



ATTORNEY SEARCH

*The Standard in Attorney
Search and Placement*

Article of the Week from Harrison Barnes

If You're Following This Common Attorney Job Search Advice You Won't Go Far

Summary: Find out why you should avoid this attorney job search advice at all costs if you want to do well in your career as an attorney.

Just about the craziest thing I have ever come across is the belief—which comes from who knows where—that attorneys should not be marketed to a lot of firms. Incredibly, this is an unfounded and counterproductive belief that is promoted to attorneys by their peers, by law school career services offices, by legal recruiters and just about everyone out there you can imagine.

As a result, the majority of attorneys are either never employed, underemployed, unhappily employed, employed in cities they do not want to be employed in, under compensated, stressed out, miserable, dying, living with their parents, confused about why they have a law degree, or dead.

See the following articles for more information:

- **[Another Big Law Attorney I Know Just Died Young](#)**
- **[25 Reasons Most Attorneys Hate the Practice of Law and Go Crazy \(and What to Do About it\)](#)**

As a preliminary matter, I would like to get something straight: **There is nothing wrong with looking for a job.** In fact, everyone does it—including the [President](#), the CEO of giant corporations, [Donald Trump](#) and, yes, attorneys. In order to get a job you need to apply to a lot of places, talk to a lot of people and market yourself broadly. You are a business and need to be seen to be purchased. Are you above [General Motors](#), [Boeing](#),



ATTORNEY SEARCH

*The Standard in Attorney
Search and Placement*

Coke, Apple, IBM and other businesses that also need to be seen and spend billions advertising annually?

What makes you so special that you should not be looking for a job and have to apply anywhere?

The screwed up person who led you to believe there was something wrong with looking for a job and applying to a lot of places should be responsible for your

- student loans,
- car payment,
- mortgage,
- medical bills,
- pride,
- happiness,
- wasted time in college and law school, and
- raising your children if you have them.

Moreover, this screwed up person can sit at home with you doing nothing while your legal career floats away. Heck, they can find you another family when your husband or wife disappears because he or she is sick and tired of hearing about how the legal market is bad and there are “no legal jobs.”

The legal market is never bad. Anyone who wants to work can always get multiple jobs. He or she just needs to understand how things work.

See the following articles for more information:

- **[Treating Your Legal Career Like a Small Business](#)**
- **[Marketing as a Career Development Strategy](#)**



You would think that people who are trained to do aggressive research, question assumptions and poke holes in arguments (**attorneys**) would not believe any of this stuff about not marketing themselves like every other business in the world. But for whatever reason they do believe it. I see it again and again.

I see it from

- high ranking partners who lose jobs,
- new attorneys,
- law students,
- experienced attorneys, and
- everyone in between.

“Let’s all commit suicide en masse and not apply to a lot of places!”

“Great idea! Everyone else is doing it. I know so many people doing it too!”

“Yeah! Here we go dying and throwing our lives and careers away! No one gets to see my resume either!”

It is so messed up. Many of these suicidal attorneys apply to a half-dozen places and then give up when nothing materializes under the belief that it is “hopeless.” Meanwhile, lesser-qualified attorneys apply to between 50 and 200 firms or more and find themselves entertaining multiple job offers. Then they suddenly grow huge egos and start counteroffer situations from multiple law firms at the same time.

There are a lot of strange reasons for attorneys believing all of this nonsense about not applying to more than a few firms. However, before I get into this I would like to tell you why it is important for most attorneys to apply to a lot of firms when they are doing a job search. In fact, this is so important that to not do so is about the dumbest thing any attorney can do.



ATTORNEY SEARCH

*The Standard in Attorney
Search and Placement*

Is it always necessary for an attorney to apply to a lot of firms? Of course not! Many top attorneys I work with apply to one or at most three or four firms, and this is fine. This sort of hyper-selectivity should generally be reserved for “the top 1%”. If you are this sort of attorney I would be excited to work with you.

I work with many attorneys like this, but it is rare that you need to be this selective. What type of selectivity am I talking about? If you are (1) the right class year and (2) the right practice area at [Wachtell Lipton](#) and are only interested in [Sullivan & Cromwell](#) and [Davis Polk](#), then that is fine. I might be too. Very few attorneys have the ability to be this selective, though, and if this is you then you already know who you are. If you think you are part of this group because you are working at any old AmLaw 100 law firm the odds are you are not. You may have great qualifications and may be marketable, but you certainly need to look for opportunities at more than one firm. I’ve worked with partners with giant books of business who spoke with 15+ firms over a few years before they found a home. They speak with a lot of people because they know that each opportunity they are offered and their comfort level is going to be different in each place.

