



By A. Harrison Barnes, Esq.

How BCG finds jobs

Introduction

BCG Attorney Search maintains the largest and most up-to-date database of attorney job opportunities inside law firms in the world. BCG Attorney Search-in good economic times and in bad-is built upon the simple core belief that better research leads to better placements. Research is, by far, the most important function a first-rate legal recruiting firm does. In fact, BCG Attorney Search does so much research that our efforts have spawned several independent research-based companies including [Legal Authority](#), [Law Firm Staff](#), [LawCrossing](#) and [MBA Authority](#), among others, which collectively assist tens of thousands of individuals both inside and outside the legal profession every year. From our foundations as a Los Angeles-based legal recruiting firm, to our current state as a core group of legal recruiters spread throughout the United States, we have expanded through elevating research to its very highest level.

This article serves two purposes. First, it discusses the importance of research to the legal recruiting field and how it relates to your job search. It is axiomatic that hiring authorities rely upon legal recruiting firms to do research in order to identify suitable candidates for their open positions. Similarly, candidates rely upon legal recruiting firms to do research in order to identify appropriate positions. A legal recruiter is wasting his or her time with a candidate if they cannot suitably identify appropriate positions where the candidate is likely to be hired and candidates are wasting their time if they are dealing with a recruiter that does not have full market coverage. We believe that without using a legal recruiter with a substantial research base, candidates may be poorly served by using a legal recruiting firm in the first place.

Second, this article also identifies some of the research methods BCG Attorney Search employs in order to do research for both its candidates and client law firms. While many employees inside our company at first did not want us to publish much of this information, we believe it is important to communicate the level of depth we go into on behalf of our candidates and client law firms. Since much of what we do is “invisible” and carried out behind the scenes, our research methodology is important to expose due to the sheer cost and magnitude of this continuous undertaking. For this reason, we believe that a candidate who is represented by BCG Attorney Search is better served in their job search than any other possible method for locating a law firm position.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH TO RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL LEGAL RECRUITING FIRM

Research is important to your job search for several reasons. As discussed below, research (A) identifies actual jobs, (B) identifies potential jobs and (C) solidifies relationships with law firms.

A. Research Identifies Actual Jobs

One of the more simplistic tasks that a legal recruiter does is perform research to identify actual jobs. In a market the size of New York City, for example, there are over 500 law firms that regularly use recruiting firms to fill

positions. In order for a candidate to be well serviced in their search for a position through a legal recruiter, they need to ensure that their recruiter has identified as many of the actual available jobs as possible.

OBSERVATION 1:

A good legal recruiter acts as a candidate's "eyes and ears" in the marketplace. Knowing where the actual jobs are is of fundamental importance. Once a law firm has an actual opening, it has made a decision to hire someone. Without having as many actual jobs as possible for its candidates, a legal recruiter is unlikely to give its candidates exposure to all of the available opportunities available in the market. The importance of having exposure to these opportunities cannot be overemphasized.

Since we consider ourselves the custodians of hundreds of careers each year, it is important that we guide our candidates to make the best possible choices with the opportunities they are presented with. The difference between an attorney going to a firm which is a good cultural, geographic and financial match and one that is not can make a profound difference in the overall quality of their life.

While this fact is somewhat grim, the fact of the matter is that many attorneys who work with a legal recruiting firm are at an extremely important crossroads in their legal career. They may be leaving a dying firm, relocating, losing a position through no fault of their own, looking to find a place where they can increase their compensation, or even flirting with the idea of getting out of the practice of law entirely. The morale of the attorney, their future and their family's future is literally on the line. It is vitally important that the attorney be exposed to every actual position that matches their interests. Every candidate should feel safe in the knowledge that they have chosen a recruiting firm that will find this position for them.

OBSERVATION 2:

Without outstanding research, you have no way of knowing if your recruiter is giving you exposure to every potential opportunity in the market. We have no doubt that countless legal careers either (1) ended, or (2) are currently unfulfilling due to the fact that an attorney was not exposed to the available jobs for which they may have been best suited through the fault of a poor legal recruiter.

B. Research Identifies Potential Jobs

The fact that "potential jobs" may exist is something that is quite surprising to those who are not familiar with how recruiters operate at the very highest level. Nevertheless, a good recruiter knows virtually every law firm in the market they are servicing. Knowing these law firms allows the recruiter to understand the types of attorneys that are good fits for certain firms and those that are not. In many cases, we can meet and interview a candidate and know-without the candidate even going in for an interview-that a given firm is quite likely to hire them.

