

**Boalt Hall, School of Law
Career Development Office
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Using a Legal Search Consultant or Headhunter

What is a search consultant? Search consultants are usually focused on lateral attorney searches for large law firms or in-house counsel positions (e.g., Associates, Partners, Associate General Counsel, General Counsel). They usually operate on a contingency basis and are paid by the employer who ultimately hires a candidate that they have brought forth. Placement fees are usually 25-30% of the attorney's first year annual salary. They also perform retained searches for law firms and companies. Search consultants will often answer questions from law school students and recent graduates, but are unlikely to take an attorney as a client unless the attorney has at least 2 years of legal experience. Search consultants can be discerning about who they will accept as clients. Easy-to-place, therefore more desirable, clients would include attorneys from top law schools with experience in the large law firm setting.

How does a search firm differ from a staffing agency? Legal staffing agencies specialize in the placement of attorneys, paralegals, and legal support staff on a temporary, project or temp-to-permanent basis. These agencies offer staffing solutions to legal employers when it does not make sense to hire a full-time employee. They are often filling contract attorney vacancies or meeting the need for a specific and limited-time litigation task that a firm is willing to outsource (e.g., document production or review). They usually require bar admission and at least one year of legal experience before they will place an attorney, however, on occasion will place recent graduates. Most staffing agencies are driven by temporary placement fees. Advertisement for these agencies can usually be found in the classified section of the legal industry newspaper published in your area.

Examples include:

- RobertHalf Legal
- Special Counsel
- The Affiliates
- Update Legal

How does a legal search firm differ from an executive search firm? Executive search firms are not dedicated to placing lawyers. Executive search firms may sometimes be retained to fill a position for a law-related management role in a large law firm, but are less often engaged to find attorneys to fill in-house positions or specific openings in practice groups or law firms.

Tips for managing your relationship with a search consultant or legal recruiter:

1. Thoroughly investigate the search consultant before engaging their services. Ask for a track record of placements in the past two years. Ask whether they have successfully placed other candidates from your law school. Ask to speak with recent clients. Review the recruiter's biographical history and ask yourself whether their professional background is one that will provide them with substantial professional contacts in the legal industry. Ask how long they have been a search consultant.
2. Engage one consultant and work with that person exclusively. This factor is what requires the thorough investigation on the front-end before retaining a consultant's services.
3. Get specific about what you are engaging a particular consultant to do for you. Don't feel pressure to respond to "cold calls." Sometimes recruiters who are cold calling potential candidates don't have the best industry connections or track record. For some recruiters the practice is to get your resume and "blanket" the market, by sending it to all law firms in the area, which may have a potential interest, with little or no follow-up on the recruiter's part. The downside of working with someone you have not thoroughly investigated is that another consultant who you may later want to engage and who may be more effective or strategic in assisting with your search, could fear not getting paid for your hire, if your resume has been previously "blanketed" by someone else. This "blanketing" might also have a negative impact if your own law school Career Development Office has the ability to assist you apply for open positions with specific employers.
4. Be sure that the recruiter gets your permission before sending each resume or a very specific list of where they will send it out
5. Ask for specific and frequent reports about what the recruiter is doing on your behalf – where they have sent your resume and what was the outcome of their outreach efforts.

Resources to find a Search Consultant in your area

<http://www.nalsc.org/membership/directory.cfm>

The legal newspapers in your region is likely to do an annual supplement that provides a list of search of consultants in your area. *American Lawyer* does an annual advertising supplement called the Legal Recruiters Directory.

Word of mouth – ask friends who have made a job transition, if they used a search consultant, and if so, whether they had a positive experience with the consultant they chose.

Career Development Office – although most law school's will not offer recommendations, they may have a resource list of search consultants in your area.