- **See [Why Every Attorney Needs to Apply to a Lot of Places \(and Not Give Up\) When Rejected](#) for more information.**

I have been in this business a long time. Getting [jobs for attorneys](#) is my passion and something I have dedicated my career to. I have seen what does and does not work for literally hundreds of thousands of attorneys. The disinformation out there about the proper way to do a job search needs to be corrected.

At [BCG Attorney Search](#) we have a staff of over 150 employees contacting and monitoring every law firm in the country for their jobs. We generally know with great exactitude where all of the jobs are, and it takes a lot of resources to find these jobs. We do not always know where all the jobs are (we missed one we should have found three weeks ago, heads rolled and we called a special staff meeting to go over what happened), but we are pretty damn good at it.



Even with this staff, however, over 50% of the placements I make are with firms that do not have openings. This is an incredibly important point to understand. ***If you are just applying to openings you are missing more than half the market.***

This obvious, plain fact is missed by 95%+ of attorneys out there looking for jobs. The problem is not with the job market. The problem is with the way attorneys look for jobs and the ridiculous “iron clad” preconceptions that they have about looking for jobs.

See the following articles for more information:

- [**How to Get Hired Where There is Not Even an Opening**](#)
- [**How to Find Unadvertised Jobs**](#)

People follow the wrong information all the time. Heck, people used to believe the world was flat and called everyone crazy who believed otherwise. The family of [**Guglielmo Marconi**](#), who invented the ability to send radio waves through the air, tried to have him institutionalized when he declared he could send voice transmissions through the air.

Here are the top 10 things most attorneys, legal recruiters and law school administrators do not understand about applying to law firms:

1. Law Firms Often Do Not Understand What Their Needs Are

Attorneys are under some strange belief that every law firm out there sits down and uses a committee to decide what sorts of openings it has. The law firm then announces this opening and the games begin!

Large, major institutional law firms (perhaps 200 to 300 law firms in the country) do this; however, they generally only tell recruiters about their needs, or post them on their website or job sites like [**LawCrossing.com**](#), when they are not getting enough resumes from other sources. (Some law firms rarely post openings because people like me are



smart enough to have a “pulse on the firm” and send them candidates they know they will need before there ever is an opening. These candidates of mine face virtually zero competition for these jobs.)

By the time a law firm “goes public” with a job it is going to be flooded with resumes from every attorney and recruiter with an Internet connection. The firm will hire the best candidate it can get, and your odds of getting that job will be very slim unless you are the perfect candidate (from the area, the correct class year, with the best educational qualifications, at the best firm, the most polished professionally in person, the best experience and more). Like a long line of sheep lining up for slaughter, like someone with a 25% percentile on the LSAT and a 2.5 grade point average in physical education from a community college in rural South Dakota applying to [Yale Law School](#), these attorneys are headed to almost certain doom. An attorney at the hiring law firm will likely never even see their resume.

When a law firm starts [posting jobs](#) it is never a good thing. Most resumes go to recruiting personnel inside of the law firm whose responsibility it is to weed through hundreds of resumes and only show the best ones to mercurial partners inside of the law firm. These women (most of them are women) are often so frazzled the last thing they want to do is either (1) post a job publicly or (2) have to fill one. Once they do, the floodgates open up and they are responsible for entering hundreds of resumes into their database, sending rejection letters and emails and dealing with a flood of phone calls from interested attorneys with no hope whatsoever of getting a job at the firm.

“Where are you now?” the recruiting coordinator might ask.

“I’m a contract attorney with the law offices of Raul Steven in Canton, Ohio. I do personal injury work. I would like to move to New York City and work at [Skadden](#). I’m not paid very well here—just \$15 an hour. I think I would be an excellent corporate attorney.”

If you think I am joking, you would be wrong. This happens to every law firm administrator



that is unfortunate enough to have to post a job publicly.

The law firm administrators sifting through this onslaught of resumes start becoming unbelievably picky. Law firm administrators (some with zero to little college) start acting like low-paid bureaucrats and weeding out resumes that only have 2.5 and not “exactly” three years of experience. As an aside, many law firm recruiters are exceptional. Some are former lawyers from top firms. The issue is that many law firm administrators without legal experience or training in their job do not understand what makes a good candidate.

- **See [Top 10 Characteristics of Superstar Associates Who Make Partner](#) for more information about what makes a good candidate.**

We typically do a very good job explaining why our candidates are good to law firms. This sort of advocacy usually pays off. I have had multiple candidates contact the major law firms in a given city on their own to get zero interviews. I come along a few months later and contact the same firms and the candidates are able to get interviews—and hired—by several of the firms that rejected them when they contacted the law firms on their own. Here, the recruiter trusted me and my opinions about a candidate, but did not trust the candidates’ own opinions about themselves (because they could not see the strength of the candidate).