More than 30% of the placements our recruiters make each year come from in-depth knowledge of the firms in their markets and not specific job openings per se. These recruiters are not identifying opportunities by calling law firms seeking openings, checking websites or browsing classified ads. They are making placements because they know the specific type of work the firm does, where it is likely to need attorneys at a given point in time and the specific types of attorneys a law firm will hire. In fact, the very best legal recruiters can review a resume, meet with an attorney and-even if the recruiter is not involved with the search-tell you with surprising accuracy a few law firms the attorney is likely to end up at when doing a job search. The best recruiters do this because they are researching and evaluating law firms and whom they hire consistently every day.

OBSERVATION 3:

Many firms never actually "publicize" or have actual openings. Instead, they rely upon talented recruiters to deliver to them candidates they know match precisely what they are seeking. These types of openings are often "constant" and certain firms are always seeking a given type of attorney (albeit, the type of attorney of which there may not be many of in the marketplace). Unfortunately, in a market like Los Angeles with thousands of law firms, a candidate is often unlikely to find these firms or know about them on their own. Good recruiters are always aware of these potential opportunities, though.

In addition, at BCG Attorney Search, we keep detailed records of every job a law firm have ever provided us with and every law firm that has ever interviewed a candidate of ours. The work to create and archive these records is quite tremendous and is something that we have a computer programmer here working on for several hours a week. Our recruiters are then provided access to reports detailing this information on an ongoing basis. We do all of this for one simple reason: Firms often have similar needs on an ongoing basis, or “in cycles”. When these cycles are identified, we can often call these firms and persuade them to interview our candidates despite the fact that they do not have current openings.

In addition, we also keep detailed charts and graphical information that track various “hiring trends” in markets throughout the world. [Click here](#) to see one such example. This graphical information enables us to know when certain practice areas are rising or faltering in demand and, when attorneys from these practice areas are more likely to be hired. If there is a sharp need in the market for one type of attorney at a given point in time, firms that do not have actual openings are still likely to have interest in this attorney.

OBSERVATION 4:

At BCG Attorney Search we believe that our study of the law firm job market is far more significant than any other organization in the United States. We believe that one of the strongest benefits of our centralized means of doing business is the fact that we have pooled our resources to have such an in-depth understanding of the law firm market. This academic approach to recruiting and placement works: Each year, countless attorneys careers are enhanced through our research efforts.

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C. Solidifies Relationships With Law Firms

It is vitally important that recruiters know the law firms they are servicing extremely well. In the legal recruiting business, recruiters can quickly lose credibility with law firms if they do not understand their needs. By understanding the precise types of candidates that a law firm is likely to hire, legal recruiters can ensure that the candidates they introduce to law firms are looked at quite closely.

In addition, when a recruiter knows a law firm and the people within it quite well the law firm will trust the recruiter’s recommendations in the future. This is of enormous benefit to the recruiter’s candidates because law firms can be quite prejudicial against incompetent recruiters. For example, with several law firms we deal with we are the only recruiter that the law firm uses. Law firms are often very cautious of providing their hiring needs to recruiters who do not understand them. In addition, just as a candidate needs an “advocate” to market them in their search for a new position, so too does a law firm need an “advocate” to help promote its positions. [Click here](#) to download an example (in .pdf format) of BCG Attorney Search promoting its clients.

OBSERVATION 5:

Recruiters who are familiar with their law firm clients are likely to garner more trust and respect from those law firms than recruiters who do not take the time to understand the needs of their clients and candidates. Very few recruiters, however, actually take the time it takes to get to know their clients. Consequently, these same law firms may literally reject solid candidates that might otherwise be considered for a position, simply out of a lack of respect for the work that their recruiter has presented to them in the past.

D. Conclusions

Research is the single most important function a legal recruiting firm engages in. Through aggressive research, recruiting firms are able to identify actual and potential positions as well as solidify their relationships with law firms.

Some legal recruiting firms do more research than others and there is a reason for this. Recruiters typically work on a commission structure whereby they receive income for each placement they make. For every placement a recruiter makes, they share a corresponding share of the recruiting fee with their placement firm. The more successful recruiters that a given recruiting firm has, the more income the recruiting fee has available for

company-sponsored research and development. Conversely, smaller recruiting firms typically do not have a great deal of funds available for research and development. To some extent, the age old saying of “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer” applies to the recruiting genera: Better recruiting firms have better research which builds upon itself both in the short and long term.

