

Martindale-Hubbell Connected: The Legal Profession's Own Social Network

The Editor interviews **John Lipsey**, Vice President, Corporate Counsel Services at LexisNexis Martindale-Hubbell.

Editor: Would you tell us about your current responsibilities at LexisNexis?

Lipsey: I am Vice President of Corporate Counsel Services at LexisNexis Martindale-Hubbell and I am a member of the management team leading the transformation of the Martindale business as we migrate from a directory business to a global legal online community. I'm on the team that manages our corporate counsel strategy, making sure that the needs of the corporate counsel community are incorporated into the Martindale-Hubbell products strategy.

Editor: For those readers who might still be unfamiliar with social networking, can you give us an overview and tell us why so many people of all ages have embraced this new platform for communicating?

Lipsey: Social networking is really just an extension of human interaction that has always existed: the need people have to meet each other, to exchange ideas and to collaborate. Web technology has now developed sufficiently to translate those human tendencies towards meeting, forming relationships and interacting via the Web. This is often referred to as Web 2.0, as in the second generation of Web technology. The first generation of the Web was really all about hosting information so that people could consume information put there by the host. It is a "one-to-many" type of interaction, whereas Web 2.0, or social networking, is "many-to-many" in that it allows individuals to find each other and to create their own content through that interaction. That is the power of social networking: people with similar business or social affinities can find each other, develop relationships and interact in meaningful ways. We're applying these same fundamentals to the legal community through Martindale-Hubbell Connected, a network specifically designed to enable legal professionals to find each other, develop relationships and engage with each other in a secure and trusted environment.

Editor: Can you give us some examples of how social networking provides value to legal professionals in their professional lives?

Lipsey: First, social networks help professionals develop and grow wider networks – global networks that they can call upon for any number of needs. We know that lawyers are greatly concerned about relationships and getting to a trusted source that has information they need – a referral, perhaps, or expertise in a particular area. Professional networks allow lawyers to find other lawyers and legal professionals who can help them solve a problem.

Professional networking also provides a secure environment to allow those professionals to collaborate in a trusted way. People can engage in online discussions and showcase their expertise. Corporate counsel can maintain a level of visibility within the legal profession and can also extend the resources they have by tapping into the network. This is important in today's economy. We know that frequently corporate counsel, especially those in smaller legal

departments, are truly crunched in terms of cash, resources and time, so having an immediate resource that is available 24/7 – a place where they can find people who have answers to their questions – creates efficiencies they wouldn't otherwise have.



John Lipsey

Editor: Let's talk about this fascinating survey that LexisNexis Martindale-Hubbell just commissioned – the 2009 Networks for Counsel Survey. Your survey found that more than 70 percent of lawyers are members of an online social network, which is a nearly 25 percent increase over last year. First of all, to what do you attribute this substantial growth over the past year?

Lipsey: Connecting with other people face-to-face almost always requires leaving your office, leaving your current project and going some place, which takes time. While this kind of interaction is very important, it has become increasingly costly and impractical. Online professional networking provides an easy, inexpensive or perhaps even free supplement to those activities to which we are already inclined. As more people participate, more people see the value of this activity, so the uptick in professional networking is really viral in nature.

Editor: Do you expect the growth to continue or to level off?

Lipsey: Eventually it will level off simply because there are a finite number of people, but we have a long way to go still. The closest analogies in the legal profession are email and Web sites. I have been in legal technology now for more than ten years, and I remember the days when there was widespread debate as to whether Web sites were a serious tool for legal organizations and whether email was going to supplant fax machines as a trusted means of communication. We are going through that same process now with online networking. The reality is that when technology creates efficiencies, those efficiencies by necessity will work themselves into the business environment. That said, they frequently need to evolve over time to become practical business applications. The success of social networking proves the value of human interaction and connecting online. Martindale-Hubbell Connected goes one step further by creating a trusted, private network through an authentication process that ensures members are who they say they are, that is specifically tailored to the needs of legal professionals.

Editor: One of the findings from your survey that really surprised me was that you documented a 30 percent increase in online social network participation among lawyers over 45.

Lipsey: Nielsen did a study last spring about the uptake in the larger Internet world that corresponded to our study. The over-45 demographic is now the fastest growing segment – both because this group is getting more comfortable with the technology and because they see more value in using it for professional purposes.

Editor: Tell us what you learned about the legal profession's interest in a professional-only network.