However, sometimes recruiting coordinators and others have not listened to me. They become so literal they are completely black and white.

I once called a law firm administrator who had rejected a few of my candidates and said: “You’ve rejected three candidates of mine who I’ve placed at great firms. One is at [Gibson Dunn](#), the other is at [Covington & Burling](#) and the third is at [Sidley & Austin](#). I would like to meet you for lunch and go over why those were good candidates.”

I took her to an expensive lunch. It turned out she had been a secretary at the law firm after high school and promoted to being a recruiting coordinator. She had no idea what



she was doing and was being “literal” (top ten law schools only, AmLaw 100 law firms only—regardless of class rank, regardless of the prestige of a law firm smaller in size than an AmLaw 100 law firm, exact class year, if it was for an M & A attorney she would disqualify them if they also had a lot of securities experience, etc.).

After the meeting she started calling me all the time with questions and I trained her in a lot of aspects of what makes good candidate. Over a period of about four months, she also hired three of my candidates in a row, and then two more about six months later.

The point was that this woman was working for a major national law firm and had no idea what she was doing. There are people like this in many law firms. If you send them your resume in response to a job posting you may be out of luck, even if you are the best candidate for the job. The ability to intervene is something that makes a good recruiter extremely effective.

If you send your resume to a well-placed partner in the firm (something that a good recruiter will do), then you are likely to have much more luck getting seen, because the partner will know what to look for. However, ads in response to job postings go to recruiting administrators in most cases, and that is just another reason why it is often a poor idea to just apply to [law firms with openings](#).

While a formal “committee announcement” of a job may be reassuring, unless they are in the midst of a major downsizing and “total hiring freeze” (something I have very rarely seen) most law firms are almost always hiring anyway. In fact, even in the midst of major downsizing most law firms are still hiring, even if they do not have “public jobs.”

- Different practice areas are in demand at different points in time. If a law firm is getting rid of several of its corporate attorneys, it may be growing by leaps and bounds in litigation. (This generally is the pattern, by the way. When the economy slows, litigation picks up because people blame others for their economic losses).
- If a law firm is letting go a group of attorneys it dislikes because they are connected



to a partner or partners the firm dislikes, the firm may be hiring new attorneys to replace them. The firm will never be insensitive enough to announce it is hiring in the midst of all of this.

- I have seen firms get rid of entire groups of attorneys with “average” qualifications so they could replace them with attorneys from better schools and pedigrees to attract larger institutional clients.

Job openings are “guidelines” in many other respects as well. For example, I know that certain law firms will always interview good litigators even if they do not have any job openings. I know other firms will always interview strong tax attorneys—and so forth. You should never just rely on guidelines.

See the following articles for more information:

- **[Do Your Job Search on Heavy Ground](#)**
- **[Keep a Broad Perspective When Looking for a Job](#)**

2. Law Firms Are Businesses and Hire People When They Can Make Money

I periodically see articles in legal publications where partners in law firms are interviewed and say something to the effect of: “We’ve never had so much work in our practice area in my 30 years at the firm! We are dying here!”

I will check and the law firm will not have any openings. Its website will say “we do not have any current openings.” The law firm administrator will say: “We don’t have any openings that I know of.” But of course this firm needs to hire more attorneys and will jump on the opportunity to do so if it is properly presented to them.

I once had several candidates I was having a difficult time placing:



- One had publicly lost a high-profile job with the government when it came out that he had two wives (unbeknownst to either wife) and the public. He had formerly been the head of a major US law firm prior to being appointed to his high-profile government role. He had been out of work for three years when I met him and was in his late 50s and living with his mother because he had nowhere else to live (both wives had divorced him and taken his money and belongings). He appeared to have chewed off part of his lower lip and was chewing it when I met him. It was bleeding and he was wiping it with a bloody handkerchief. Not a good situation.
- Another young woman had a grand total of two weeks of experience in her first job out of law school before she quit. She had been sexually harassed by a professor in law school. He was fired for stalking her. When she started work at her first law firm she was put in an office right next to him, and when she told the firm it refused to believe her and she walked off the job. She received poor references and had been embroiled in a well-known lawsuit that got her blackballed in the entire state she was trying to get a job in.
- A few others had been unemployed for extended periods of time and did not have the best references, but I believed in them.

I sent every one of those candidates to the partner I had seen remark about the massive amounts of work. He hired **FIVE** of my candidates within 14 days of me submitting them to him. His firm subsequently merged into one firm that then became [Reed Smith](#). Never in any of these attorneys' wildest dreams could they have imagined they would be working at such a great firm. The firm did not have openings when I sent them there.

