

Mirror Image: Selected Legal Industry Sources

By Jan Bissett and Margi Heinen

Say “research” to most lawyers, and the word conjures up case law, statutes, or perhaps classic treatises on a specific practice area dear to the attorney’s heart. However, for most attorneys currently in practice and certainly for corporate counsel, one significant area of research is the legal industry itself. What are your colleagues doing and how can you market yourself as successfully? Which firms or attorneys are especially strong in the area that your corporate client is struggling with? What partnership or fee structures are changing in the practice of law? These questions often need as much confidential treatment as our client work does, so where do we go for an inside look that goes beyond casual networking? Knowledgeable colleagues as well as commercial and association publications available in print or electronic format can answer some of these questions or direct you to a source that can.

Not surprisingly, LexisNexis and West offer many of these resources, both fee and free. Trying to identify fellow corporate counsel? Or thinking of hiring outside counsel? Or just plain curious about an attorney’s trial record? A number of free web resources may provide enough information, while analytical reports from Westlaw and LexisNexis provide in-depth information gleaned from court records and opinions. The traditional print directories live on in electronic form: Martindale Hubbell at <http://www.martindale.com> allows you to identify corporate legal departments using the advanced search template; more sophisticated searching is available to Lexis users in the MARHUB library. The *Directory of Corporate Counsel* is available to Westlaw users in the CORP-DIR database. Several corporate directories list legal personnel, but subscriptions are usually pricey.

Check with your local public library to see if an electronic version is available on its website. And don’t forget corporate filings—the SEC offers a beta full-text search of corporate filings from the last two years at http://search.www.sec.gov/EDGARFSClient/jsp/EDGAR_MainAccess.jsp. Now that both LexisNexis and Westlaw own electronic docket retrieval services (Courtlink and CourtExpress, respectively), information from these services is making its appearance in “premium” databases offering an analysis and listing of a particular attorney’s or firm’s litigation record. LexisNexis’s Analyzer at <http://www.lexisnexis.com/analyzerinfo/features.asp> and Courtlink’s Strategic Profiles for Corporate Legal/General Counsel at http://www.lexisnexis.com/courtlink/online/ben_corplegal.asp provide profiles of judges, arbitrators, counsel, and experts. The competition, Litigation History Reports at <http://west.thomson.com/documentation/westlaw/wlawdoc/wlres/lithis06.pdf>, is available via Westlaw’s Profiler database or CourtExpress and allows searchers to examine an analysis of a particular judge’s or attorney’s litigation experience from 1990 forward. Thomson’s Legal Record, available to registered users of MY Findlaw at <http://www.thomsonlegalrecord.com/info>, provides some of this same information with links to Westlaw’s cases and dockets.

Association websites, such as the Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC) at <http://www.acca.com/>, the American Bar Association (ABA), and the State Bar of Michigan, provide access to publications that may be of interest. While ACC’s member directory and publication, *ACC Docket*, are accessible only to members and require a sign-on, the virtual library at <http://www.acca.com/php/cms/index.php?id=7> provides selections from annual programs and is available without a required sign-on or registration. *ACC Docket* is available through Westlaw. Business law publications often provide articles on in-house counsel and management issues. The ABA’s *Business Law Today*, available at <http://www.abanet.org/buslaw/blt>, is accessible and searchable—by index or by an online search of the issues. Selected issues of the Michigan *Business Law Journal* are available on the web at <http://www.michbar.org/business/bizlawjournal.cfm>, but indexing and search capabilities are limited. If you’re still looking for “free” information, don’t pass up MeL—the Michigan Electronic Library. Subscription databases are available to Michigan residents at <http://www.mel.org/screens/databasesubjects.html>, including LegalTrac, an electronic companion to the *Legal Index to Periodicals*, and WilsonSelectPlus, which provides selected full-text reprints from thousands of

CI (competitive intelligence) is in-depth research using legal and ethical techniques to monitor a particular industry for the purpose of establishing a competitive advantage.

titles, including law reviews and business management-related publications.

Keeping current on trends and happenings in the legal community can be done on many levels. Electronic discussion lists, blogs (short for web logs, these online journals offer the views of individuals and may offer the opportunity to comment on these posts), and traditional newsletters now crowd our inboxes and PDAs. LexisNexis's free (to those with a Lexis ID) e-mail alert offering, the *Lexis Legal Monitor* (<http://www.lexisnexis.com/legalmonitor>), provides links to reports on law firm trends, surveys, and news about changes in well-known firms. Like any e-mail alert, some news days are better than others, but an effort is made to include news of interest to corporate counsel and law firm managing partners; an example from recent postings: coverage of a case concerning payment of legal fees for directors and officers. FindLaw for Corporate Counsel, <http://corporate.findlaw.com>, offers free (registration is required) newsletters in specific industries and practice areas, including recent case summaries, current news, and in-depth articles. In addition to e-mail alerts, there is a blog designed specifically with corporate counsel and legal managers in mind. Affiliated with Law.Com, the musings from *Law Department Management* (<http://lawdepartmentmanagement.typepad.com>) are written by Rees Morrison from Hildebrandt International and provide tips on law department trends and management, with an emphasis on knowledge management. For corporate counsel and counsel considering a move to in-house work, the Center for WorkLife Law at University of California Hastings College of Law, Project for Attorney Retention, has completed a report on work as corporate counsel, including best practices, available at <http://www.pardc.org/CorporateCounsel>. This same group studies work vs. life issues at law firms for those managing partners concerned about retaining associates. If you are seeking sample job descriptions and articles on managing a law firm or an in-house legal department, Altman Weil has a number of resources available at no cost in its "Articles, News & Resources" section of its website at <http://www.altmanweil.com/index.cfm/fa/r.home/resources.cfm>. Users

need to register, but the resources available are worth a moment of typing. Other law management and statistical information may be found in the ABA's Market Research Department at <http://www.abanet.org/marketresearch/resource.html>.

Your research or information gathering concerning business practices and decision making may not rise to what is often known as competitive intelligence or CI. CI is generally understood to be in-depth research using legal and ethical techniques to monitor a particular industry's external events and trends for the purpose of establishing a competitive advantage. If you want to explore CI more fully, the Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals' *Competitive Intelligence—An Overview* pro-

vides an introduction to CI research at <http://www.scip.org/pdf/overview.pdf>. With the wealth of information available from both commercial and public resources, and the ability to manipulate such information, it's important to keep in mind that what you can easily find is also what can easily be found about you. ■

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