Why Every Attorney Needs to Apply to a Lot of Places (and Not Give Up) When Rejected

By Harrison Barnes from Los Angeles Office Managing Director

Summary: Learn why it is so important to market yourself to a lot of law firms in your job search, despite what you might hear to the contrary.

Very few attorneys understand the importance of marketing themselves to a lot of law firms when they are doing their searches. Many have been counseled by bureaucrats inside of law schools, friends, legal recruiters and others (with hidden agendas) to be very careful about not sending their resume to a lot of places (more on that later). Moreover, many attorneys (falsely) believe that sending their resumes to a lot of places is a mistake and something that will harm their chances of employment. Finally, many attorneys believe that if they do not get interviews with firms immediately it is time to "suspend" their search and give up.

None of these things are true. In fact, attorneys make a major, major mistake not applying to lots of employers and they make a major, major mistake giving up when they are not interviewed after initial applications. You need to throw all of your preconceptions out the window. I have seen more careers stall, underperform and not do well due to under-marketing and a lack of persistence than I can count.

Do feel like your career is underperforming? Could these be the reasons? Let us know in the comments! See Persist Until You Succeed for more information.

Every Business Understands the Importance of Marketing Themselves to a Lot of Prospects. Attorneys Should Too.

I receive anywhere between 10 and 25 pieces of junk mail in my home mailbox each day and countless letters at work as well. Even my bills contain solicitations to buy things inside of them. Even when I purchase something online and it is delivered, there is a solicitation to buy more of something inside the box that is delivered. When go to the grocery store there are coupons and various offers printed on the receipt after I purchase something.

It is quite rare that I remember who any of this was from or act on it. Just while writing this, I received a robocall from a company selling website services, hundreds of "spam" emails and a call from a hungry young stockbroker trying to sell me something.

This happens daily, all day, every day and it does not stop. Junk mail has followed me to every address I have ever lived in for the past quarter of a century. The same goes with advertisements on television, in magazines, on the radio, on billboards, and in the mail at my office. Just about everywhere I go I am bombarded by requests for my business. So are you. Why? Because it works! See The One Call Close and the Moving Parade for more information.

EVERY BUSINESS UNDERSTANDS THE IMPORTANCE OF MARKETING AND THEY DO NOT STOP MARKETING. THIS IS HOW THEY GET PEOPLE TO BUY THEIR PRODUCTS AND SERVICES. IT IS HOW THEY GET BUSINESS. IF THEY STOP MARKETING THEY GO OUT OF BUSINESS.

I have news for you: You are a product and you need people to be interested in you. Every business knows
that the more (focused) people are seeing their advertisements and promotions the more they are likely to
sell, and the more money they are likely to make. Every business knows that if they are going to keep going
as a business concern they sure as hell better get themselves out there.

You need to treat your career like a small business.
See Treating Your Legal Career Like a Small Business for more information.

Some businesses are better at marketing themselves than others. The largest and most successful
businesses will generally go to extreme lengths to market themselves. The better the marketing the better the
business generally is.

I lived in Thailand when I was in high school. One day I took a motorcycle about 5 hours outside of a city
(Chiang Mai) on a dirt road. This was in the mid-1980s and there were some very remote areas back then
you might not find today. I reached a primitive village where people were, quite literally, walking around
naked covered in dust and mud, farming with rudimentary tools. When I pulled into the little village a ton of
children ran up to me and wanted to touch me, presumably (I do not know) because a white person was a
rarity.

To my absolute astonishment, a large billboard for Coca-Cola was erected in the village and someone was
selling cold Cokes out of a cooler that was being powered by a portable generator connected to a car battery.
I had gone to a remote part of the Earth and there was someone selling Cokes, and a large billboard had
been erected in the MIDDLE OF NOWHERE advertising Coca-Cola.

Good brands do everything they can to spread their message far and wide.