The reason these attorneys got jobs was because law firms are businesses and will hire people when they have billable work for them to do. They will always hire people when they have work. I wish more attorneys understood this point, but it is pretty simple.

Lawyers are sitting around in their law firms working on their cases and their deals. Regardless of the economy, there are always attorneys who are going to be busier than



other attorneys. This is just how it works in capitalism. These busy attorneys may have such a good reputation that work is flowing through the door, but they cannot do the work, or take on new work.

Lawyers are not in the recruitment business, they are in the practicing law business. Even when they are swamped (especially when they are swamped), they do not sit down and look for more attorneys because they are too busy to do so, even if they could make more money. But when attorneys do hire more people to help them, it can work out extremely well and **ALL ATTORNEYS KNOW THIS**. If a resume appears that they are comfortable with and can make money from they will **HIRE YOU**.

The math of all of this is very simple. While I have not figured overhead into all this, you should understand from the below that you represent a lot of profit to a law firm.

- **SCENARIO A:** If they (1) can bill you out at \$350 an hour and (2) you work even 1,000 hours a year for \$200,000, (3) they make \$150,000 (4) because you've brought in \$350,000. They also get more work done and impress their clients.
- **SCENARIO B:** If (1) they pay you \$150,000, (2) they make \$200,000. Not bad.
- **SCENARIO C:** If (1) you work 2,000 hours (most likely) and (2) they pay you \$200,000 (3) they make \$500,000 because (4) you brought in \$700,000. (That's decent money for giving you work to do and putting up with you.)
- **SCENARIO D:** If they hire five of you under "Scenario C," they will make \$2.5 million. That's very good money.
- **SCENARIO E:** If they hire five partners with \$1-million in business each and pay each of them \$300,000, they can now make \$3.5 million. If you combine scenario D with E then the money really starts to add up!

Yes, there is crazy money to be made from the rental of your labor to clients. Law firms are businesses. If (1) they have work they can make money from billing your services on, (2) you seem like someone who has the pedigree that is passable to their clients, and (3)



ATTORNEY SEARCH

*The Standard in Attorney
Search and Placement*

you look like you will not make trouble, then they will hire you, regardless of whether they have openings. Of course they will.

They would be nuts not to. That is why when certain markets are hot the smartest thing you can possibly do is approach the firms with the most work, or ones that are likely to have a lot of work. Again, you would be nuts not to.

I used to run a business that would basically research all of the firms in a given city in an attorney's practice group and for a fee would print letters and envelopes and send attorneys out to the firms that matched what they were looking for. Most legal recruiters only send attorneys to openings and most "prestigious" attorneys are only interested in applying to a few prestigious firms, so this was a good way to help attorneys beyond [BCG Attorney Search](#).

I remember one day sitting in my office in downtown Los Angeles in 2001 when the world seemed to be melting down and jobs were scarce. That day I met with a few Ivy league-type attorneys from major firms: [Latham & Watkins](#), [O'Melveny](#) and a few others who had been laid off and whose worlds were crashing around them. They were very upset. There were less than 10 or 15 serious corporate openings in the United States at big firms at the time and these candidates had applied to all of them with no luck. One was getting ready to go live in Asia and teach English and another was going to live with his brother in rural Colorado from what I remember. The atmosphere was dim and silly. It was silly because there were plenty of jobs they could get if they followed the correct approach.

"You really should apply to firms that do not have openings and let me send you there. You will easily get something. This is ridiculous," I told each of them.

Like many attorneys before them, however, they were brainwashed into believing you only should apply to firms with openings and they said things like this:

"I do not want to harm my brand."



“That’s not the right thing to do. I could never do that.”

Says who? You are going to live in your brother’s apartment in rural Colorado with no job. You are going to teach English in the jungles of Asia. What brand? You are harming your brand being unemployed. It’s great you were *order of the coif* from [UCLA Law School](#), but none of that matters in the jungle!

After another particularly depressing meeting with a guy who was losing his visa and being deported back to Bombay, India after losing his job as a corporate attorney at [Morrison & Foerster](#), two happy and confident young men in sunglasses came into my office with one of their fathers. The father rushed up to me and gave me a hug. The two guys were friends and recent graduates of [Thomas Cooley Law School](#) in Lansing, Michigan and both had gotten several job offers in Los Angeles through my former resume mailing service ([Legal Authority](#)). With my help, they’d each applied to over 1,000 law firms in Los Angeles.

They were there to thank me. They were getting ready to start work at their [Los Angeles law firm jobs](#), and the father was so proud of one of them he was going to buy him a small boat to live on in Marina Del Rey.

