 'Help' and gained a better understanding of what the game is about and how it operates, it's time to start your business. Pressing the 'Dive in' button or clicking the 'Home' button at the top of the screen will take you the same place: The Home screen.

The 'Home' screen in SimVenture is the place from where you can navigate to all other screens. Hover your mouse over the words on the page to find the 4 main business areas. Alternatively, use the 'Menu' button in the top left of the screen. This feature shows all the main areas of the game in one view.

You will find the four main business areas to be: Organisation; Finance; Sales & Marketing & Operations. Explore each of these elements by clicking through the pages and see for yourself the nature and extent of what SimVenture covers. There is no time limit.

Understanding the Interface

The Home screen presents a lot of information and it can seem quite daunting at first trying to take in all the information. However, each piece of information is provided to help you run your virtual business. So what does it all mean?

The **Status bar** at the bottom of the page provides ongoing information about key aspects of your virtual business.

| Enquiries, orders and sales are generated by the simulation when you 'Run a Month'. These figures always relate to what happened in the previous month. | The Profit or Loss made in the previous month is shown here. Click to see your full profit and loss report. | Your bank balance as at the end of the previous month is provided here. Click to see your full cashflow forecast. | These two bars show the income from orders you will generate in the current month (top line) and the money you are planning to spend. You can click the bars to see more detail. | These two bars show the time you plan to put aside to work this month. Effort shows the hours needed to complete the tasks you want to do. Click the 'Time' bar to increase your working hours. | Your 'Efficiency' indicates how and where you may be wasting time. Once you have run a month, click to see more detail about your use of time. | The face reflects how tired and stressed you are. The more tired and stressed you become the greater the chances of inefficiency. |

The bar at the top, known as the **Toolbar** allows you to access key business information and use navigational aids.

Game	Menu	History	Overview	Tools	Help		Run Month	Home	Back	01 Jan 10	Advisor
Click the Game Button to Save/Load work and view key reports.	Use Menu to navigate around the game.	The History button allows you to view previous months and print out data.	The Overview function allows you to see your game position at any one time	Within Tools you will find: a notepad; a glossary and a calculator.	Use Help to learn how to play the game as well as run a better business. Web Resources is a library of information.		Press The Run Month button when you have made your monthly decisions.	The Home and Back buttons are navigational tools to help you move around the game.		The date moves forward 1 month every time you 'Run a Month'.	Click the advisor for help and support as well as view the business planning tool.

Getting Started with your Business

Once you feel comfortable with the interface, it is time to make some decisions within your virtual business.

SimVenture mirrors reality and rewards best practice thinking. Skilful play always produces better business results than guesswork. The Advisor Report suggests you first complete market research to find out what potential customers might want to buy, how much they might pay and what product features are important to them. Since you are only selling to friends and family, market research is a wise move. How is this done? Follow the instructions in the boxes to the right of the images.

To complete market research, run your mouse over words 'Sales & Marketing' on the computer screen. The Sales & Marketing menu will appear. Click on the 'Research Strategy' button and this will take you to the Research Strategy screen.

The Research Strategy screen is laid out like all information pages. From this page you can undertake: Market Research'; 'Competition Research'; or 'Customer Research'. Click the box with the arrow to select 'Market Research'.

You will two options for undertaking market research (using a consultant or do it yourself). Opt to use a consultant and a dialogue box appears in the middle of the screen. When you click 'Yes' you will be confirming that you want a consultant to undertake market research for you. You will also see the costs in the Status bar increase by £300 and the Effort bar increase by 4 hours. Click 'Yes'.


The game shows that you have completed your decision because the 'Costs' bar and 'Effort' bar have changed. You can also see the message that 'Research is Scheduled but not completed' (This will change when you run the month). You can also click the 'Effort' bar to see a breakdown of how your time is used.

Now repeat this process, but this time complete competitor research using a consultant. Once again you will see that the Costs bar rise by £300, the Effort bar rises by 4 hours and Competition Research will be scheduled but not started.

