

BCG Announces Promising Growth in Attorney Placement

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In its recent state of the market report, BCG Attorney Search found several major cities avoiding the usual summer slump in attorney hiring.

Practice in the influential Northeast region is typically affected during the summer months by the hiring of summer associates, generally marking a downturn in recruiting activity. But while Connecticut showed less across-the-board growth, the New Jersey market continues to thrive this summer; and hiring is fairly active. "While we caution candidates about the glacial quality of mid-summer recruiting, we have been pleasantly surprised by the fluid recruiting efforts of firms, especially with excellent candidates," said BCG's Carey Bertolet, Managing Director of the New York office.

As usual, New York firms dominate the corporate and financial landscapes; and as such, they are the biggest players on the scene. Most notably, those large firms representing the world's largest banks are looking for qualified associates in all manner of corporate, finance, and lending positions to facilitate the most noteworthy deals.

In Los Angeles, as well, the hottest practice area is corporate, with a particular emphasis in corporate finance. Candidates with any finance experience, including structured finance, are getting many interviews and offers quickly. In particular, candidates who currently practice, or have previously practiced, in New York are in the highest demand. "Los Angeles is becoming a major focal point in finance; there are simply not enough candidates to go around," stated Claudia Barnes, Managing Director of BCG's Los Angeles office. "Some firms are even willing to transition associates who have experience in other practice areas—such as litigation, tax, or bankruptcy—but who have solid academic and professional records and a true interest in corporate law."

Silicon Valley, too, is undergoing a boom in the corporate practice sector, combined with the usual high level of demand for litigators with intellectual property experience. "Even without a technical background, if you can demonstrate strong litigation skills, experience in IP, and the ability to get up to speed on the technology at issue, you are sought after," said Deborah J. Acker, Managing Director of BCG's Palo Alto office.

San Francisco's corporate law departments have seen heavy influence from their neighbors to the south. In recent years, a number of firms planned to grow their corporate practices primarily in Silicon Valley because that was perceived to be the area of greatest opportunity. San Francisco, by contrast, was perceived as a high-cost center without the same access to Fortune 500 companies and promising start-ups that the Valley offered.

However, with a flood new entrants using corporate as their anchor practice, the market has changed. In addition, many of these new entrants do not have Silicon Valley-type practices; instead, many have a wider mix that includes more public securities work and private equity at the higher end of the deal spectrum. "This is undoubtedly a good thing; as an attorney, you are only as marketable as your skills and where you have honed them," said James Fant, Managing Director of BCG's San Francisco office.

Meanwhile, the number of new law firm entrants to the San Francisco legal market means that quality lateral openings will continue to be relatively strong—if specialized—for the rest of the year and into the next year. Fant characterized it as "a quiet boom."

"It all boils down to the value proposition a firm can offer. In a relatively quiet market, there is no pressure for firms to sweeten the deals they offer their attorneys," Fant explained. "The speed with which the recent wave of salary hikes swept over the marketplace is a good indication of the degree of competition."

In the Southeast, the emphasis is on real estate. Firms in Miami, Charlotte, and Raleigh report an ever-growing need for associates as the market expands. In Atlanta, corporate practice and intellectual property are also showing growth, with the sole decrease coming in the area of litigation. "It seems that the Southeast is moving more towards a candidate-driven market," said Raffaele Murdocca, Managing Director of BCG's Atlanta office. "This is the busiest summer we have experienced in five years. There are more opportunities, especially on the transactional side, than we have seen in a long time."

Despite smaller salaries than are offered in some states, recruiters expect South Carolina to show dramatic growth for the Southeast in the months to come. "Firms are keeping their eyes and ears open to the salary wars; and the larger firms are making increases, which means that small to mid-sized firms will eventually do the same," said Jenny Van Veen, a Senior Recruiter in the Atlanta office.