The contrast for me was bizarre.

On the one hand, here were two guys with unremarkable educational qualifications who had relocated, grown up in small towns in Michigan and were starting exciting careers in law firms. On the other hand, here were a couple of much smarter and more highly-credentialed attorneys afraid to mass market themselves, and their legal careers were dying after only a few years. They did not know how to look for a job and would not take advice about how to find a job.

When the work dries up at major law firms in various practice areas, it is because companies are trying to save money and not sending them as much work. They send



work to smaller law firms, and the smaller law firms grow and start getting more work. This happens all over, and it is a cycle that repeats again and again.

It is not just job seekers that do not know how to find jobs. Recruiters can get demoralized as well.

I have another quick story that I think is quite interesting and instructive, and it is about a mistake made at our own company. After 2008 and the financial crisis, there was a total meltdown in the New York market. I had a few recruiters working in that market whose activity and number of placements practically dried up overnight. This was certainly nothing unusual: The freeze in the market had been quite profound, and very few firms were not affected.

For a period of about six months, there was a legitimate “meltdown” in this market, and in addition to the city being filled with unemployed people looking like zombies, law firms were freaked out and very few were hiring. The openings dried up and our recruiters became “battle scarred” and afraid to send people anywhere, lest the law firms lecture them that they were in the midst of the greatest meltdown in work they had ever experienced (which happened to them a few times). For a period of six months, this demoralizing experience took its toll on these recruiters and it was all they could do to get out of bed in the morning. Two of the recruiters suggested that our placement firm should get into other industries, at least as far as New York City was concerned.

After about six months of no activity, these recruiters left our company and were quickly replaced by “bright eyed and bushy tailed” recruiters who were trained by me, had not been through the same experience and knew only what I told them about recruiting. They immediately jumped in and started making placements. In fact, in her first few months one of these new recruiters had more interviews and more placements than I had ever seen a new recruiter have in my entire career.

The women who had been demoralized had become afraid to work. The new recruiters



did not care. What happened? Like battle scarred job seekers afraid of rejection or “hurting their brands,” these recruiters became afraid to do their jobs.

The big thing I saw was this: Many of the law firms had let far too many people go during the financial meltdown. When they realized this they started aggressively hiring again. It was as simple as that. Law firms are businesses and they respond to economic cycles: over fire, then over hire, and so forth.

- **See [Law Firm Business Fundamentals: How to Run a Successful Law Firm](#) for more information.**

Had my former recruiters not been demoralized by a few mean phone calls from law firms—had they not given up but forged ahead and kept sending candidates out to firms, then when the hiring picked up again, their candidates would have been the first hired. Recruiters always need to be getting you out and marketing you. The market may “slow down”, but it always picks up again. Law firms are businesses.

- **See [How a Good Legal Recruiter Finds the Best in You and Communicates it to Employers: How to Define Your Unique Selling Proposition](#) for more information.**

3. Some Law Firms Always Have Openings

Most law firms always have openings. Strong litigation law firms generally are always [looking for good litigators](#). Strong patent prosecution law firms generally always have [patent prosecution openings](#). Is this always the case? Of course not; however, understanding “the nature” of various types of law firms and the sort of people that they hire is the job of a good legal recruiter. Law firms that consistently have openings for various types of attorneys do not need to advertise these openings either: Good recruiters know about these openings and the nature of the law firm.



The issue is more complex than that, however. Even if a law firm does not have a “formal” opening, a good legal recruiter is likely to understand the nature of the attorney looking for work and the nature of the law firm. A good legal recruiter is a “matchmaker” and can see the sorts of attorneys that various law firms are likely to be interested in at all times. Certain law firms and attorneys are good matches and the job of a good recruiter is to understand the nature of both.

4. It Can Be a Good Idea to Apply to Law Firms You Have Not Heard of

This is another huge mistake that attorneys make. They believe that a “name brand” law firm is always better than one that is not a name brand law firm. There are several problems with this logic. Here are a few:

- Name brand law firms started out as small.
- There are often more opportunities in growing law firms than established ones.
- It is more difficult to advance in large law firms than smaller ones. (**See [The Benefits of Avoiding the Large Law Firm](#) for more information.**)
- The culture of the law firm you join will often determine your success or failure more than any single other factor. (**See [Firm Culture Matters Most](#) for more information.**)
- The work-life balance of a smaller law firm will have an impact on how long you end up practicing. (**See [Finding Work/Life Balance](#) for more information.**)

I could debate and discuss this indefinitely. The point is that some of the smartest attorneys out there choose firms where they have a future compared to those where they may not. You should not be so “mesmerized” by the lull and prestige of a large, name brand law firm that you discount everything else out there. That is crazy.

