

# The Library as a Business Development, Competitive Intelligence and Client Relations Asset for Law Firms



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Voice of the private law librarian

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## Introduction

Although bringing in new clients is an important role of the marketing department, in the current legal marketplace, client retention and development have become increasingly important for attorneys and for business development and marketing professionals. A challenging economy in the late 2000's led to a change in the way firms do business, and being able to demonstrate value to existing clients as well as new clients is crucial. The library can play a key role in business development efforts by providing timely, reliable, and well-presented information about current and potential clients, industry and legal market trends, and cross-selling opportunities.

The amount of available information can be overwhelming. However, professional librarians are trained to find and evaluate the best resources for the content, timeliness and value of that information. By working together with attorneys and business development professionals, the library can provide the information necessary for client advisories and intranet postings, responses to RFPs (Requests for Proposals), pitches, conference materials and other publications. The challenges in the current legal marketplace make it more important than ever to find the best information in the most efficient and effective manner.

This AALL RESOURCE GUIDE will help law firm management understand how professional librarians can assist in marketing and business development efforts with a goal of increased revenue and profitability by:

- creating a cross-functional team with legal staff, marketing and others in planning for marketing and business development initiatives;
- conducting the research necessary to support those initiatives;
- supporting the knowledge needed by the firm to compete effectively by developing proactive client information products (advisories, alerts, intranet content);
- monitoring and reporting on legal industry trends (new fee arrangements, flexible work schedules);
- and maximizing information resources and eliminating redundant work efforts.

# The state of marketing and business development in law firms today

The primary role of a law firm marketing and business development department is to bring in new clients and to retain existing clients. To achieve this, law firm marketing departments engage in various activities such as providing guidance to their firms regarding strategy and practice planning; client communications like RFPs, newsletters, media outreach, and public relations; and tactical activities like managing websites and other technology. The marketing function in law firms has professionalized and grown steadily in recent years, and its role has changed dramatically.

Law firm marketing departments strive to develop a preference for their firm’s services within a target audience of clients and prospective clients. Due in part to the recent economic downturn, law firms face the tremendous challenge of differentiating their firm’s services from services provided by other firms in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Providing impeccable client service and demonstrating value is the key to successfully differentiating one firm from another, and in order to provide that level of client service, a firm must have a deep and profound knowledge of its clients and its clients’ industries. Attorneys need to be able to help their clients see around corners, anticipating and anticipate trends and potential hazards. Law firm marketing departments and library departments can help position their firms to develop this level of insight into their clients.



## What is CI?

Competitive Intelligence (CI) is a process of gathering information about an organization, industry or person(s); organizing and analyzing the results; and providing a report package that highlights and summarizes the most significant facts while providing comprehensive coverage from the news, industry reports, SEC filings and specialty databases and resources that can be used for strategic planning, developing business, enhancing client relations and analyzing marketplace trends. This process can be used to understand a client or potential client better, or it can focus on the firm itself – or both!

CI has become more important as a planning and market knowledge tool within law firms around the globe during the last 5 to 10 years. While firms have always made use of business information in one form or another, CI takes that strategic advantage one step further. What happens to decision making when you use CI? It becomes more strategic resulting in:

- better planning;
- increased productivity; and
- increased profitability.

### Examples of how firms use CI to make decisions:

	Questions
industries	Should the firm target potential clients in that industry?
Practice Areas	Whom would the firm be competing against in a new practice area? What services do they provide? Who are their clients?
Locations	Would the local market support a new office for the firm?
Competitors	Who is competing for an existing or potential client’s legal business and how does the firm’s services and experiences compare to its competitors?

These are just a few examples of decisions that CI can support. Once a firm starts using CI, it finds there are many different ways it can make the firm more competitive.

Using CI to develop the firm’s understanding of their clients’ market positions, possible future plans, and other business factors allows attorneys to prepare for business that may not yet exist. CI is a great tool to show clients how well your firm understands their needs, and how responsive your firm can be. Librarians can connect the dots on these critical reports.

# Client development and retention

How can the library provide information to the firm, allowing attorneys to add value? As the information center of the firm, the library is in a position to gather information and make sure it is used to increase the firm's business. Libraries have the resources to ensure that attorneys have timely and relevant information on potential new clients, and that the firm stays up to date on existing clients. Because the structure of each firm is different, the delivery of information will vary. Sometimes librarians are embedded within practice groups, business development departments, or the C-Suite – and sometimes librarians establish relationships with individual attorneys and give information directly to them. Here are some of the ways librarians can help firms with client outreach, development, and retention:

## Finding targets

Librarians are highly skilled at locating information on businesses. If you need to know whom the players are in a certain industry, or what businesses of a certain size exist in a certain market, or which prospects would have the need of a particular practice group, librarians can find the resources to make that happen. They can look into an industry's history and development over time, and see opportunities for the firm to add, or in some cases, retain business.

## Researching companies

Finding company information can be complex. There are a large number of databases with different kinds of company information available. Information on publicly traded companies is available through many sources while information on private companies is not as easy to find. In some cases, information on a company's litigation history is available depending on the court, and a company's assets, history, offices, directors, in-house counsel, current counsel and much more can be determined as well. Professional librarians know where to find this information.