Run Month

Now it is time to 'Run the Month' to see how those two research decisions you have made in January play out. Click 'Run Month' at the top of the screen.
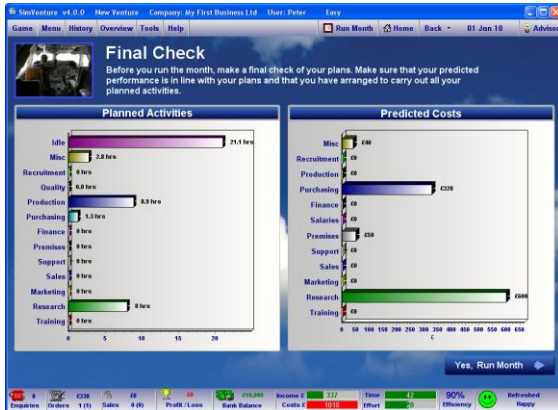
When you click the 'Run Month' button you will see the 'Final Check' screen that shows how you plan to spend your money and time. Note this is only an estimate. When you are happy with the information, click the 'Yes, Run Month' button situated in the bottom right hand corner of the page. If you are not happy, press 'Home' in the Toolbar and make more decisions until you are ready to progress.

Once you click 'Run the Month', January will play out on screen. The simulator, playing the role of the market, will provide the consequences for your decisions and ultimately will show you the following screen.
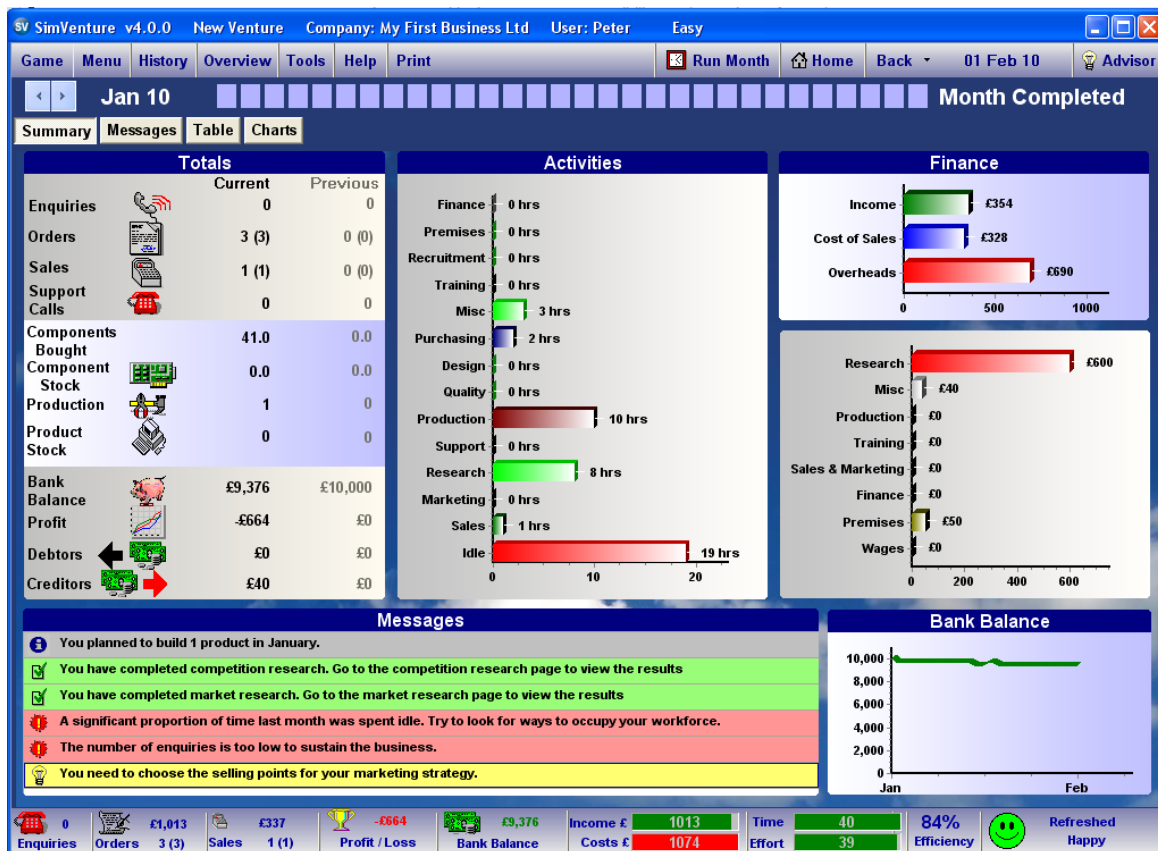
The month end summary information is provided in five separate boxes, each of which is explained below.