You need to find a law firm that makes you happy and where you can have a long and fulfilling career. You would be crazy not to do this. You need to explore the market



and find people like you that you will be happy around. A job search and where you work should not be about your ego as much as it is about finding a place that matches your social, psychological and financial needs. Perhaps a high pressure environment where you never see your family will match these needs—or not—but you need to have contrasts and apply to a lot of law firms to find that place.

See the following articles for more information:

- [**How Attorneys Choose Law Firms**](#)
- [**How Attorneys Destroy Their Careers by Choosing the Wrong Law Firms**](#)

5. It Can Be a Good Idea to Apply to a Firm Even If You Heard Something Bad About It

When I review lists of law firms with attorneys that they should be applying to, they always cross off various firms because they may have heard something bad about the firm recently, a year ago, or even twenty years ago. While there are some legitimately bad firms out there, in reality most law firms (large and small) are groups of several businesses. Attorneys cluster in practice areas and attorneys in practice areas cluster in groups inside of law firms. It is the practice area and the attorney(s) you are working with that you should be concerned with, not necessarily the law firm.

Even bad law firms have good practice areas. Even bad practice areas have good attorneys to work with. Even law firms that “never make partner” always make partners when a powerful partner with a ton of business wants to promote one of his subordinates. This is just how it works.

When you are looking for a job, your objective is to find the right group of attorneys to work with in the right law firm. This should be your overriding concern and what motivates you when you are looking for a job: Not the name of the firm or some stuff you’ve heard about on a gossip site online.



ATTORNEY SEARCH

*The Standard in Attorney
Search and Placement*

- See **Seek Out and Work with People Who Share Your Beliefs** for more information.

6. New Law Firms Are Popping Up All the Time

Law firms are emerging daily and many become successful. With so much fluidity in the market and so many things constantly happening, you cannot afford not to apply to these places. I've seen new law firms hire junior attorneys with a promise of partnership in a year or two. If a recruiter is recommending these you should at least check them out and apply.

7. When the Economy is Growing Rapidly, Law Firms Will Hire in All Practice Areas (Regardless of Openings)

When the economy is on a run, law firms large and small in some cities will be hiring, regardless of whether or not they have a formalized need. This is just how it is. Does this happen often? No. But it does happen. When a good recruiter starts making recommendations in a hot market you should listen.

In early 2000s during the "dot com" boom I saw some stuff so crazy I could not believe it. Top law firms in New York started hiring people out of fourth tier law schools as laterals to be corporate attorneys. Law firms in the Bay Area did the same. The market was that hot. It was so hot that smaller law firms would have hired practically anyone in the right practice area.

If a good recruiter is making recommendations to move fast in a certain market, then you should move fast. The sun does not always shine forever.

8. The Market Moves in Predictable Ways (Geographically and Otherwise)

At [BCG Attorney Search](http://www.bcgsearch.com), we have a data scientist on staff who uses several points of information to understand exactly what is going on with the market at all times.



ATTORNEY SEARCH

*The Standard in Attorney
Search and Placement*

Law firm openings and needs typically move in geographic trends throughout the country. For example, economic trends and “hiring upticks” and slowdowns generally start in either the Bay Area or New York City. Several months later these trends find themselves in Chicago, and several months after that they hit Texas. This is just how the legal market works. I’ve seen these patterns multiple times.

What this means is that if you start applying to places in Chicago after an economic uptick starts in New York, you may be the first in line when things pick up a few months later. The same goes for “getting in” if a slowdown starts in New York. If you see a flurry of suggestions from a BCG Attorney Search recruiter all of a sudden, the odds are pretty good that the recruiter is making these recommendations due to the use of data showing either a pickup or slowdown that looks underway or imminent in a given market.

If a market like New York City is in a major meltdown, the pain of this is likely to be felt by big firms and the work will move to smaller firms. A good recruiter will then start marketing you to smaller firms in the midst of all of this.

In addition, if attorneys with “average” qualifications are suddenly getting numerous interviews in a given practice area in a given location of the country, this means that this practice area is “on fire” and that there are likely to be opportunities within more firms even without firms having formally declared openings.

9. Law Firms List Their Openings a Lot of Places and It’s Difficult to Get the True Picture

Attorneys often believe that because they look at some websites they know about all of the openings. With the exception of LawCrossing.com (where we publish all of our researched jobs in addition to paid job postings), most websites typically only post jobs on them that employers have paid to post. If you see a job on a site like Gig.com, that just means that this website and others have the same jobs.

