

## *A Debriefing on CI:*

# Convert Covert Info Into Intelligence

by Amy Spach, AS Written Communications/LMA-LA Communications Chair

**Los Angeles**—Competitive Intelligence (CI) is a buzz word on marketers' minds and "to-do" lists. The plethora of CI data is so overwhelming that it's challenging to move beyond static competitors' profiles and really use the research as a tool to gain the upper hand.

To help legal marketers sharpen their analytical tools, Martindale-Hubbell LexisNexis ([www.martindale.com](http://www.martindale.com)) presented *Mission Possible*, a CI primer presented at LMA-LA's August luncheon program.

"Information that is just nice to know is just nice, it's not intelligence," according to Christina Fritsch, Martindale's Client Development Specialist. Analysis and distilling information are key to making the research work for you. Successful intelligence analysis begins broadly and incrementally narrows in scope until the target data is clearly in sight.

The winnowing process was vividly demonstrated by Fritsch and her co-presenters, Molly Lindbloom and Patrick Fuller. They simulated three intelligence gathering missions that legal marketers face in their daily lives: growing new business, cross-selling to existing new clients and finding acquisition candidates.

**BEYOND GOOGLE** To coax the audience into revealing their best research sources, the trio from Martindale rewarded all active participants with cool black t-shirts. The ploy worked. Besides the standard fall back search engines, here are some of the top information stops mentioned:

- CourtLink
- Hoovers
- One Source
- GreedyAssociates.com
- CourtEXPRESS.com
- idEXEC
- CEOexpress.com
- Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP)
- Mergers & Acquisitions Report
- NLJ's "Who Defends Corporate America"
- D & B Business reports
- Thomson Financial
- REAL ESTATE Alert
- National Association for Law Placement (NALP) forms
- Harvard Business Review
- News Aggregators & Clipping Services

Once you've obtained scores of information, narrow your focus to turn your plan of action into a manageable task. After you review the research, the CI team suggests taking these steps to transform the data into intelligence:

1. Identify trends
2. Develop target companies and target markets
3. Weed out limited opportunity prospects

**USING CI TO CYA** Perform due diligence on your target competition. Discover their strengths and weaknesses. And remember to make the process personal. Human intelligence is one of the most valuable factors in the equation. Talk to people in your firm, in the industry, and in related businesses to inform your actionable intelligence.

“Start small and focus on tactics that will deliver quick wins,” says Lindbloom. Know your tools and their capabilities. Use both competitor and client profiles to identify opportunities. And communicate the successes you achieve in your CI efforts.

The notion that mastering CI is within grasp - a possible mission indeed - was evident in the reaction of legal marketing leaders attending the program. For Kirsten McGregor, Director of Marketing of Wood-Bender, the program motivated her to delve deeper into the trove of available quality information. White & Case's Regional Marketing Manager, Susan Baldwin, used Martindale's presentation as a starting point to augment her quest for useful intelligence. Although both marketing pros were recipients of those cool black-t-shirts, their enhanced approaches to CI indicate that they gained more from the program than just a new shirt on their backs.

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*The Los Angeles Chapter of the Legal Marketing Association offers monthly programs and events to promote and develop the legal marketing profession. Find out more at [www.lmala.org](http://www.lmala.org).*

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