Our recruiters are extraordinarily good at what they do and far more successful than most other legal recruiters in the United States. Becoming a BCG Attorney Search recruiter is no easy task and our screening and retention mechanisms are harsh; however, we do produce outstanding recruiters. In fact, most BCG Attorney Search recruiters work much harder than they worked in previous positions. Far from being “refugees” from the practice of law, many of our legal recruiters left the legal profession, we believe, because they felt they were too ambitious for the long-term practice of law. Due to the sheer volume of placement fees our recruiters generate compared to competing recruiting firms, we are allowed to allocate an impressive percentage of our budget for research and development. For every legal recruiter at BCG Attorney Search, we typically have at least two other dedicated individuals doing research for them on a full-time basis.

II. HOW LAW FIRM JOBS ARE IDENTIFIED

There are several methods that recruiters typically use to get jobs from law firms: (A) they do not worry about all of the jobs, (B) they meet with law firms, (C) they check web sites, (D) they check classified ads, (E) they call the law firms, (F) they speak with attorneys inside the firm informally and (G) they are put on distribution lists. Without consistently following these methods, a legal recruiter is unlikely to have very good market coverage.

OBSERVATION 6:

The above job gathering actions may not sound all that significant. It is important to understand, however, that there are few legal recruiters in the United States that can actually successfully cover the market using all of these methods. While many outside the profession believe that legal recruiting is a shallow business, at its highest level this could not be further from the truth. There are very few national legal recruiting firms for a reason: Namely, the amount of research that is required in order to run a successful multi-state legal recruiting firm makes high-level success prohibitive due to the sheer expense and manpower that the necessary research entails.

A. Most Recruiters Do Not Worry About All of the Jobs

This is how virtually every legal recruiting firm in the United States operates. The reason for this should make perfect sense. In a market the size of New York City there are over 500 law firms that use legal recruiters to fill positions. At most points in time, over 50-percent of these law firms will have some sort of attorney position they are interested in filling for various reasons. Since hiring needs can change from month to month, the average legal recruiter would need to make hundreds of inquiries and do exhaustive research in order to ensure that they have all the jobs. Doing this, in addition to making placements and working with existing candidates, is a massive undertaking. Accordingly, most legal recruiters just focus on working with a few law firms.

OBSERVATION 7:

Working with just a few law firms can produce results. Even a recruiter who works with a limited number of law firms will make placements-and sometimes quite consistently. The drawback from the recruiter's standpoint is they have fewer opportunities to make placements. From the candidate's standpoint, the drawback should be quite obvious: They are exposed to fewer employment opportunities. Being exposed to fewer employment opportunities means that the candidate may not find an appropriate position (or might potentially be pressured by a recruiter into accepting an inappropriate position).

Another potential drawback of a recruiter that is not worrying about where actual jobs are is that the prospective candidate may be sent to a law firm that could not possibly have a position for them. If a recruiter does this more than a few times (i.e., “mail bombs” the candidate’s resume) the law firm will stop looking at the candidates the recruiter attempts to interest them in.

OBSERVATION 8:

Much of the “gate keeping” done by large law firms is done by a recruiting coordinator. Recruiting coordinators are often a point of contact for recruiters without relationships with hiring partners. In addition, many large law firms (to ensure that their hiring partners are able to focus on their practice) require all recruiters to simply make the recruiting coordinator their point of contact within the law firm. Some recruiting coordinators are extremely competent, but others are not, and will have trouble differentiating a good candidate from a bad one beyond a Yale, Stanford or Harvard Law School graduate coming from Latham & Watkins.

If the recruiting coordinators show a few candidates introduced by a “mail bombing” recruiting firm to the hiring partner and the hiring partner becomes annoyed more than a few times, the recruiting coordinator may simply refuse to present these candidates to the appropriate personnel inside the law firm in the future. This can be disastrous for a potential attorney’s job search if they are represented by a recruiter that is black-balled.

We should add that despite the fact that many legal recruiters work with only a few number of law firms, this is not always a bad thing. If the legal recruiter has a very strong relationship with a few select law firms, they will often have the ability to persuade a given law firm to meet with a marginal candidate they might not otherwise agree to meet with. In addition, if a legal recruiter has a strong relationship with a few select law firms they may be privy to “inside” hiring information that other legal recruiters are not privy to.