1	**Totals**	These are enquiries, orders and sales (also seen in the Status Bar) as well as stock levels (components) and overall financials (debtors, creditors and bank)
2	**Activities**	This chart summarises how you have actually spent your time that month
3	**Finance**	The two charts break down your financial dealings into the 3 key categories.
4	**Messages**	This key information tells you what has happened in the month you have just run
5	**Bank Balance**	This chart shows how money has moved in and out of your bank

The simulator will also calculate how tired you are how you are feeling and if necessary adjust the 'face' in the bottom left of the Status Bar. Furthermore, the simulator will review your 'Efficiency' Levels based on the decisions you have made and summarise your overall efficiency in the Status Bar. You can click this figure to find out more about where time is not being used effectively. Here is how your screen will appear when you have just Run a Month.

You will automatically receive a 'Month End Report' from your business advisor (as long as this feature is switched on the start-up options). This report summarises how your business performed in the previous month and provides critical data to help inform future business decisions.
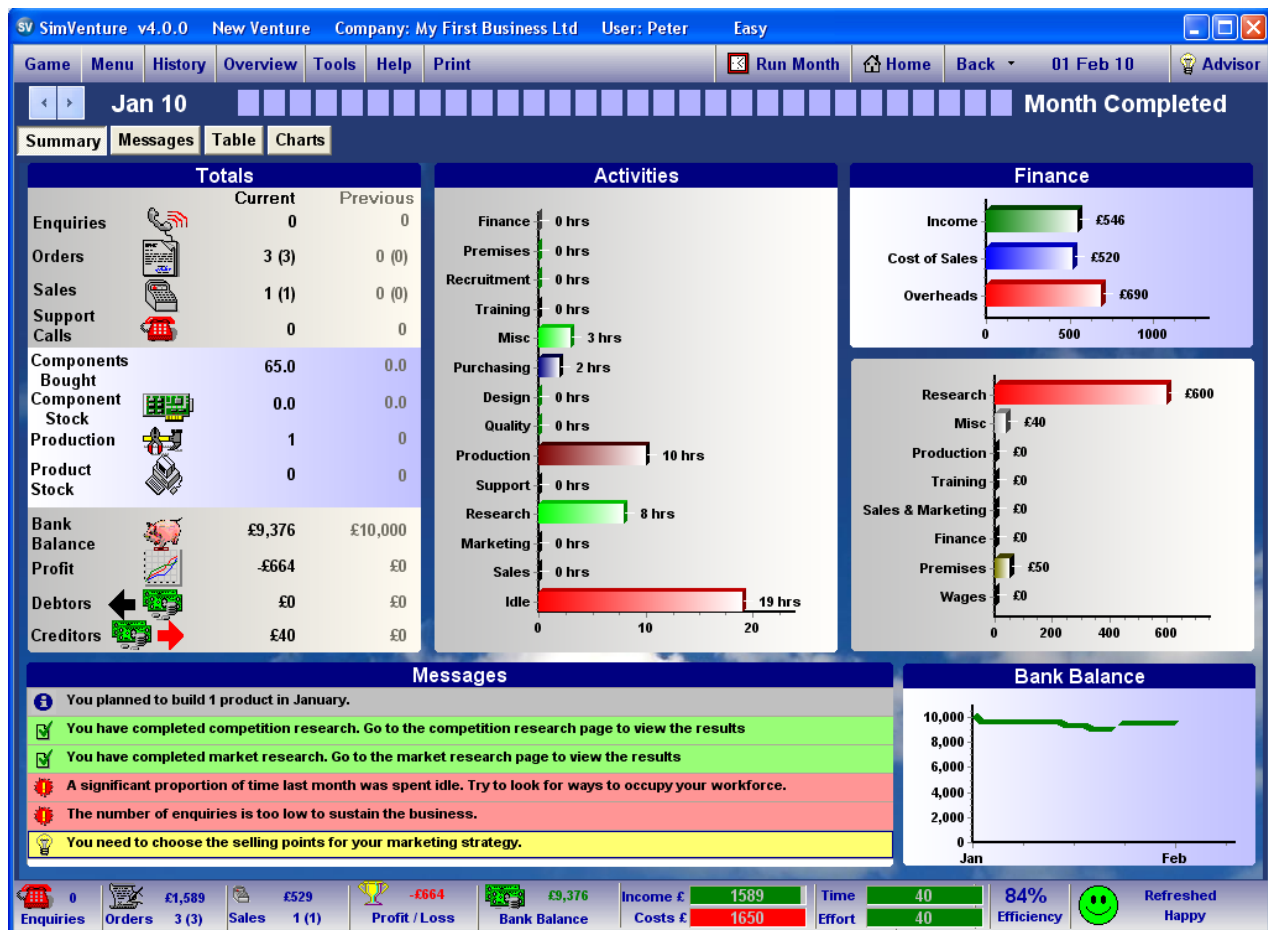
Before progressing to February, you should be aware of the following features that will help you to play SimVenture:

1   You can view the completion of any month by pressing the 'History' button in the Toolbar at the top of the page. You can also print out the results for any month you have run simply by selecting the appropriate month and pressing 'Print'.

2   Save your game at the end of each month. You can then make decisions the following month and if you are not happy with them, simply revert back to your saved game and try again.

3   Within the 'Finance' section, click 'Accounts' and then 'Bookkeeping'. You need to be doing some kind of bookkeeping (either yourself or paying a bookkeeper) in order to see your financial records such as Profit & Loss and Cashflow Forecast. Note -you will of course need to Run a Month before this feature works.

Analysing the Consequences

To start the next month, analyse the consequences first to understand in more detail what has happened. Let's have a look at January's results in more detail.

| Summary Boxes	Interpreting the Month's information (January)
Tools	Whilst no enquiries were received, 3 new orders were generated and you sold the one order processed in January. (Figures in brackets represent actual number of computers ordered or sold). 43 Components have been purchased to meet the demand of 3 orders. A loss of £664 occurred in the month.
Activities	Much of your work time was spent making the one ordered computer or working with the research consultant. Note, 19 hours were spent idle because even though you put aside 44 hours for work, you only chose to work 25 of them.
Finance	The income refers to the single sale made; The Cost of Sales is the amount of money spent to build the computer. The Overheads are all the other costs which are then broken down in a separate chart – 'Research' being the main cost here.
Bank Balance	This graph shows that cashflow has been relatively unaffected. Looking at the Bank Balance in the Status Bar, you can see there is £9,376 in the bank.
Messages	Research (competitor & market) has been completed. Click all green bars to go to the relevant screen. You are warned about idle time & insufficient enquiries.

Other Points to Note

The simulation always automates the production process (you can override this) in response to orders received. So what are the consequences of this automation and how are results represented in the screen above?

When you win orders, as a result of the decisions you have made, the simulation will automatically do a number things for you including:

1. Order components from your chosen supplier so that the computers can be made by you (unless you are contracting out some or all of production). This can be viewed in the Tools section (see below) but for more detail go to the 'Production' pages.