Lipsey: The Networks for Counsel Survey indicated considerable growth and interest in a private legal network. Last year only 41 percent of corporate counsel acknowledged an interest in a legal-only network; this year that number grew to 65 percent. This trend strongly mirrors the growth of Martindale-Hubbell Connected, which has grown in just six months to more than 17,000 members. The notion of a professional-only network is fairly new, yet the interest is demonstrable when you look at the growth of our network.

Editor: Your survey also found some interesting differences between how corporate counsel use online social networking as compared to private practice lawyers. Can you give our readers some examples of those differences?

Lipsey: In general, corporate counsel are interested in using online networks to access unique content and tools that will help them do their jobs more efficiently, effectively and at lower cost. In other words, they're looking for access to resources. We forget that even though corporate counsel are practitioners, they tend to operate as relatively small departments within large companies whose business has nothing to do with the practice of law, so they often don't have as many resources as, say a private practice in a large law firm. A professional network can provide them access to low-cost information while helping them maintain visibility in their profession.

Private practice lawyers, not surprisingly, are interested in finding new clients; their networking interests focus predominantly around looking for opportunities to get in front of prospective clients. Private practice lawyers can also be a resource to corporate counsel by providing unique and needed content. They can showcase their expertise by acting as a resource to corporate counsel online, perhaps putting them top of mind to corporate counsel when buying decisions for legal services happen to come up. Within a professional network such as Martindale-Hubbell Connected, the diverse interests of both in-house and outside counsel can actually be met simultaneously through robust interaction on a legal-only network.

Editor: How do the numbers of in-house vs. outside counsel break out on the Martindale-Hubbell Connected network?

Lipsey: There are over 3,000 corporate counsel on Martindale-Hubbell Connected right now. The remainder of members include private practice lawyers, and other legal professionals such as legal marketing professionals, Legal IT, law librarians, paralegals, law clerks and law students. One of the things that we learned early on in the development of Connected was that lawyers want a place to collaborate with their peers, however they define them. Corporate counsel indicated quite vocally that we needed to allow other legal professionals on the network because in their roles they interact with other professionals, including business stakeholders, paralegals, inside counsel and outside counsel. The legal professionals with whom corpo-

rate counsel interact on a daily basis vary widely, so we accommodated that need by creating an expansive definition of "legal professional." We also provide functionality on the network for members to discern for themselves which types of professionals they would like to interact with and under which types of settings.

There are about 10 or 15 role types to choose from and members can create their own group or sub-community at will. I believe that at last count there were more than 400 different groups that members had created on Connected.

Editor: In spite of the significant increase over the past year in the use of social networking by lawyers, your survey found that just six percent of lawyers are participating in "microblogging" – such as Twitter. Do you expect that usage to grow in the years ahead or is it possible that Twitter is just not going to take off in the legal profession in the way other kinds of social networking tools have taken off?

Lipsey: I think microblogging is powerful, but limited; Twitter, is a powerful way to instantly broadcast very small amounts of information (it allows only 140 characters per "tweet.") But there will always be a need for individuals to communicate their ideas and thoughts, and people are experimenting with different types of applications, such as how Twitter can be an effective communications mechanism. Once the hype dies down a bit, there will likely be a place for microblogging, and its level of uptake in the legal community will be dependent upon its practical business applications.

Editor: The survey also asked lawyers to review a list of brand names and identify those they felt were best suited to deliver an online, global legal community. What did you learn from the response?

Lipsey: We were pleased with the response. The almost 1,500 respondents to the Networks for Counsel Survey included both corporate counsel and private practice lawyers. They cited Martindale-Hubbell more than any other provider as best equipped to deliver on the value proposition of the private professional network for lawyers. That tells us that Martindale-Hubbell and LexisNexis have a lot of credibility in terms of understanding the needs of the legal profession. We can offer vast resources of content and technical expertise to deliver applications that are suited for lawyers. When you are engaging in an activity that can carry a lot of potential risk – such as social networking – you need a service you can trust. I think the survey reveals that we are a trusted brand not only to deliver this technology, which we have specifically tailored to the needs of lawyers, but also to protect the privacy of our users.

Editor: I know that result must be welcome news to all of you who have developed the Martindale-Hubbell Connected online legal network. Can you tell our readers a little bit about that network and how they can participate?

Lipsey: Your readers can join Martindale-Hubbell Connected by registering at www.Martindale.com/connected.

Please email the interviewee at john.lipsey@lexisnexis.com with questions about this interview.