Nevertheless, if the recruiter does not know about all the openings in the market, their candidates can be put at a tremendous disadvantage in their search for a position. It is also important to note that doing in-depth research on a law firm’s openings costs a great deal of money and is no easy task. For this reason, larger recruiting firms with substantial resources are more likely to know all of the positions in the legal market than smaller recruiting firms. Still, small and highly focused local firms are often quite effective in local markets

B. Recruiters Meet With Law Firms

We believe that meeting with law firm is, by far, one of the most effective methods for getting jobs. In a face-to-face meeting over lunch, for example, a law firm is likely to give a recruiting firm far more insight into its hiring needs than they will in a simple phone call. Understanding the psychology of this is quite important because it underlies the fundamentals of what a good recruiting firm does. Recruiting is a relationship-driven business and these relationships are quite important to the running of a successful recruiting firm.

The reason that meeting with law firms is so important is that it can help put a face behind the legal recruiter and also establish a platform of trust between the law firm and the legal recruiter. Law firms want to be aware of the fact that a recruiting firm will treat its hiring needs with discretion and not blatantly solicit every attorney on the market for the potential position. In addition, law firms, like most of us, want to deal with recruiters that they feel comfortable with.

When a recruiter meets with a law firm, they are also more likely to have the ability to understand the culture and personalities of the firm. Every law firm there is has a culture and, as recruiters, we believe we bring a high degree of insight into our understanding of law firms that enables us to understand the types of attorneys that are likely to fit in at various law firms.

As a final note, when a recruiter meets with a law firm, their sole intention should not be to simply get openings from the firm. They are meeting with the law firm to form relationships and these relationships are the fundamentals of any outstanding recruiting firm. Recruiters who take the time to develop solid relationships with their clients are the ones who are in the business for the long term. They are also the recruiters that are likely to get calls immediately when a given law firm has an opening.

C. Recruiters Check Web Sites

Law firm jobs can be posted on many different sites. It is our business at BCG Attorney Search to be aware of every job on the market. Every evening we check over 5,500 law firm web sites. For every opening posted on law firm

web site, we are generally aware of the opening within 12 hours. In addition, we have a dedicated staff of 5 people who check “job posting boards” for us every day of the workweek.

OBSERVATION 9:

Law firm websites, while informative, are not necessarily the best place for recruiters to find jobs. While we check over 5,000 websites each evening, this is not necessarily the most effective way to locate jobs. We would estimate that over 30% of the positions on most law firm websites are out of date because the law firms simply fail to update them. One of the largest benefits of knowing the openings on law firm websites is that they can provide information pertaining to “hiring trends” in various markets. For example, many practice areas in certain markets may begin to experience hiring activity before others. Studying these trends can be extremely useful. In addition, seeing openings on law firm web sites can allow us to “cross reference” jobs we have for the firm that we may learn about from other sources.

In addition to law firm web sites, law firm jobs will also often be contained on a myriad of “job posting boards” and other sources. We check these sources as well on a weekly basis. These sources help us be aware of all the opportunities within the market. Like law firm web sites, many of these job posting board are out of date. Since the relevance of job posting boards is often based on the fact that they have “the most jobs”, many of the boards will leave their jobs up far after the position has been filled.

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D. Recruiters Check Printed Classified Ads

Classified ads are a good source of intelligence for recruiting firms. We subscribe to virtually every legal publication in the United States that lists jobs. Many firms often duplicate their efforts with recruiters by using classified ads. Most firms of more than 15-20 attorneys rarely fill openings through classified ads. Nevertheless, in large markets like San Francisco classified ads are often used by larger law firms to actually advise recruiters (as opposed to candidates) of the fact that they have positions available.

OBSERVATION 10:

Classified ads are a good source of information for most recruiting firms due to the fact that they are likely to be quite current. In almost all instances, ads in printed publications are more current as a general rule than ads on law firm web sites or on public job boards.

As an added benefit, printed classified ads are also likely to be less highly browsed (and receive fewer applications) than ads on Internet job posting boards due to the fact that someone actually has to get a physical copy of the printed publication.

E. Recruiters Call Law Firms

Most recruiters will call law firms from time to time in order to get jobs. While this entire procedure of discovering jobs could sustain an entire treatise in itself, it is important to note that this is one of the more important sources of jobs that a recruiter can get. A recruiter can generally only pick up the phone and call a firm for positions if they have a strong existing relationship with the firm. Many law firms are very careful with their openings and will only provide them to recruiters that they trust. These same law firms are not likely to (1) post job openings on their web site, or (2) advertise these jobs in classified ads or on job posting boards.