You are a brand. When an attorney goes and gives a speech, goes out to dinner with clients, writes articles,
joins the Chamber of Commerce and goes to meetings and does a variety of things to BE SEEN they are
doing this because they are advertising themselves. You need to be constantly advertising yourself and
getting out there.

How have you promoted yourself so far in your legal career?

Lack of marketing is why careers stall and can also make it hard to find a job.
See You Need to Sell, Sell, Sell for more information.

Getting yourself out to employers (as many as possible) is hugely important. You should do everything within
your power to track down the right job. Do you think that the local window guy, the oil change shop and
others who are stuffing my mailbox with junk mail everyday care that I am not responding to their solicitations
filling up my mailbox each day?

I doubt it, because they keep coming:

THEY KNOW THAT IF THEY KNOCK ON ENOUGH DOORS THAT SOMETHING WILL OPEN UP.

You need to understand this logic as well. As an attorney, you are in the market and you have something to
sell (your services). You are competing with a lot of people for the same jobs. Some people will choose you
and sometimes they will choose someone else. The local oil change place may have to send its coupon to
500 households before someone comes in for an oil change. When someone does come in, though, they
may have gotten a customer for life. It is like that with a job as well: Kiss enough frogs and you may meet a
prince. If you find the right job, you too could have a job for life.
I've been doing this my entire career and have people that did just that around two decades ago. They approached a ton of law firms in their job searches. Early in my career I often flew to whatever city they were in, drove to meet them and sat down and explained the importance of applying to a lot of places: **IT IS THAT IMPORTANT.** Today, some of these people are the leaders of the largest law firms in the United States. They were in crisis and took action. This is how it works. Some of these people are working in cities, firms and environments they never could have imagined they would be working in, but they succeeded.

I have been doing this a long time and I speak with a lot of attorneys. Some of the most difficult attorneys to work with are attorneys who attended top law schools and worked at top law firms. When these attorneys are unhappy at a given firm they are very difficult to help because they are under some strange belief (I am not sure where it comes from) that they are such an important "brand" that it only makes sense for them to apply to a few firms.

They are saying, in effect, that they are so "exclusive" that they cannot "tarnish" their brand by applying to a lot of places.

Does this make any sense? It is insane. Rolls Royce, Louis Vuitton and other brands do not care where they are sold. They will put stores and dealerships in war zones if they have to in order to sell their products. I was in London a few years ago giving a speech and after the speech went and visited one of the oldest and most prestigious clothing stores for men on Saville Row in London. This is the same store that men from the Royal Family of England have been purchasing clothes at for generations. To my astonishment, the store had recently opened some 20 stores all over China, the only other location they had stores. Do you think they were concerned with their "brand"? They were chasing money and opportunity. You need to chase money and opportunity as well.

What happens to attorneys who refuse to apply or consider a variety of firms? Most of them end up pretty unhappy. They spend their lives concerned with prestige and not what is important to them. They base how they feel about themselves on the "group think" consciousness that says your happiness can only be determined by what others think and not what is important to you.

If someone went to a great law school and is practicing at a great firm, they sometimes are "prestige conscious" and only willing to consider similar firms of the same prestige level. What this means is that they are often going to move and find the same environment again. A legal career is about more than prestige. It is about finding an environment where you can succeed and do well over the long run. It is about being with a group of people who value you and where you can do well.

If someone from a smaller town/city goes to a law school like Harvard, Yale, or Stanford, the odds are very good that instead of working in St. Louis, Detroit, Memphis, Savannah. Ft. Meyers (Florida), Amarillo (Texas) and so forth, that the person will go to work in New York City, Palo Alto, or some other big city. As a legal recruiter, I have watched the career trajectory of thousands of attorneys. I see attorneys who made the choice to go to a large city and those who made the choice to go to a smaller one. In most instances, the person who goes to the large city gets burned out, frustrated and is pretty unhappy. They are a small fish in a big pond. Harvard Law graduates are a dime a dozen in New York or Los Angeles. It's a good degree, but they are **EVERYWHERE.** There were **FOUR OF THEM** on my old block of 15 or so homes when I lived in Pasadena, California.

