

Researching Specific Law Firms

Whether you are narrowing down potential firms to apply to, or if you have an interview scheduled with a firm, doing your research is a critical component of the job search process. A good recruiter will be able to give you some background (and often inside) information regarding any particular firm, especially if they have a long-standing relationship with the firm, or have worked previously with candidates looking to move to or from that firm.

However, there is no substitute for doing your own research - it will get you more actively engaged, you will retain the information better, you may find some information the recruiter missed (or came online since the recruiter looked into things on your behalf), and really, at the end of the day, it is always best to take ownership of your search no matter how good of a recruiter you are working with - being actively engaged in the process will pay dividends in terms of your lateral success.

That being said, what are some resources you can use to research potential firms to the fullest extent?

The Firm Website

The firm website is the most obvious source of information about a firm, but there are generally a couple tips and tricks that will help you find the most relevant information for [your particular job search](#) or interview:

1. Take a look at the full office roster of attorneys so you can gauge the size of the office as a whole. There can be a large variation in the size of firm offices, even for the largest international firms, and this can have a dramatic impact on a number of relevant factors to your search including: office environment and culture, how broad or narrow your work opportunities will be (i.e., how many and which partners you will likely work for), and perhaps most importantly your opportunities for future promotion (smaller or satellite offices typically have less "pull" when it comes to hiring and promotion decisions during firm-wide partner committee discussions, unless that office happens to house a particularly influential rainmaker).
2. Also be sure to look at how many attorneys that office has in the particular practice group for which you would be working, especially the partner profiles. If there are only a couple of partners in that practice group in that office, you are almost guaranteed to be working for them - take a look at their bios and practices and see whether you feel as if there will be a good fit. If there are only a few partners, or even one partner, it is possible you will be taking assignments from partners in other offices - this is a good question to ask in terms of assignment staffing when you are in an interview, and it is particularly common for more "national" practices like patent or corporate transactional work (less so for litigation, which tends to be more local in nature).
3. Take a look at the general background information for a particular office. You might be surprised at how recently an office was founded - many firms were in a process of rapid expansion leading up to the recent economic depression, and a number of offices are on the newer and smaller side, even in major cities like Los Angeles. If a firm has a relatively new presence in a market, this may mean the work is less stable, which could be a deterrent. The flipside of this is that the office may be more entrepreneurial or poised for rapid growth, and you could be in an excellent ground-floor position that can rocket you to promotion and seniority faster than working your way up through the ranks of a larger, more established office. It really depends on the nature of your practice, how your matters are staffed, and how aggressive you are willing to be with grabbing practice opportunities and developing a client base. Either way, this is important information to have.
4. Absolutely look at the news/press release section of the firm's website for both the particular office at which you are interviewing, and for the practice group firm-wide. You want to be aware of whether the group is expanding, if there have been recent major lateral hires that represent significant new

practice opportunities, and whether there are any major recent successes you can bring up in an interview, particularly if they involved any of the attorneys you are speaking with - I probably don't have to tell you that attorneys love being reminded of their successes in practice!

General and Industry Specific Legal Publications

Publications like JD Journal, ABA Journal, The American Lawyer, the National Law Journal, Vault, the Wall Street Journal's Law Blog, and even [Above The Law](#) can all be excellent resources for researching both specific firms and general legal industry trends. Most of them have searchable website archives where you can search for your specific firm in order to see news, press releases, and even gossip relevant to that firm. See [Top Ten Interview Questions](#) for more information

It is good to know how the overall market is doing, as well as your particular practice area market, in order to gauge why and to what extent your background and experience may be in demand at any given point in time. It is also good to know how your potential firm is positioned in this market, and any major moves or shake-ups that might be relevant to your long-term prospects with the firm. Did they recently lay people off? Did a group of partners and associates in your practice area recently depart for another firm, and perhaps that is what is driving their current hiring? Did a firm recently make a significant partner or practice group acquisition in order to expand their business in your practice area (which demonstrates a long-term commitment to servicing clients in that sector)?

While I definitely do not recommend bringing up a firm's recent layoffs or partner departures in a first round interview, it is definitely helpful to develop a current profile of your target firm's recent movement as it pertains to their staffing, hiring, and retention in your practice area. You do not want to land at a firm only to find that the reason so many attorneys in your practice group have departed recently is because the firm management has de-prioritized your practice group. I have seen too many attorneys land somewhere and have to look for yet [another position within a few short months](#) due to this particular chain of events.

Classmates and Colleagues

One of the best sources for information about a firm is clearly the people who work there. To the extent you have classmates or former colleagues who work at a given firm, it is definitely worth reaching out them to get their take on the overall firm culture, a particular office, or ideally particular partners (LinkedIn is a good source for researching this, and many firm websites allow you to search for attorneys by the law school they attended). Even if you do not have a direct contact at a particular firm, you may have a friend-of-a-friend there to whom you could be introduced.

Regardless of whether you end up interviewing, or even applying, to a particular firm, this sort of fact-finding mission is an excellent excuse for networking, and you will reap the benefits of being more visible in your practice group community, making new contacts, staying in touch with classmates and colleagues, and potentially finding out about other opportunities through the proverbial grapevine. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard stories of attorneys finding great lateral jobs seemingly at random or by accident through networking, meeting friends-of-friends, or even just getting back in touch with old law school classmates or former colleagues, but the common denominator to all of these stories is that those attorneys were out there actively speaking to people in the market, not just sitting behind their desk clicking a mouse. Putting yourself in front of people, whether it is in person or over the phone, is an excellent skill to develop, maintain, and improve, and it will [help you in your long-term career](#).

Conclusion

There are other ways to find out information about particular firms, but these are the main sources, and the most fruitful in terms of solid intel you can use in your job search, application, and interview process. At the end of the day, the law is a human institution and a human enterprise, and the more information you have about the people, culture, office, and practice group at a particular firm, the more targeted your search will be and the more successful you will be in the interview process. In this competitive market, it is not enough to simply fire off a resume to the website of all the AmLaw 200 firms and hope for the best, even if your credentials are stellar. Putting in the extra leg work to do your own research will not only help you land a new job, it will help you [make sure that job is the right one](#) for many years to come.

Learn why attorneys usually fail law firm phone-screening interviews in this article:
[Why Most Attorneys Fail Telephone-Screening Interviews](#)