OBSERVATION 11:

Our experience has proven that a large share of the law firm placements we make come through a phone call or other phone interaction with a law firm. Law firms simply want to deal with recruiters who take the initiative to contact them about their openings and discuss the exact parameters of what the law firm is seeking with them. Once a recruiter has spoken directly with the law firm about what they are seeking (and in fact understood what the law firm is speaking about) the recruiter is in a far better position to promote the law firm's opening.

F. Recruiters Speak With Attorneys Inside the Firm Informally

Recruiters speak with attorneys inside law firms all day long, every day. Most recruiters spend at least 4-5 hours a day on the phone speaking with attorneys. Because recruiters spend so much time speaking with attorneys, it stands to reason that they are likely to get quite a bit of information and, because recruiters will be recruiters, a great deal of this information has to do with jobs inside the attorneys' law firms (or lack thereof). Virtually every week BCG Attorney Search makes placements in firms where we learned about the firm having a "crushing workload" in one practice area or another. In a majority of the cases, the fact that the firm may have a hiring need is something that could not be known either by visiting the law firm web site or searching various ads. In fact, we believe that informal knowledge of what is going on inside of law firms is among the most important sources of knowledge a recruiter can have. Despite all the research that recruiters might do, they are not going to be aware of most of the openings within their market unless they are actively engaged with attorneys from that market.

The way in which BCG Attorney Search operates provides us with a powerful tool for gaining awareness of what goes on in various legal markets around the country. We are a national recruiting firm that specializes in geographical regions. We have offices in Los Angeles, Orange County, Chicago, New York, Texas, Miami, and Washington, DC, with each of our recruiters specializing in their particular region of the country.

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OBSERVATION 12:

Many outside the legal recruiting profession are under the impression that a great deal of the work that a legal recruiting firm does simply involves locating jobs through simplistic means. If this were the case, there would be little point in the existence of recruiting firms, as attorneys could find employment on their own just as easily. Through speaking with attorneys in various markets several hours a day, we are able to keep our finger on the pulse of the hiring needs of various firms that in many cases actually eclipse what many inside the law firm know about.

G. Recruiters Are Put On Distribution Lists

Law firms will generally put their favored recruiters on distribution lists and send them their jobs every few months. Most law firms that follow this practice do not typically make their jobs publicly available except to their preferred recruiting firms.

Law firms trust us to provide them with the attorney candidates that best fit their needs because we have built a reliable name for ourselves. Due to the established relationship we have with these firms, we often receive law firms hiring needs before anyone else. In many instances, we are often notified of a new opening before the law firm even releases it throughout their firm.

Additionally, law firms have sought us out to perform an exclusive search for a particular kind of attorney. Law firms know that we have an extensive database filled with the top qualified attorneys in the country and have the ability to present them with these candidates in the most professional way, and therefore routinely choose to employ us in their recruiting efforts.

H. Conclusions

More than 75% of the placements we make at BCG Attorney Search are in firms where we have identified a need through sources that a candidate could not possibly find on their own. We do not need to tell you that the benefit to our candidates from this is tremendous. By identifying needs through means that are not public, we give our candidates a shot at opportunities that are simply off the radar screen for most attorneys. If the above illustrations serve any purpose, it should be to make you aware that the work that sophisticated recruiting firms engage in is by no means an easy task and it can be extremely involved.

III. FINAL OBSERVATIONS

Blanket cold calls, mass mailing of resumes and high-pressure sales tactics are tell-tale signs most of the time that a legal recruiting firm is not making use of the research function. The very best legal recruiting firms devote their efforts to research above all other pursuits. Better research simply leads to better placements. We believe our research and ability to get jobs is unrivaled for numerous reasons:

- First, we have pooled the resources of numerous recruiters to have the resources and breadth to study and understand the market to the greatest extent possible;
- Second, we are purposely specialized in making exclusively law firm placements and do not dilute our efforts by doing in house or staffing placements (i.e., paralegals, legal secretaries, etc.);
- Third, we maintain strong relationships with the large number of law firms we count as clients and therefore are able to gain firsthand knowledge of their hiring needs;
- Fourth, BCG Attorney Search's recruiters have unparalleled market understanding in their regions, which enables us to accurately assess the needs of many firms, even without them directly advertising available positions;
- Fifth, we purposely hire recruiters that are likely to be very good at what they do. We do not hire "refugees" from the practice of law who are looking for an easier life or fewer hours outside of the practice of law; and,
- Sixth, and perhaps most important, we are continually identifying new opportunities through various research methods that provide us with the kind of openings that few others have the capabilities to recognize.

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