We have discovered **WELL OVER 1,000** individual (non-law firm) websites where law



firms post their jobs. They could be websites for legal associations, websites for the city they are in, major job boards, or small job boards. The point is, you are never going to have perfect intelligence on your own and law firm jobs are in far, far too many places for you to ever second guess them. More importantly, there are so many places law firms can post their jobs on that you are often better off just applying than you are waiting to see if they have openings after reviewing 1,000+ websites as part of your effort to “double check” whether some committee has met and discussed openings.

10. If You Have Good Enough Qualifications, Any Firm Can Potentially Be Talked into Hiring You

Attorneys with exceptional qualifications make the law firms that hire them look good. Every law firm likes to say they have people from various top law schools working there, or people with experience at one great law firm or another. Even in the midst of the harshest recession, most law firms will savor the opportunity to bring on the socially polished valedictorian of a top ten law school.

This is especially the case when an attorney is relocating home. If an attorney is relocating home to a smaller market (New York City to Grand Rapids Michigan, for example) from somewhere else in the country and has great qualifications, that attorney needs to be marketed to most firms in a given market, regardless of openings. If a superstar is returning home, the law firms will all want to see that superstar regardless of whether or not they have an opening.

Conclusions

If you are a lawyer seeking employment who has been victim of the misinformation campaign about not applying to a lot of firms, you are not alone. Let me tell you some reasons people do not want you applying to a lot of firms and then let me correct the misinformation.



- **See [Why Every Attorney Needs to Apply to a Lot of Places \(and Not Give Up\) When Rejected](#) for more information.**

First, it is a lot of work and it is EXPENSIVE to CORRECTLY apply to a lot of firms.

If I am working with a candidate on a major national search I may send him or her to over 300 firms in a given practice area and location, and I will get this candidate a good job. I'm confident of it.

Our company is formal and we send letters, faxes and emails to law firms (and then follow up with the law firms weekly). We do this because we want to make sure the information is received and letters coming into law firms as paper are treated differently than simple emails. This requires a huge investment of time and resources on our part and a lot of people, office space and so forth. In representing one highly-qualified candidate, we may collectively spend thousands of dollars on paper, postage and hundreds of man hours representing the candidate effectively. Most recruiters will email your stuff around, and it gets deleted, hits spam folders and so forth and may never be seen. We always mail, fax and email formalized submissions on stationary, double check to see our submissions are received and then follow up.

If a recruiter is working out of his or her home somewhere and is a "lifestyle recruiter" who does not pick up the phone and recruits via a cell phone while shopping, this is simply not going to be the sort of service you are going to get. These types of recruiters will discourage you from applying to a lot of firms because they do not have the time, managerial ability, staff, money, or skills to get it done. They also do not have the motivation to do the work needed to do that many submissions. At 10 minutes a submission, you are talking about 3,000 minutes for 300 submissions (which is 50 hours). Do you think any recruiter is going to do that for you?

These recruiters will tell you they are "connected" and all sorts of other stuff to distract you from the fact that they do not have the time or resources to do the work needed to get you the sort of job you need. They will submit you to a few firms and then forget about



you. Have you ever worked with a legal recruiter that you heard from once and then never heard from again? More likely than not it is probably because you hired a child to do an adult job. I once had a friend who died of cancer because his first line of defense when it started was his chiropractor and then a “naturopath” that urged him to cure his lymphoma by eating more greens. I’m not kidding. You should not mess around with your future.

It is rare that we ever send someone to 300 firms, but sometimes we need to: You need a job and are willing to work where you can find the best one. If we need to aggressively market you because your happiness and future depends on it we will.

In addition to recruiters telling you that you should not apply to a lot of places, you may also have heard this sort of information from your law school. Do not get me started about this. Law school administrators often make in excess of \$100,000 a year to work in the career services offices and advise you on where to apply. Contacting the right firms does work. You would be severely under marketing yourself not to. If you take the advice of others you will compete with every other person in a uniform way where you are likely to lose and not win the job search game.

Second, it takes a lot of work to have thousands of law firm relationships. It is one thing for a legal recruiter to know every law firm in their city in the [NALP Guide](#). It is quite another for the legal recruiter and firm to have a staff of people whose job is to reach out to every law firm they can find, establish relationships with them and find them the candidates they want. That costs a lot of money and it is serious business. It is not boutique recruiting and it is not something a recruiter can do from home. It requires a large-scale operation with lots of employees and resources. If a recruiter, law school administrator or other person has not made this investment, it will be your loss.

I once spent weeks travelling the country and meeting with law school career services offices trying to convince them to get their students to apply to a lot of places. What I found will amaze you.