2. Make provision for the resultant cost of making the purchase of components. This can be viewed in the Status Bar.

3. Make provision for the resultant effort needed to build the computers using the components. This can be viewed in the Status Bar.
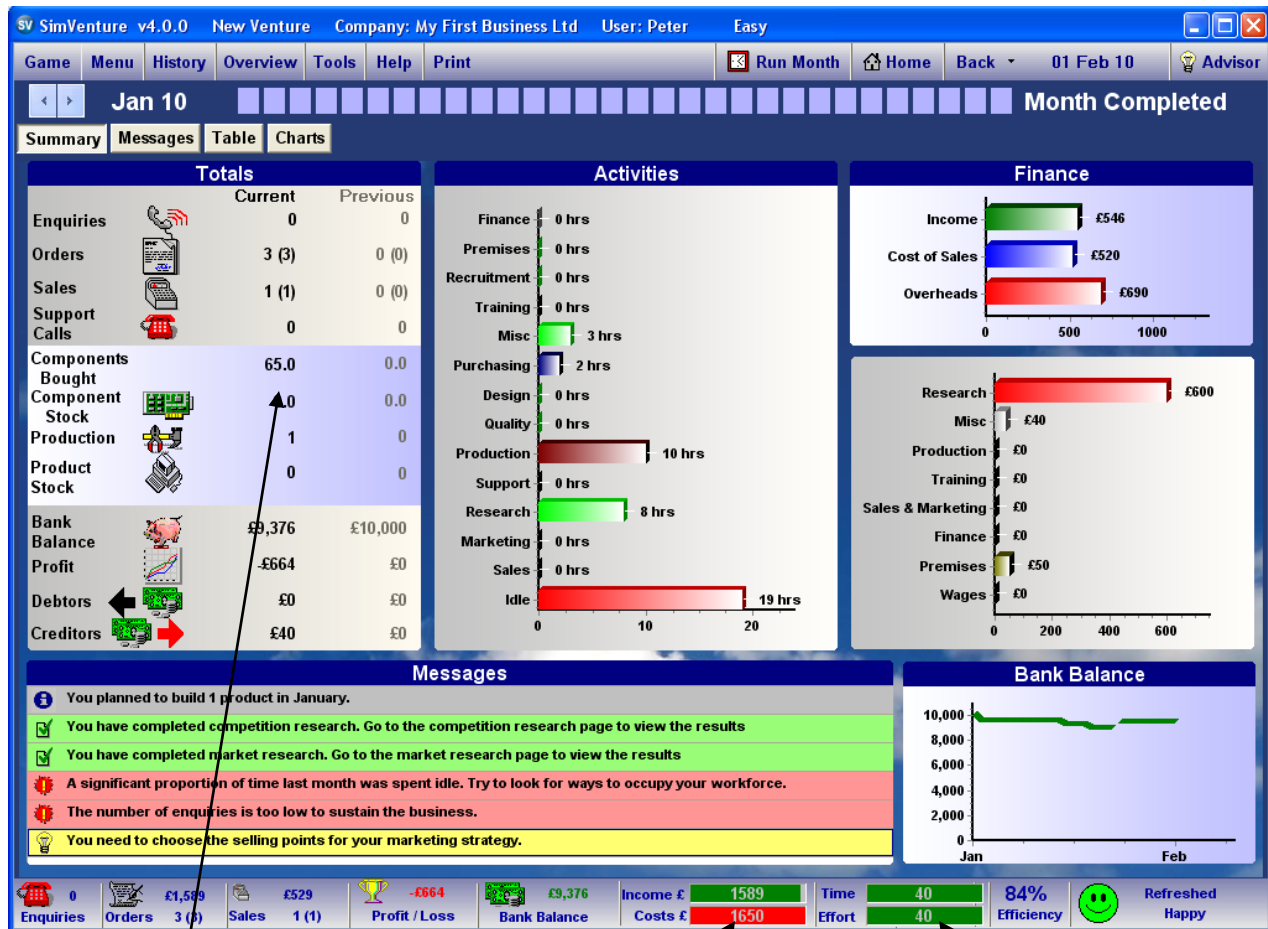
1. Components are ordered   2. Makes provision for costs   3. Makes provision for effort

Next Steps

The messages in the Consequences screen show that in January both the market as well as the competitor research was completed successfully. Clicking on either green bar will take you to the relevant page where you can then view the research results. Alternatively, you can arrive at the same pages by clicking 'Home', then 'Research Strategy' (within the 'Sales and Marketing') menu and finally, the 'Market Research' or 'Competition Research' boxes.