In contrast, if you go to work in a smaller city you are suddenly a valued "celebrity" rock star attorney. People respect your background and law firms coddle and advance you. Clients admire you and you are given important work and have access to lots of opportunities and more stuff opens up to you. **Bill and Hillary Clinton probably would have had far, far different careers if they had moved to New York City after law school than if they had gone to Little Rock, Arkansas.** You will advance and do well to the extent you get...
positive input and reinforcement from your environment.

Where did you go after law school? How has this affected your career?

See the following articles for more information:
Groups and Their Norms Determine the Outcome of Our Lives
Success Requires Ignoring Group Norms
Group Rules, Walking Off, Suffering, and Your Career

You need to be around people who give you positive reinforcement. There is nothing wrong with working in a savage environment in a big city, but you want to be happy. The next time you think about how special you are and that you could never think about working in a smaller legal environment, ask yourself what would happen if you (1) went somewhere you were happy, and (2) got positive reinforcement.

Think about the times you have done best in your life. What were those environments like? What is the environment you are in now like? What would it take for you to find an environment like that again? How important is it to you to be happy?

See Why Robin Williams Killed Himself: The Importance of Being Yourself for more information.

The worst thing you can do is give up when you are not having immediate success in your job search. This is crazy. When a business gets started it often takes them years to become profitable, but they keep going because they know it will eventually be profitable. Attorneys are like businesses and need to push forward with the understanding that if they keep getting themselves out there they too will be profitable (and get a new job) and find an environment where there is growth potential.

The reason Coke was selling sodas and erecting billboards in the middle of nowhere was because that was where the opportunity for growth was.

Why take rejection so hard? You need to keep going and not stop, at all costs.

If you are rejected after an interview, learn from it. What could you have done differently? What could you do better the next time? Were you off and why? What have you done in the interviews you were most successful in previously?

Often, it is not even you that is the problem. The problem is that it is just not the right fit. A salesperson that gets an appointment with a prospect may not have any luck making a sale, but they keep trying. (If you have not seen Glengarry Glen Ross you need to see it!). The salesperson understands that each rejection they face puts them one step closer to making the sale.

See the following articles for more information:
Firm Culture Matters Most
The Worst Piece of Attorney Job Search Advice Ever

Where Does this Business About Telling You Not Apply to a Lot of Firms Come From?

When an attorney is looking for a job, there is no shortage of people telling them how to find a job. The attorney has friends, recruiters and law school career services offices all telling them how they should be searching for a job.
I am not saying that any of these people are "wrong" about how you should be searching for a job; however, you always want to make sure that you understand that the advice you are receiving may not necessarily benefit you, and may be biased because the person has an interest in your success (or lack thereof) that you may not necessarily see.

See Do Not Allow Others to Be in Control of Your Career and Life for more information.

Let's go through the various actors telling you not to apply to a lot of positions:

**Law School Career Services Offices**

Law school career services offices generally have your back when it comes to getting you a job and they want to get you a job. However, part of their role is to control the hiring process. They want to filter the best resumes to the best employers and control who sees whom. This is how it has always worked. If students and others start blasting their resumes to the same employers, chaos ensues and the career services offices lose control over the process. Hence, these offices will tell you about things like "networking", career fairs, on-campus interviews and other things that keep them in control.

Have you tried finding a job at a career fair? How did that work out for you?

In order to get a job, however, you need to contact as many employers as possible. There is no other way. It is very effective to do networking, of course, but that can only take you so far. You never know what aspect of you could jump out to a potential employer and what could make them hire you. It could be your qualifications (and often is) but it could also be:

- Your religion
- Your race
- Your age
- Your hobbies
- Your sexual orientation
- Your attractiveness
- Where you grew up
- A sport you played
- Your last name
- Something you have written
- Someone that knew you long ago
- Someone that knew one of your parents

Who the hell knows? The point is, something often jumps out at potential employers and makes them want to hire you. You cannot anticipate what this will be, and the only way to address this is to get out there to lots of employers.

