

Transforming A Legal Icon To Meet Tomorrow's Needs

The Editor interviews **Ralph Calistri**, Senior Vice President and General Manager of Global Client Development, CEO of Martindale-Hubbell.

Editor: Please tell us about yourself and your career at LexisNexis.

Calistri: I've been with LexisNexis for about 20 months. During my first fifteen months with LexisNexis I ran the practice management group which entailed management of the back office systems – accounting, calendar and matter management, document creation, which grounded me in the company's technology. My background is technology. After those 15 months I had the opportunity to come to Martindale-Hubbell's offices as head of the client development group globally. Client development is more about creating a social network, connecting lawyers with lawyers and lawyers with their clients. Our vision at Martindale is to introduce that social network into our organization where we can bring lawyers and their clients together in one location.

In my time with the company, we have adopted a strategy of Total Practice Solutions, and from the vantage point of having led two different Solution Lines, I can see how that strategy is manifesting itself at Martindale-Hubbell and across the LexisNexis organization.

Editor: The readers of *The Metropolitan Corporate Counsel* are familiar with Martindale-Hubbell. Can you tell us some things about Martindale-Hubbell that they may find surprising?

Calistri: One unique attribute of this company is that while we've been around since 1871, we're evolving with the times and going beyond the scope of our original directories. Our vision is to be transformational in our product delivery. We're focusing on things like *My Martindale Network* for corporate counsel where they can build on our system a list of outside counsel whom they work with, including key factors about them, so that as they need to connect with attorneys or law firms they can reach them easily. We're introducing an upgrade of our client reviews from simple peer to peer review to a client to attorney review so others can view attorneys from a client perspective. We're also looking at side-by-side comparisons of law firms so that when corporate counsel is looking for outside counsel they can look at three or four firms simultaneously in a matrix format which shows important elements about each firm – how many attorneys are in the firm, what are their practice areas, how many transactions have they done in IP, what was the average size and number of their M&A transactions – very specific details tailored to individual client needs. This is accomplished by bringing in valuable federal court data from our competitive intelligence offering, atVantage. We're also looking at the top 10 lists of firms by practice area, by geography, etc., thus narrowing the list of choices for corporate counsel.

Editor: Does the information Martindale-Hubbell includes from atVantage reveal what judges outside counsel have presented before?



Ralph Calistri

Calistri: Yes, we get that information right off court records, and more of this valuable data will be available free in the next few months to our users with upcoming enhancements to Martindale-Hubbell.

Editor: You mentioned “transformation.” What does that mean for Martindale-Hubbell? And how will it benefit corporate counsel?

Calistri: Our goal is to become the global legal network that is an indispensable resource used by sophisticated buyers of legal services to identify and select lawyers and law firms. The thing about transformation is we know that we cannot allow our product to become static. Unlike those using Google who have to search through reams of potentially useless information, our tools are focused on law firms and corporate lawyers. We can build on a database of a million-plus listings of attorneys so that we can really narrow the focus for the user. We will be adding two forms of content – one for consumers, more consumer friendly content, but also one for corporate counsel, which will include content that shows specifically what about a law firm is significant. We will also allow firms to add their own content. Tools for comparison will also be incorporated so that viewers can compare one law firm to another or one attorney to another. As an example, sometimes a potential client may not be as interested in the lead counsel as the associates who will be sharing the workload – how would you rate them, what schools did they go to, what are their practice areas, where have they done things before, have they published any papers – those specific kinds of areas. Also, our network will list corporate services which provide CLE training, etc. It will become a beginning-to-end professional network serving over 200 law schools around the United States and extending to include lawyers at the end of their professional careers who are planning their retirement at which time they may be interested in pro bono activities or doing consulting work. Our vision is to create a community where the legal profession can come to communicate with each other and also share information.

Editor: A key challenge for corporate counsel is the selection and validation of outside lawyers and law firms.

Because lawyers get references from other attorneys, and they can look at a wealth of information on law firm Web sites, why do they need Martindale-Hubbell today?

