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Competitive Intelligence: Giving Our Students a Leg Up

Posted on [December 8, 2014](#) by [Catherine Lemmer](#)

A law firm partner that I admire greatly put it succinctly when he said, “Successful lawyers spend 90% of their day being entrepreneurs.” Although we might dispute whether 90% is an accurate data point on the spectrum, it is indisputable that successful lawyers more closely reflect entrepreneurship than most of us would like to admit. Although law schools offer law office and practice management courses, business development has yet to become a core course in the law school.

To help fill this deficit or perhaps to put a dose of reality in law school, I advocated for and developed a one-week unit on competitive intelligence (“CI”) in our required semester long second-year legal research class. The objective of the CI unit is to introduce our students to the concept of CI and its role as a business development tool. Although brief, the unit introduces CI as a tool to better represent current clients and to develop new business from existing and prospective clients.

We keep it simple! The objective of the unit is to have students understand that in an increasingly competitive environment successful lawyers need to understand how to gather and transfer business data into strategic knowledge that informs and drives planning and action. The unit focuses on identifying relevant data; gathering and comparing the data in a systematic manner; and using the data to advise a client on a business opportunity. Although deeper concepts of benchmarking and market analysis are noted, we don’t delve into those concepts in this basic introductory unit.

The unit:



Image credit: <http://www.fonttalent.com>

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- includes a brief historical overview of CI and its roots;
- distinguishes CI from corporate espionage;
- introduces business, corporate, government, social media, and news resources and search engines;
- discusses cross-checking data and developing relationships between different data; and
- puts it all together in advice for the client.

Students are also introduced to the [Strategic and Competitive Intelligence Professionals](#) (SCIP) organization and resources such as the [SCIP Insight newsletter](#). [Aqute Intelligence](#) and its [free resources](#) are also introduced. Aqute's Competitive Intelligence Tools (found on the free resources page) is a list of over 200 CI tools, including over 25 social media CI tools.

LLRX.com hosts [Sabrina I. Pacifici's Competitive Intelligence – A Selected Resource Guide](#) (updated August 2014). Although Pacifici's guide is likely to overwhelm most students, it's a good free resource to introduce them to for future use.

The goal is that at the end of the unit our students will be familiar with the concept of CI and have a basic understanding of identifying and connecting data to advise a client. For those of you who may be interested in developing a similar option for your students, the following additional resources were helpful in developing the CI unit:

- American Association of Law Libraries, Private law Librarians Special Interest Section, [Guide 7: The Library as a Business Development, Competitive Intelligence, and Client Relations Asset for Law Firms](#).
- Peter Drucker, *Management Challenges for the 21st Century* (1999).
- Ann Lee Gibson, *Competitive Intelligence: Improving Law Firm Strategy and Decision Making* (2010).
- Harvard University, [Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness](#) (founded by [Michael C. Porter](#)).
- Larry Kahaner, *Competitive Intelligence: How to Gather, Analyze, and use Information to Move Your Business to the Top 20* (1997).
- Michael C. Porter, *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors* (1980).

I am interested in hearing from anyone else that is introducing CI to their students. I am also very interested in hearing from any private law librarian who might be performing CI research as to what we should be teaching our students about CI!

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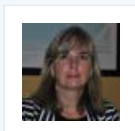
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About Catherine Lemmer

A life long learner interested in most aspects of the creation, use, management, and control of information.

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One Response to *Competitive Intelligence: Giving Our Students a Leg Up*



Andrew Winston says:

December 11, 2014 at 9:41 am

I think that introducing law students to CI research is an excellent idea, since business development will be so important for those who go into private practice. CI principles and strategies could also be very helpful for junior transactional lawyers performing due diligence investigations in mergers and acquisitions, financings, and other transactions, as well as for research and investigations in litigation and other contexts. Lastly, I think it is great to expose students to the value CI can add, so that they are hopefully more likely to seek CI assistance from their law firm librarians when in practice.

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