I am going to say something right now that is going to blow your socks off, but it is true. MOST OF THE PLACEMENTS I MAKE ARE WITH FIRMS THAT DO NOT HAVE ANY CURRENT OPENINGS. I make an astounding number of placements compared to the average recruiter and "have a target on my back" because of this (competitors are, after all, jealous of success). I am able to make so many placements because I understand the need to find commonalities between firms and candidates. This does not always mean sending an attorney to a lot of firms. Most often it means explaining who the candidate is in a way that firms can identify with. Opportunities are created. You cannot just expect to apply to openings with hundreds of others and get a job. You need to create opportunities.

See To Get a Job You Need to Get the Employer’s Attention and Be a Safe Choice for more information.
Coca-Cola is not just selling soda to people who are thirsty. It is creating demand wherever it can.

**Friends**

Friends will often tell you not to apply to a lot of places. This may be a product of them being told the same thing by law school career services offices. I have no idea. It could also be a product of the fact that they too are competing for the same jobs. I also have no idea.

What I have noticed, however, is that the most competitive people are often the ones who are applying for the most jobs. Most successful job searches are the result of getting out there to a lot of firms. I noticed when I was in law school most students pretended they did not study a lot, when they in fact did.

If someone is telling you not to apply to a lot of places, you need to question their motives. What good can possibly come of this? They are not going to get you a job, are they? Are they going to support you when you do not have a job? Are they going to take care of you when you are unemployed?

See [Don’t Be Persuaded By Others Who Tell You How to Do Your Job Search](http://www.bcgsearch.com) for more information.

**Recruiters**

Recruiters also often tell you not to apply to a lot of different firms. This is a big problem that has screwed up countless careers. Let me tell you how this one works.

There are several national recruiting firms that are set up where individual recruiters in each office are the only contact responsible for certain law firms. It works like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RECRUITER A</th>
<th>RECRUITER B</th>
<th>RECRUITER C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Firms 1-10</td>
<td>Firms 11-20</td>
<td>Firms 21-30</td>
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With these firms, each recruiter in the office is the only one allowed to represent each of their 10 firms. These firms are the recruiter’s clients and each recruiter is the only one allowed to submit a candidate to each firm. This means that if you are approached or speak with RECRUITER A you will become their candidate, and the only openings they will tell you about are at firms 1 through 10. To discourage you from applying to more openings, they will spin various stories about how it is bad to apply to too many firms and so forth.

The logic of this antiquated system (still used by numerous recruiting firms) is that each recruiter will have a good relationship with each firm, get their openings and be able to better understand their needs. This made a lot of sense back in the day (20+ years ago when these older recruiting firms were set up) when law firms only worked with one recruiter. Today, just about every law firm in the United States now works with more than one recruiter.

If you are interested in a position with an opening that RECRUITER C has at firms 21-30 (perhaps you saw it on the recruiting firm website) and tell RECRUITER A about it they may be able to get RECRUITER C to submit you to the position, but then they may not. Both RECRUITER C and RECRUITER A will have to split commissions if you are submitted and hired. This means you may be told you are not a good fit or another candidate where no commission is involved may be "pushed" harder than you for the position.

This arrangement at many recruiting firms has stalled and messed up so many legal careers it is hard to believe. [BCG Attorney Search](http://www.bcgsearch.com) allows its recruiters to submit to any firm in the region they are working in.

Have you used BCG Attorney Search to help you find a job before? If so, what was your experience?
Recruiters will also try and discourage you from applying to a lot of positions because you may be applying to firms they do not have relationships with and they will then not get commissions. Many recruiting firms will do a ton of cold calling and divide cities and areas up into firms they steal attorneys from and those they put attorneys into. This means half the city is off-limits FOR YOU because recruiters cannot place attorneys at firms they recruit and steal people from. Law firms do not work with recruiting firms that are calling its attorneys all day. Recruiters then, of course, try and discourage candidates from applying to these firms.

