

LexisNexis Martindale-Hubbell Ratings Survey

By Lightspeed Research

Background & Objectives

LexisNexis Martindale-Hubbell is enhancing its online rating service and seeks data on the opinions of corporate counsel, private practice attorneys, small business owners and consumers regarding their perceived value of lawyer ratings in assessing a lawyer or law firm's abilities and expertise.

In an effort to inform further development of this resource and publicize its value to legal and other professionals, research was conducted to uncover:

- General use, experiences and needs of review and rating sites
- Attitudes, usage and experiences of lawyer reviews and ratings
- Relative interest in an online solution that offers a 360 degree evaluation of legal professionals

Research Method

The survey was conducted online between April 14th and April 23, 2009 using the field services of Lightspeed Research, an independent research firm.

561 interviews were conducted among legal professionals, small business owners and consumers.

- All Legal Professionals (n=361)
 - Corporate Counsel (n=180)
 - Attorneys in Private Practice (n=181)
- Small Business Owners who seek legal counsel (n=100)
- Consumers who seek legal counsel (n=100)

To qualify for the survey, respondents had to have experience with selecting/hiring lawyers:

- Lawyers who participated in this study had to at least influence the evaluation and selection process of lawyers and law firms.
- Small business owners (defined as a firm with under 500 employees) had to have hired a lawyer or law firm for either business or personal reasons.
- Consumers qualified if they hired a lawyer or law firm for personal reasons.

Results were analyzed using a 95% Confidence Interval.

- Significant differences between audiences are denoted by letter subscript or circles.

Key Findings – Ratings Overall

Lawyers, small business owners and consumers alike are heavy users of ratings web sites for personal and professional purposes.

- On average, 85 percent of all respondents have engaged in some kind of action on a ratings website – from reviewing other’s scores to providing their own feedback.
- Nearly 100 percent of all respondents see advantages to using ratings websites.

However, concerns over the credibility and reliability of ratings websites exist, signaling a need for improvement of current resources.

- Nearly 60 percent of all respondents believe review and rating websites can be easily biased and at times too easy for businesses to post “fake” positive reviews.
- Additionally, more than half of all respondents find review and rating sites not useful to only moderately useful when making purchasing decisions.

Building trust is key. Lawyers, small business owners and consumers value trustworthy, credible ratings resources

- According to 65 percent of all respondents, the more people who rate a product or service, the more reliable the ratings.
- 56 percent of all respondents said ratings given by independent third-parties (e.g. J.D. Power & Associates) are more trustworthy than those given by actual customer testimonials.

Key Findings – Lawyers’ Perspectives

There is a significant use of ratings generally among lawyers.

- 87 percent of lawyers use review and ratings web sites for professional and personal reasons.
- While only 25 percent of corporate counsel are using online information-sharing sites, nearly half would consider using an online information-sharing site to evaluate and select lawyers and law firms.

However, current review and ratings offerings to evaluate lawyers fall short.

- Nearly two-thirds of lawyers are *only moderately satisfied* with the resources currently available to evaluate lawyers and law firms.
- 90 percent of lawyers believe there are disadvantages to the current resources available to help evaluate lawyers and law firms.
- 67 percent of lawyers find the greatest disadvantages of ratings web sites is the lack of comprehensive information, missing or incomplete information and current sources are not specific enough for their needs.

A demand for new ratings resources exists.

- Over 70 percent of lawyers say that a centralized, credible and cost-efficient ratings resource are the most important factors when searching for information on lawyers and law firms.
- Nearly 40 percent of lawyers believe that searching for/rating lawyers and law firms would be easier if they had access to the kinds of user ratings found on restaurant, hotel and travel web sites.
- Almost half of corporate counsel worry that they do not have a 360 degree view of lawyers or law firms when trying to evaluate them.

Key Findings – Corporate Counsel vs. Private Practice

The survey revealed some striking differences around the attitudes and usage of ratings resources among corporate counsel and private practice attorneys.

- When asked how satisfied respondents were with current resources to evaluate lawyers and law firms, private practice attorneys expressed greater dissatisfaction than corporate counsel.
- 56 percent of corporate counsel say they want an online resource where they can access lawyers' professional credentials, client and peer assessments all in one central location – compared to only 41 percent of private practice attorneys.
- In addition, 44 percent of corporate counsel believe that searching for/rating lawyers and law firms would be easier if they had access to the kinds of user ratings that are found on restaurant, hotel and travel sites – made appropriate for the legal industry – compared to only 33 percent of private practice attorneys.

Key Findings – SBO's and Consumers' Perspectives

Overall usage of general ratings resources is high among consumers and small business owners.

- 82 percent of small business owners and 49 percent consumers use review and ratings web sites for professional and personal reasons.

However, for researching, evaluating and selecting a lawyer:

- 66 percent of small business owners responded that referrals from peers or trusted colleagues are their top source in researching and finding a lawyer.
- 45 percent of consumers cited referrals as their top source to research and find a lawyer.
- 74 percent of small business owners based their evaluation and selection of a lawyers and law firms on a past experience.

The need for a comprehensive, credible, and trustworthy resource exists.

- More than 80 percent of SBOs and consumers claimed that having access to credible sources of information is highly important.
- 72 percent of SBOs and consumers value the ability to access all of the information they need in one place for easier comparison when seeking information about lawyers.
- 60 percent of small business owners and consumers alike believe that better service would be provided if lawyers knew they would be subject to a review.
- Nearly 50 percent of SBOs and consumers do not always trust the information available on lawyers and law firms.