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Law I.Q.

More firms are using competitive intelligence to grow their business.



Competitive intelligence (CI), generally defined as gathering and analyzing information about customers and competitors for short- and long-term planning, is helping a growing number of firms determine a client's needs in detail and to gather feedback on their own business development efforts. And it's catching on in Canada.

Although some U.S. firms even use it when recruiting talent and acquiring other firms, CI in the Canadian profession usually falls under the purview of marketing departments. For example, Ogilvy Renault LLP now has three professionals dedicated to full-time intelligence-gathering.

The firm hired two MBAs to act as "intelligence advisors," researching and analyzing data on emerging industries and prospective clients and their market environments.

"They prepare client dossiers, so if we have lawyers going out to do a pitch or if we've been

asked to do a presentation, this group will prepare a background document on the client," says Lise Monette, who oversees the group launched three years ago. "[The document] has all the vitals on the company, their competitors in the market, and information about the law firms that represent them, so we can determine their needs in detail. It's very analytical."

Toronto-based legal business development consultant Heather Suttie, who advises firms on how to make the best use of CI, suggests they start by "mining" their client lists to ascertain top clients, then break down the lists according to each client's Standard Industry Classification (SIC) code. "The smart firms are investing in their clients, by taking the time to find out who are the ones keeping the lights on," she says.

Wanda Woollett, marketing manager of the Calgary office of McMillan LLP, is already aiming to expand her firm's CI program, which she launched five years ago. "People may have a sense of what their law firm does, but when you can lay financial numbers on top of that, it becomes much more significant," she says.

Still, using CI to build business remains a novel concept for many law firms. Zena Applebaum, who oversees a formal CI program at Bennett Jones LLP in Toronto, says it's only in the past year that she has seen an increase in the number of Canadian law firm marketing professionals at Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals functions. "It's new, so everybody's at a different place on the curve."...

By **Daryl-Lynn Carlson**. Read the entire article online at www.cba.org/practicelink/bizdev.