BCG Attorney Search relies on other forms of marketing to get qualified candidates and does not divide markets up this way. This provides our candidates access to all of the opportunities in a given market.

Self-confidence and Rejection

Many attorneys believe that their "personal brand" is somehow harmed if a law firm does not "bite" at their resume and interview them. This is crazy and nonsensical to a shocking degree.

Some law firms receive hundreds of applications for each position. They do not know who you are or remember that you applied. These resumes are reviewed quickly and with very little judgment about you whatsoever. The reasons people are rejected are just as insane as the reasons people are interviewed.

I was in a meeting not too long ago with the hiring partner of a law firm I was working with and gave him a stack of resumes of interested candidates. Here are some of the things I heard:

"I would never hire someone from USC. I hired some people from there years ago and they quit working here within a year or so. Too many entitlement issues. I don't care if your candidate was first in his class and matches what we are looking for."

"Now this guy is good. I like people that play a lot of rugby. It means they are not afraid of getting down and dirty and know how to be one of the guys. We should bring this one in. Their background is not that strong but I could make that work."

Huh? This is how everyone’s mind works that is making hiring decisions. It is RANDOM and often makes no sense. I am not saying that merit does not matter. It is just that law firms like people and interview people for a variety of reasons. Some law firms are concerned mainly with education, others with experience, others with whether or not they like you. You just never have any idea whatsoever why you are interviewed and not interviewed and it is not for you to figure out.

I sent a woman who was FIRST in her class from a top 3 law school and practicing at a major law firm to another law firm with an opening for someone exactly like her. The attorney was REJECTED within 10 minutes.

"What?" I emailed the hiring partner.

"I want someone that is going to want to stick around and work hard here. Not someone that is going to think they are special and we are going to worry could leave if they get a bad review or do not work out."

The best of the best get rejected for being too good. People that are not good enough get rejected for not being good enough. You just never know with any of this.

See the following articles for more information:

The Fear of Rejection and Your Career
Expose Yourself to Pain in Your Job Search
I have seen some amazing things over the course of my recruiting career. I've seen someone with so-so qualifications apply to 50+ firms and get only one interview, with the top firm in a market (think something like Wachtel) and go work there. You never know.

When a law firm is looking at your experience they can look at it through a complex variety of prisms you will never understand.

One firm may dislike you because you have worked with major institutional clients and not family-owned companies.

Another firm may not like you because you have trial experience and they want someone who does not have trial experience. They want someone who will follow around the partners in the firm who do trials and write briefs.

Another firm may like you because you have experience working with a person they like.

I even saw a law firm hire a guy for a very competitive job once who was in his late 60s and had no business.

"I'm very glad for him, but I do not understand," I told the partner who had just offered this UNEMPLOYED attorney $350,000 a year and passed up attorneys in their early 40s with over $750,000 in business, with much better qualifications for the same position. I was flabbergasted ...

"Simple. Our clients will like him better. He wants the job and will not be able to go anywhere. He will not steal our clients and we think not having a job for six months has made him appreciate the value of work. He will never cause problems."

The point of all this is that law firms review your background in so many ways that you have absolutely no way of knowing what they are looking for. You could be rejected by every firm and hired by the best firm in the market. It is nothing personal, and law firms review so many applications that your ego should never fit into any of this. Do not worry about it and move on.

You Should Never Give Up Your Search

Giving up your search is ludicrous and nonsensical. The worst thing you can do is give up after weeks, months, or even years. This is your life we are talking about, and you have spent decades in most cases going through school and getting where you are. Giving up because things are not immediately going well for you is crazy. You are a complicated and unique product. It can take years to sell something.

What's the longest period of time that you have searched for a job?

See Frustration, Rejection, Sylvester Stallone, and Rocky for more information.

I was in a hotel in the Middle East years ago in an executive lounge. A couple of representatives of a large aircraft company were meeting with a very wealthy man that was considering purchasing a very expensive aircraft. When the meeting was over I started chatting with the men and they told me it was their third trip from the United States to see the man. They had been meeting with him for the past few years trying to interest him in purchasing their airplane.