Using 'Market Research' as an example, here is what you will see:

The Market Research page displays the button 'View Report' in the game box. You can click this to see the results of the market research. See below for Results.

The Report that you view shows different market segments that exist within the simulation. As a player you need to analyse them and decide which segment you are going to focus on in terms of selling and marketing your product. The next screen helps you to understand the value and purpose of the information on this screen by examining one segment in detail.


This is the 'Corporations' segment. First note, all data in black is generated randomly each time a new game is played.

In this instance, there are 422 companies in the market each buying on average 8 computers every 9 months. Buying price is typically £770 - £840. The Preferences are important clues for the Selling Points that you create as part of your Marketing Strategy.

Using the information gleaned from the market research report, you can now do the following:

Visit the Marketing Strategy page to make important decisions about your preferred Target Market Segment and Selling Points.

Visit the Pricing page (Sales Strategy/Pricing) to alter your price so that it is market focused.
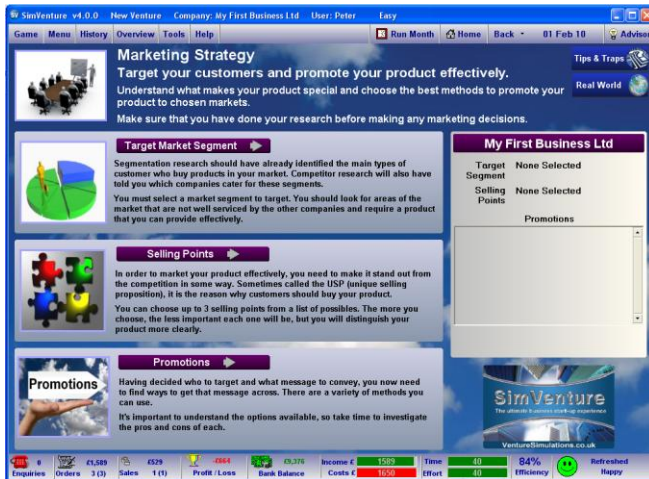

This is the screen to visit to make important strategic choices about your Target Market Segment, Selling Points and ultimately Promotions. If you don't make informed choices here the simulation will deduce that your decisions are based on guesswork. You will ultimately be penalised in terms of fewer enquiries, orders and sales. In reality, that's what happens to businesses that are not focused or market led.

Important: Before analysing your Competitor Research details, make sure you have used the Market Research to make informed decisions about your preferred Target Market Segment, Selling Points and Price.

Competitor Research

You can now repeat the steps you have taken to review the Market Research to look at Competitors. Click Research Strategy/Competition Research and then select 'View Report' in the Game box.
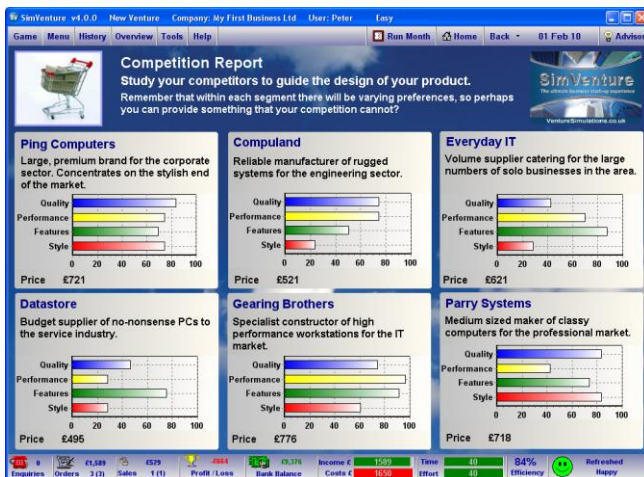
The Competitor Research report shows 6 active competitors, the market in which they specialise, their current price and their product design.

You must find the competitor that is active in your market. You must note their key features and use the information to make your business attractive to prospective customers so that they choose you rather than a competitor.

