

Marketing

Tips for Using Competitive Intelligence in Your Marketing Efforts

SALLY J. SCHMIDT | There's a lot of talk about competitive intelligence these days, especially as law firms seek to find new sources of business. In response, companies are offering lawyers products and services that identify information for use in their marketing. But if you don't really know how you want to use the data, the result can be simple information overload.

From internal client retention data to information on prospective clients' litigation matters to trends in targeted industries and beyond, competitive intelligence resources have clearly become more plentiful and more focused in recent years. What is less clear for many law firms is precisely how to use the information.

While competitive intelligence can be factored into firm strategy and guide decision making in a range of areas, one of the most common and best uses in law firms comes in the area of marketing. Here's a review of some sources for that purpose, along with ways to use the information that can contribute to more effective marketing and business development efforts.



Sally J. Schmidt (sallyschmidt@schmidt-marketing.com), President of Schmidt Marketing, Inc., has counseled more than 400 law firm clients over the past 20 years. She was the first president of the Legal Marketing Association.

Main Types of Information

Generally, information can be defined in the following ways:

1. Internal (i.e., generated by the law firm) or external (i.e., generated by outside parties); and
2. Primary (developed by the firm for a specific purpose) or secondary (already available from other sources).

The chart on the opposite page outlines some examples.

To facilitate collecting and reporting internal data, there are many varied and increasingly helpful software packages available to firms, from time-and-billing tracking applications to business intelligence products like Redwood Analytics.

Likewise, external data and information are available through an ever-growing platform of sources, including some vendors with long-standing relationships with law firms (such as Thomson West and Lexis-Nexis), numerous generally available sources (like the U.S. Department of Commerce and other government agencies), and other providers fairly

new to the industry. Let's match some sources with marketing uses next.

Researching Prospective Clients

From a business development standpoint, the most valuable information is often that which provides insights on prospective clients, to assist in making a pitch or a proposal for business. Some of the more popular external information sources for company information include these:

- Companies' annual reports and Web sites
- BNAConvergence
- Datamonitor
- Hoover's
- LexisNexis products, including Company Dossier, CourtLink and atVantage
- Thomson West products, including Firm360 and Westlaw Business
- Google products
- Government departments and agencies (like state labor department employee data for private companies)

Sorting through the sometimes voluminous results from a company search can be time-consuming and difficult—especially for a busy lawyer who doesn't have time to pour through a 3-inch binder of company data just hours before a meeting with a prospect, for example. So, whether the synthesizing is done by the firm's library staff, the marketing department or a firm associate, it makes sense to develop a snapshot of the most