"How long does it take to sell one of these planes?" I asked the men.

"It could take us 5 more years, we do not know. If he buys another one from a competitor, we will keep meeting with him. It could take 15 years then, but we hope we will eventually sell him a plane."

You are not selling $100-million airplanes, but you might as well be. You need to show the same level of
persistence that a company would to sell a $100-million airplane. There is too much at stake: your life, future, income and happiness. Do not give up on your dream and what you want. See Learn from Every Experience You Have Ever Had for more information.

One of my favorite stories is from the book Think and Grow Rich about stopping three feet from gold:

One of the most common causes of failure is the habit of quitting when one is overtaken by temporary defeat. Every person is guilty of this mistake at one time or another. An uncle of R. U. Darby was caught by the "gold fever" in the gold-rush days, and went west to DIG AND GROW RICH. He had never heard that more gold has been mined from the brains of men than has ever been taken from the earth. He staked a claim and went to work with pick and shovel. The going was hard, but his lust for gold was definite.

After weeks of labor, he was rewarded by the discovery of the shining ore. He needed machinery to bring the ore to the surface. Quietly, he covered up the mine, retraced his footsteps to his home in Williamsburg, Maryland, told his relatives and a few neighbors of the "strike." They got together money for the needed machinery, had it shipped. The uncle and Darby went back to work the mine.

The first car of ore was mined, and shipped to a smelter. The returns proved they had one of the richest mines in Colorado! A few more cars of that ore would clear the debts. Then would come the big killing in profits.

Down went the drills! Up went the hopes of Darby and Uncle! Then something happened! The vein of gold ore disappeared! They had come to the end of the rainbow, and the pot of gold was no longer there! They drilled on, desperately trying to pick up the vein again—all to no avail.

Finally, they decided to QUIT. They sold the machinery to a junk man for a few hundred dollars, and took the train back home. Some "junk" men are dumb, but not this one! He called in a mining engineer to look at the mine and do a little calculating. The engineer advised that the project had failed, because the owners were not familiar with "fault lines." His calculations showed that the vein would be found JUST THREE FEET FROM WHERE THE DARBYS HAD STOPPED DRILLING! That is exactly where it was found!

The "Junk" man took millions of dollars in ore from the mine, because he knew enough to seek expert counsel before giving up. Most of the money which went into the machinery was procured through the efforts of R. U. Darby, who was then a very young man. The money came from his relatives and neighbors, because of their faith in him. He paid back every dollar of it, although he was years in doing so.

Long afterward, Mr. Darby recouped his loss many times over, when he made the discovery that DESIRE can be transmuted into gold. The discovery came after he went into the business of selling life insurance.

Remembering that he lost a huge fortune, because he STOPPED three feet from gold, Darby profited by the experience in his chosen work, by the simple method of saying to himself, "I stopped three feet from gold, but I will never stop because men say 'no' when I ask them to buy insurance."

Darby is one of a small group of fewer than fifty men who sell more than a million dollars in life insurance annually. He owes his "stickability" to the lesson he learned from his "quitability" in the gold mining business.

Before success comes in any man's life, he is sure to meet with much temporary defeat, and,
perhaps, some failure. When defeat overtakes a man, the easiest and most logical thing to do is to QUIT. That is exactly what the majority of men do.

More than five hundred of the most successful men this country has ever known, told the author their greatest success came just one step beyond the point at which defeat had overtaken them. Failure is a trickster with a keen sense of irony and cunning.

It takes great delight in tripping one when success is almost within reach.

What do you think you need to do in your career to go the extra three feet?

Conclusions

You need to get out there and approach a ton of employers to get the best job. You need to approach a lot of places in order to get a position. Everyone does. This is how it works. You also positively must not give up when you do not get the job you want. The most important thing you can do is to never give up and continue no matter what. Winners never quit and quitters never win.