Let's have a look at the competitor selling to Corporations. If you wish, you can record all Research findings in the Notepad (see Tools in the Toolbar) so that you always have it available to review.
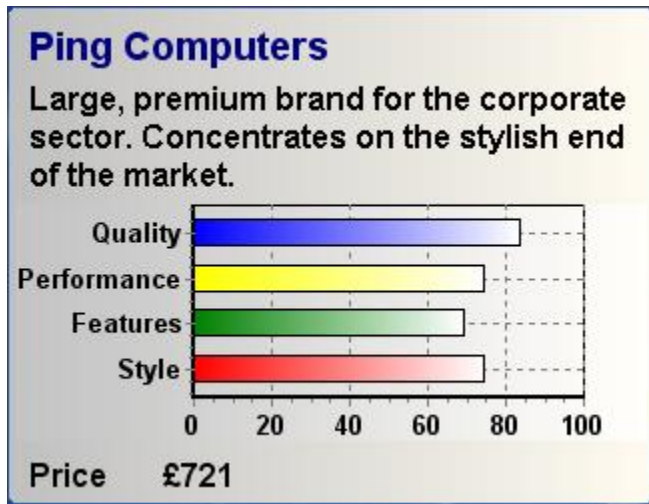
This is the 'Corporations' competitor. Again, data is generated randomly each time a new game is played.

In this example, the competitor is currently selling at £721 and the 4 bars show the relative emphasis that has been placed on Quality, Performance, Features & Style – the 4 areas of Product design.

Used in conjunction with the market research, analysis of competitors is a powerful way to establish the nature and extent of any gap in the market. Note, one of the changes the game makes as you play on higher levels, is that the size of the gap narrows.

Using the information gleaned from the competitor research report, you can now do the following:

> Visit the Product page (see below) to make important decisions about how your product is designed.

> Visit the Pricing page (Sales Strategy/Pricing) to hone your price so that it more attractive than your competitors as well as being market focused.

Within 'Operations' (hover the mouse over the drawing board) you can adjust the design of your product so that it best reflects the needs of your customer segment and importantly is more attractive than that being offered by your competitor.

This is the Product Design screen. You can change the 4 attributes of your product (Quality, Performance, Features & Style), by clicking the button 'Redesign your Product' in the pink game box.

Use the Re-Design screen to adjust the sliders and thus change the attributes of the product. Armed with Market & Competitor Research information you can make each attribute of your product the 'best' available on the market and then alter your pricing (see pricing page) so that you are the least expensive. This strategy will naturally make your product very competitive. Note, when moving sliders you alter product costs.

Next Steps Summary

As part of next steps, you have analysed all the research findings to alter your price, target market segment, selling points and product attributes. Ideally, your product will now be cheaper but better than your competitors and it shouts all the key selling points that your customers want to hear.

You have the foundations for a business that is market focused and thus has greatest chance of survival and hopefully growth.

Moving Forward

From here you can make a range of other choices to help you build your business. To learn more about SimVenture, experiment with the following options to see how the game works. If you have a fully licensed copy of SimVenture, you can save games as you go along. You can also use the ready-made Scenarios to learn more about the software. 'Driving Test' is a particularly good way to see how SimVenture operates once a business is up and running for 6 months.

Options

Choose from the following options to develop the business you have created as a result of using this First Steps guide:

1   *Simply Run the Month (February) and see the consequences of your actions. Analyse the resultant data and follow any advice provided by the Advisor.*

2   *Having completed all the research, put 10 hrs per month aside for Personal Selling (Sales Strategy/Sales Channels/Change Sales Channels/Personal Selling. In addition, choose to do some form of promotion (Marketing Strategy/Promotions/New Promotion). Note, you may well be need to click the 'Time bar' in the Status Bar to increase the amount of time you put aside to work on your business. When both the 'Time' and 'Effort' bars are green you are likely to complete all the tasks you want to do.*

3   *Do something else that you want to do!*

   We very much hope that you enjoy learning about SimVenture, but if you have any queries, please use the 'Learning Zone' on the website www.simventure.co.uk for help and support.