Some of these offices are exceptional. I've been very impressed with schools of all shapes and sizes. I'm impressed with [UCLA](#), [Columbia University](#), [Brooklyn Law School](#), [Stetson Law School](#), [New York University](#), [Ohio State](#) and several others. Some, however, I was not too impressed with. Some actually discourage people from applying to a lot of law firms. On the one hand, some of these schools want to place their best students in jobs and administrators want to take credit for this and impress the bureaucracy and justify their salaries. On the other hand, some of these schools are actually just trying to keep the gravy train rolling. I've heard the following:

"If we tell students to apply to 500 firms, then our office is going to be responsible for putting together that information and this will be extra work for us."

"If we tell students they need to spend the time applying to hundreds of firms, then the parents are going to think they are wasting money on their education if it is that hard to get a job. We cannot be seen as taking that risk."

Third, it takes a ton of work to find all of the jobs (not just the low-hanging jobs).

Everyone knows when there is an opening for a patent attorney at [Morrison & Foerster](#) in Palo Alto. What every recruiter does not know, however, is the 30+ other firms (small to large) in Palo Alto that may have [patent attorney openings](#) at the same time. It takes a lot of insight, research and heavy lifting to find all of these jobs. If you are not hearing about these jobs (and applying to a lot of them) then someone has not done their homework to find all of the openings. It is serious work to find all of the openings and know market patterns, and most recruiters are unwilling to do this work. Unfortunately, it is your career and life at stake.

Fourth, most attorneys do not understand what a good recruiter is, and they put their trust in someone based on criteria that makes almost zero sense. Recruiting firms like to tout the fact that their recruiters went to good schools or worked in good firms, as if this has something to do with being a good recruiter (being thick skinned, being an aggressive researcher, not giving up, being interested in people, being



ATTORNEY SEARCH

*The Standard in Attorney
Search and Placement*

passionate about helping others and so forth).

This is the most ass backwards pile of baloney I've ever heard: Attorneys are risk adverse and concerned about what other people think of them. They are often the last people in the world you want advocating on your behalf. They are worried about pissing people off and rocking the boat.

Over a decade ago, I used to hire recruiters who only went to top law schools and were from top law firms. I thought this was a good idea, and attorneys came and used our recruiting firm because they were impressed with it. Others soon copied this because it was a way to attract good candidates and look "relatable" to them.

One day I was spending time with a man who had just sold his business for \$400-million dollars and was taking me and some of his "awe struck" friends on a ride on his jet to go to Taos, New Mexico from Los Angeles for the weekend.

I sat next to him on his airplane eating sushi and told him how smart [BCG Attorney Search](#) was having all of these recruiters with such great qualifications.

"You're a jackass and I would never use your recruiting firm. You have no idea what you are doing," he told me.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"I've hired thousands of people and made a lot of money doing it. Let me tell you how it works in the real world and from people who actually make real money in business: A recruiter's job is to get you out there, knock on a lot of doors and open doors that would not get opened without their involvement. You should hire people with some balls, who care about the people they are working with and who like finding hidden information. If you hire people with good qualifications they are going to think being a recruiter is all about them and not the people they are helping. They are going to look good in a suit



ATTORNEY SEARCH

*The Standard in Attorney
Search and Placement*

with their credentials beneath their picture, but that is it. They will fuck your candidates up. You need smart people that like information, research, do not care what other people think of them and are not afraid of rejection. Most guys who went to a good law school and worked in a good firm are going to think that being rejected is beneath him and will always be a shitty recruiter. They may want an “alternative” to working in a law firm, but let them experiment with someone else’s life and not your candidates.”

After that conversation, I started looking for something far different in legal recruiters. He was right. The best recruiters may have good qualifications, but recruiting is about something far different than paper qualifications. There is a certain type of person that is a natural advocate for attorneys, and you need to be careful about who you trust with your legal career.

Hiring an attorney is a different thing than hiring a recruiter. You should be hiring a recruiter and not an attorney to help you with your job search. You should actually be more suspect if your recruiter is an attorney than if they are not. Why did they leave the practice of law? Did they not like the long hours? Did they not like research and drudgery? Did they not like the confrontational nature of litigation? Did they not like being accountable to other people? None of these are good reasons for becoming a recruiter, and they are all personality characteristics that can actually harm you if you choose a recruiter like this when looking for a job.

Here is the bottom line: ***The greatest mistake attorneys can make in their job searches is under marketing themselves. Do not ever under market yourself or tolerate any recruiter or other adviser to under market you without compelling reasons.***

[Click here to contact Harrison](#)

Our mission is to meet or exceed every attorney’s expectations for their job search and ensure they are succeeding and winning with BCG Attorney Search