Before meeting with a potential client for the first time, it is worth a partner's time to talk to the firm librarian about what kind of information can be used to prepare for the meeting. While researching, the attorney might find the client could make use of other practice groups at their firm, or find that they went to the same university as one of the corporate counsels. Librarians can search not just traditional sources like news and company databases and books, but also social media to locate where the interests of the firm and the potential client intersect, what they have in common and possibly what issues they are facing.

## Developing existing clients

Once the lawyer/client relationship is formed, the library can continue to provide support. As a firm focuses on retaining its clients, attorneys need to continue to develop knowledge about how a client's business developments affect their legal needs. The library can help monitor clients using news or litigation monitors, as well as supporting the firm with resources needed to provide the actual legal work. They can monitor for new legislation that might affect the client, and new innovations in that business area that might affect the client's business model.

Librarians can serve as the firm's eyes and ears in their client's marketplaces, gathering news and information on issues relevant to that client. That not only helps the attorneys keep the lines of communication open with the existing client, it often can help the firm cross-market and ensure the firm is aware any potential issues a client may experience in the future.

## Analysis

In all stages of a client relationship, the key to retaining business is in using or developing knowledge about a client, connecting that knowledge to the client's needs, and communicating that information to the client. Sometimes, this process solves – or prevents – their legal problems, and the firm benefits financially. Sometimes, this process keeps the firm on the client's radar and ensures their goodwill. The library can help a firm's business development department, C-Suite, and attorneys by helping them "connect the dots" in all of these instances – turning raw data into analyzed information that can be helpful to clients.

# Resources for business development & client retention by type of resource

There are multiple resources available to assist library professionals in supporting the business development and client retention efforts of their firms. The librarian is an expert at identifying the most suitable resource for the need. The following list is representative only and should not be considered a comprehensive list. Consult with your librarian for more information on resources available at your firm.

## Market Research

Research and analysis of markets for the purpose of determining market share, potential customers/clients perceptions, new legal issues that firms can respond to, etc.

- Variety of online tools including Law360, Courthouse News, Lexis AtVantage, West Firm 360, Alacra and others
- Dialog
- Lexis (news files) & Factiva
- Westlaw (news databases)

## Industry Research

Research and analysis on what the industry does, who the key players are, who holds the market share, who their clients are, the legal climate, legislative and regulatory challenges and trends to use in determining marketing vehicles – associations, speaking engagements, writing opportunities, etc.

- A variety of online tools including industry databases are available via local public library: accessible online with a valid library card
- Dialog
- Lexis
- SNL Financial
- Westlaw
- Various industry research reports

**Company Research**

Research and analysis on specific companies that the firm needs to know more about. Reports can include company overview, officers, corporate structure, competitors, history, recent news, recent litigation, patents, etc.

- Bloomberg
- Capital IQ
- Dun & Bradstreet
- Deal Pipeline
- Debt Market
- Hoovers
- Lexis AtVantage and/or Company Dossier
- Mergent Online
- Merger Market
- OneSource
- Reference USA
- VentureSource

**People**

Background research and updates on key executives

- Boardex
- Leadership Directories

**Competitive intelligence**

Competitor analysis; Practice Area/Product intelligence; and Strategic decision support

- ALM Intelligence
- Lexis Courtlink
- West Monitor Suite
- Westlaw and Lexis news resources

**Current Awareness (news)**

- Attensa
- BNA Convergence, CompanyDash, CustomClip
- Google News Alerts
- Government RSS feeds
- Lexis Publisher
- Ozmosys
- Pinhawk
- Westlaw Watch



# Communication and collaboration



Providing useful and timely information requires good communication, departmental cooperation and collaboration between the library, the business development group and the attorneys who are working with current or potential clients. Whether the request comes into the library or business development, it is essential that both departments work together to process the request without duplication of effort. An established workflow eliminates duplication. For example, the marketing department looks for information on past contact with a potential client within the firm and the librarian researches business information on the company itself.

Whether the request comes into the library or business development, it is essential that both departments work together to process the request without duplication of effort. If both teams are researching in the same area, more elaborate work-sharing tools might be necessary. A common e-mail box or a Wiki on the intranet, where requests can be posted, progress can be monitored and results can be shared may be needed. Several people are usually involved in putting together a pitch presentation or a response to an RFP (Request for Proposal) and it is helpful to know the responsibilities and progress of the team members. Having a Wiki or other central repository of information saves time when a request or proposal requires similar information. It also saves money because people aren't duplicating efforts and information resources can be recycled from past efforts and updated at a lower cost.

The library can also assist business development professionals and attorneys with client relations and retention by establishing and disseminating news or court alerts on specific clients or industries, by posting links and documents on a client specific intranet page or Wiki, or by monitoring pending legislation that will affect a client's business practice. This type of proactive communication will help all firm professionals recognize changes and trends affecting their clients and give them the ability to confidently evaluate their client's needs in the ever-changing economy.

# Conclusion

The legal marketplace has become increasingly competitive in recent years. The librarian is an invaluable asset to the firm's efforts to identify, attract and retain clients and is a key partner to the firm's marketing and business development professionals in helping the firm to obtain and retain a competitive advantage in this new landscape. The advent of this more competitive landscape and rapid changes in technology make the skills of a firm librarian even more valuable to firms and their clients. In this age of Google many can find information, but today it is imperative to find the right information in the most timely and efficient manner possible, and librarians are the experts to do that, thereby helping to keep their firms competitive in today's market.

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For more information visit the  
Private Law Libraries Special Interest Section web site  
<http://www.aallnet.org/sis/pllsis/>