Calistri: Lawyers tell us that the reason they rely on Martindale-Hubbell is *trust*. They repeatedly say they can trust the information that is in our directories and in our professional network. We systematically collect information, allow lawyers who are included in our directories to update it, and allow lawyers to rate each other in our peer review. Now we are going to have client review – professionals to professionals. Anecdotally over our more than 100-year existence, we have been told by countless generations of lawyers that we are the source used for hard information about lawyers by corporate counsel. They state that when they wish to find out about a firm or a lawyer, they know they can *trust* Martindale-Hubbell.

Editor: As a follow-up, I'd like to ask more about Web 2.0 technology. There are many lawyers doing blogs, putting video online and using other innovations. Is Martindale-Hubbell getting involved there too?

Calistri: Yes, absolutely. Web 2.0 technology is really important for those who wish to get their message out. There's nothing like seeing a person and hearing what they have to say. It gives you knowledge about them before you even meet them. We plan to allow lawyers and their firms to put up their own blogs and videos, and we'll actually help them create videos so they can put them on our site. We'll invite Google and other search engines to index our site so attorneys are able to get more exposure. So Web 2.0 technology accommodates blogs, communication in getting the word out, having people interact with you and having video where you can present yourself as master of a given subject matter or present your firm in a certain context.

As for corporate counsel, we hear from them all the time about the isolation they experience being one of two or three attorneys in the company. Every professional needs a network of peers they can bounce ideas off of and just commiserate with.

That's why this year we are launching a legal professional network on Martindale-Hubbell that will give corporate counsel a forum to connect, re-connect and share their unique perspective on corporate life.

If you want to know more about what we're doing, please visit our blog at martindale.com/blogs.

Editor: Web 2.0 technology seems rather recent. I remember observing a given law firm using this technology in a “talking heads” format.

Calistri: Making that personal connection with an attorney is far different from reading a write-up about his accomplishments. It gives the attorney an opportunity to reach out with his personality and present himself. It's like the elevator pitch you hear about – how somebody wants to present themselves; this is the

elevator pitch on the web. Web 2.0 is key and you'll see more and more products coming from us over the next quarter or two. We're on a track to do four or five releases of our software a year which will produce very rapid improvement in creating the social network.

Editor: A major issue among corporate counsel the last few years is the desire/necessity to reduce their budgets for outside counsel. How does Martindale-Hubbell support this market dynamic?

Calistri: We want to help corporate counsel take their list of lawyers and firms, acquired by references and other sources, and help create a short list for final review.

By providing them with a rich set of information to fully evaluate each firm or attorney, we're helping corporate counsel attorneys select the most qualified counsel for their needs. Cost savings come into this equation in the form of more efficient work by the corporate counsel attorney his or herself, as well as the ability to evaluate and compare outside counsel on the variable of cost.

For example, we have added the capability to do side-by-side reviews of law firms, with all the data about their practice areas, firm locations, number of Peer Review Rated attorneys, and their federal litigation and M&A data.

Additionally, the new Martindale Network allows corporate counsel to create a custom list of lawyers and law firms. This new feature allows in-house attorneys to securely append comments to lawyer and law firm profiles in their network for future reference, readily draw upon their network short list to review a lawyer or firm's credentials for assigning new matters, easily compare new lawyers and firms to hire – both within the side-by-side comparison tool, and within other lawyer and law firm profiles not yet in their network, store specific contacts and office locations – never have to search again for regularly used contacts.

And, our Client Reviews offers feedback from other corporate counsel on the performance of the firms they've used.

Editor: We've talked a lot about Martindale-Hubbell, but given your leadership role at LexisNexis, can you tell us about how the company is partnering with corporate counsel generally?

Calistri: LexisNexis is committed to making corporate counsel a key focus for Martindale-Hubbell. We know that serving our corporate counsel constituents with valuable tools and content will ultimately benefit the law firms that partner with us.

You will see us now, working with corporate counsel in more similar ways that we work with law firms – still recognizing their unique needs – but allowing us to incorporate their feedback into all our legal products.

Within Martindale-Hubbell in particular, we will be able to continue to add more content and more features, drawing upon the wealth of features and information housed within the LexisNexis portfolio.

Please email the interviewee at ralph.calistri@lexisnexis.com with questions about this interview.