

## How to Build a Professional Network: First, Find a Million People

by *David Curle, Director & Lead Analyst - Minneapolis, Minnesota*

*LexisNexis' Client Development Solutions group is preparing a release of Martindale Hubbell Connected, a Web 2.0-based platform for connecting corporate general counsel with private practice attorneys. In addition to providing a lawyers-only, LinkedIn-type space, this new platform will leverage its big head start: existing profiles of over a million legal professionals. There are lessons here for other publishers interested in vertical social networking applications.*

**Important Details:** Web 2.0 social and professional networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn come from outside the publishing world, and have rapidly built huge horizontal audiences. Our report, [Social Communities and Expert Networks in B2B](#), identifies dozens of smaller networks vying to be the Facebook of choice within a given vertical. In the legal services industry, lawyers are starting to dip their toes into these waters via LinkedIn and Legal OnRamp (see [Legal OnRamp: Collaboration and the Future of Legal Content Creation](#), 27 August 2008). Lurking in the background, however, is the venerable Martindale-Hubbell directory, which for decades has served as the definitive directory of legal professionals in the US.

As law firms discovered the marketing value of building out their own web sites, and learned the tools of search engine optimization (SEO) and search marketing, paid listings in the Martindale-Hubbell directory (which had at least made the move online in a Web 1.0 format) began to look like a large recurring expense with little return. Google replaced the Martindale directory for many people looking for lawyers in a specific geography or specialty. In response, LexisNexis is reframing its offering with the new [Martindale-Hubbell Connected](#) service, shifting from the dusty old directory model to a modern client development tool targeted to the needs of General Counsel (GCs) at large corporations.

Previous enhancements have leveraged other LexisNexis content, so that GCs can compare firms by their mix of litigation or M&A activity, for example (See Insights, [Enhancements to Martindale.com Reflect the](#)

[Changing Law Firm Marketing Space](#), 8 January 2008). It also cut a deal with LinkedIn to give users access to the one general professional networking service that has attracted a large number of users from the legal services industry (see Insights, [Martindale-Hubbell and LinkedIn Join Forces](#), 30 July 2008).

But Martindale's push into professional networking hasn't stopped with the LinkedIn deal. Like Legal OnRamp, Martindale believes there's a strong market for a lawyers-only network that can provide GCs and private practice lawyers with a place to find each other, obtain referrals, exchange content, and deliver services. Martindale's secret weapon? The same ubiquity that made it so useful in the print age. By linking its networking platform into its existing directory content, Martindale is providing a set of ready-made connections to virtually every practicing lawyer in North America and many more internationally. It will be possible to identify connections with lawyers in specific geographies, those with desirable affiliations (bar groups, alumni of specific firms or law schools), and those practicing within specific specialties without those other lawyers having actually join the network. Connected will also also leverage LexisNexis content including case law and its subject-matter taxonomy in order to help users identify lawyers with the right knowledge and experience. GCs will be able to build and share internally their preferred provider lists, while identifying, tracking and updating recommendations and referrals from other lawyers they know through various kinds of connections.

The goal is to make Martindale such an indispensable tool to GCs that firms will once again see the value in purchasing full directory listings in order to maintain their visibility.

**Implications:** Many people of a certain age (ahem) enjoy playing around with Facebook - but come away unsatisfied. Not everyone they know is in the network, and not everyone they know in the network relies on it to any large extent for communications with friends. Their college-age and 20-something children and nieces and nephews don't have that problem, because participation is almost universal. For that younger generation, Facebook is a one-stop shop for communicating and keeping up with all their friends, because everyone's in the network. Here's where Martindale-Hubbell has a leg up on other professional networking efforts for lawyers - it already has the network, in the form of profiles of over one million legal professionals in the US and elsewhere. In the print era, the value of the Martindale directory was its ubiquity - lawyers knew it was the place to find any attorney, and knew they would find detailed information with a consistent structure. Web 1.0 made that ubiquity less valuable, because a lawyers' own web site became an effective substitute for the Martindale listing as the preferred way to be "found" online. By linking those profiles to a Web 2.0 network, the ubiquity is once again valuable for its instant access to myriad cross-connections between people.

Other publishers might similarly find the genesis of a social networking

site right under their noses, in existing content that already contains embedded relationships. Collexis' [BiomedExperts](#), for example, mines the relationships between the authors and subject matter of millions of scientific papers to create profiles of 1.5 million experts, a move which has proven very successful if its usage figures are anything to go by.

In the legal space, Legal OnRamp and Martindale-Hubbell are clearly where the action is right now. Other attempts to build networking sites for lawyers have mostly fallen flat. Legal OnRamps' emphasis on collaboration and Martindale-Hubbell's emphasis on client development complement each other nicely, so future collaboration or partnerships are not out of the question.

---

#### **Information Industry Headlines**

Outsell aggregates and publishes Information Industry Headlines daily. See them on the web at: [http://www.outsellinc.com/our\\_industry/headlines](http://www.outsellinc.com/our_industry/headlines)

#### **About *Insights***

Redistribution: *Insights* is an annual subscription service. Individuals subscribe for their own use and may not distribute, disseminate, disclose, or otherwise make use of the information herein without permission. Company subscribers may distribute content freely within their companies, agencies, and institutions, but not to persons outside their organizations without permission.

For more information about subscriptions to *Insights* visit <http://www.outsellinc.com/store/subscription/insights>

The information, analysis, and opinions (the "Content") contained herein are based on the qualitative and quantitative research methods of Outsell, Inc. and its staff's extensive professional expertise in the industry. Outsell has used its best efforts and judgment in the compilation and presentation of the Content and to ensure to the best of its ability that the Content is accurate as of the date published. However, the industry information covered by this report is subject to rapid change. Outsell makes no representations or warranties, express or implied, concerning or relating to the accuracy of the Content in this report and Outsell assumes no liability related to claims concerning the Content of this report.

Copyright 2008 Outsell, Inc. All rights reserved.

email: [insights@outsellinc.com](mailto:insights@outsellinc.com)  
web: <http://www.outsellinc.com>

To unsubscribe from these e-mails [click here](#).

**Outsell, Inc.**  
330 Primrose Rd., Suite 510 | Burlingame | CA | 94010 | USA  
Tel: +1 650-342-6060 | Fax: +1 650-342-7135  
25 Floral Street, Suite 1.02 | London | WC2E 9DS | UK  
Tel: +44 (0) 20 8090 6590 | Fax: +44 (0) 20 7031 8101  
<http://www.outsellinc.com>