



ATTORNEY SEARCH

By A. Harrison Barnes, Esq.

How we make a living

Providing Insider Knowledge and Counseling

Professional search consultants receive their fees from the legal-hiring organizations that employ their candidates. Virtually every U.S. law firm with a staff of more than 20 attorneys asks recruiters to help them with their hiring needs. In fact, firms are often surprised when candidates approach them who aren't represented by a professional search consultant. They find it difficult to believe that some candidates think they can learn about the universe of opportunities available on their own. Considerable leg work is involved with finding a new position, and most candidates just don't have the time it takes to successfully handle all of the necessary tasks while holding down a full-time job.

Candidates generally need someone to lobby behind the scenes, gathering information about the culture of each legal-hiring organization and finding out what salary range is available. It always helps candidates to be presented professionally to the right people within each legal-hiring organization after being given inside information that most applicants could never obtain on their own. A professional search consultant knows how to counsel candidates about the people who will be interviewing them and can protect their confidentiality. Prior to sending a candidate out on interviews, a search consultant can tell him/her which firms are most likely to value his/her specific talents and personality. Once the interview is over, valuable feedback can be obtained by the recruiter and passed on to the candidate.

While we hesitate to use this analogy, professional search consultants are like talent agents for the legal profession. They look for star talent and then try to advance every star's career by pointing them in the right direction and locating opportunities that match the candidates' interests and views. The search consultant does everything he/she can to get the candidate into the organization that matches the candidate's personal, professional, and financial goals. Nearly every legal-hiring organization of any substance in the U.S. understands the benefits that professional search consultants bring to the legal profession and each candidate's job search. However, there are rare instances where legal-hiring organizations do not work with professional search consultants. For example, in San Francisco's legal market, there are three or four smaller law firms that do not use professional search consultants.

Firms that don't use professional search consultants typically pay well below market-rate salaries (usually 50 percent or more below) and are usually not in a growth mode. In general, most of our candidates would not be interested in securing positions with these firms anyway. Obviously, if firms thought they could just wait for top candidates to somehow find them on their own, you can imagine the types of people they might have to hire in the interim. Moreover, a good candidate rarely wants to conduct his/her own job search because he/she knows it's an arduous task and he/she wants the up-to-date, inside information that's often only available to recruiters. Top candidates also know it's unwise to approach every legal-hiring organization in a given city; they are aware that it's always a mistake to indiscriminately blanket legal markets with their resumes.

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Setting Reasonable Fee Structures

The fees charged by professional search consultants vary. Fees are typically set via contractual arrangements with the legal-hiring organizations. As you can imagine, these negotiations can require a substantial amount of work. That is why some search consultants may only have five opportunities available in any given city at a time. Fortunately, there are organizations like BCG Attorney Search, which often has 250 or more job listings for various markets.

Some legal-hiring organizations pay professional search consultants as little as five percent of a placed candidate's annual salary, while others pay more. Many professional search consultants demand certain set rates from legal-hiring organizations before they will introduce a candidate to them. Our standard fee is lower than most legal-search firms we know of. Many (if not most search firms) demand that the firms they introduce you to pay them a percentage of any bonus compensation the firm pays you for one year after they hire you. Not us. We cannot imagine why a search firm would do that. What incentive would that give the firms employing our candidates to pay them a large bonus? Additionally, because we will typically offer to negotiate our standard fee downward for smaller firms, we tend to gain more coverage than other legal-search firms. This in turn helps us provide our candidates with more options. In fact, in most markets, we believe we have better coverage than most of the other legal-search firms.

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In some cases, other search firms will demand as much as 40% of a year's salary before they will introduce you to a legal-hiring organization. When working with smaller firms, BCG Attorney Search has often placed candidates for as little as \$1,000, or no fee at all. Does that sound like bad business? We don't think so. People who are focused on making money do not stay around a long time at our firm because our focus is on the candidates we serve. On a daily basis, we counsel lawyers who are considering unproductive moves to stay at their current firms. Additionally, when we believe that an attorney would be better served by going to a firm that does not work with recruiters, we tell our candidates about the opening. It's our ability to prioritize the results that helps provide us with more opportunities. In fact, we believe our focus helps everything else simply fall into place.

We are sometimes surprised by the ethics displayed by professional search consultants who seem more concerned with their personal, short-term rewards than the long-term satisfaction of the hiring organizations they serve and their candidates. Our focus, in all respects, is long term. We keep our standard fees low, frequently negotiate them down, and have never raised our fees.

BCG Attorney Search is a full-service organization that is firmly committed to improving the legal profession as a whole. We go the extra mile and actually inform our candidates if a particular firm does not use recruiters. Firms that do not use recruiters typically try their luck by advertising in legal publications. We enter and update this type of information in our databases on a daily basis. Yet don't be mistaken; we have bills to pay too. However, we've decided to take a long-term approach to interacting with our clients and candidates.

For all of the reasons set forth above, we believe that BCG Attorney Search will remain at the forefront of the professional search consulting field. We feel privileged to serve the legal profession.