

Welcome To Management Recruiters of Colorado Springs

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How to Make an Impression with Executive Recruiters

By VALERIE PATTERSON

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"I'm an unemployed technical marketing executive in New York who has called and sent resumes to dozens of recruiters in my field. Why aren't they calling back? I thought everybody was hiring these days."

Many unemployed executives feel stonewalled by recruiters who don't acknowledge resumes or return phone calls. While there's no doubt executive search is hot -- business at select search firms grew an average of 24.5% last year, reports Kennedy Information LLC, a Fitzwilliam, N.H., publishing firm -- there's a fact of life every job seeker needs to know. Recruiters don't work for you. Instead, they work for -- and are paid by -- client companies to locate and screen candidates for positions. They also typically focus on finding exact fits for specific jobs -- the proverbial "round peg for the round hole" -- rather than on chasing down a broad population of candidates. "Job seekers get very hurt when recruiters don't return their phone calls, but why would they return your phone calls when you're not paying them?" asks Ginny Rehberg, a consultant in Burlington, Mass., for Drake Beam Morin Inc., an outplacement firm.

But all isn't lost if you're currently job hunting and want to get recruiters' attention. Here are steps you can take to reach out to search executives.

Learn how recruiters work.

You'll find two types of recruiters: contingency and retained. They differ in how and when they receive payment for their services. Contingency recruiters earn fees only after a client company hires a candidate they refer. Retained recruiters are paid "retainers" in advance to conduct a search. They may collect payments even if their search doesn't produce a successful hire. Both types of search firms earn 30% to 35% of first-year compensation for candidates they place and never charge candidates.

According to the Association of Executive Search Consultants (AESC), a New York-based trade group for retained search firms, contingency recruiting often is used for:

- positions that pay salaries of less than \$100,000

- positions which have many qualified candidates
- filling multiple vacancies with similar candidates
- hiring organizations that want more involvement in screening, interviewing and negotiating

Retained firms are hired when:

- salaries exceed \$100,000
- highly unique or specialized candidates are needed
- a hiring organization wants a third party to screen and interview candidates
- a company wants to persuade an executive to leave an organization and needs an intermediary

Find the right targets.

You'll improve your chances of a return call if you locate headhunters who specialize in your industry or function. Check your local bookstore or library for directories that list recruiting firms by type, industry, job function or region. "Stay away from recruiting firms that sound like they do all things for all people," says Peter Jacobus, a recruiter of software sales and support professionals for Century Associates Personnel Inc., a search firm in Philadelphia. Most good recruiters specialize in a few industries or functions, he says.

It's wise not to limit yourself to contacting recruiting firms in your immediate geographical area, even if you don't want to relocate. Many firms that appear to be local or regional actually have national accounts, says Wayne Cooper president of Kennedy Information, which tracks the industry.

And while many executives don't contact search firms until they have a career crisis, it's best if you can initiate contact with these professionals "long before you need them," says Mr. Cooper.

Get and give referrals.

You should ask friends, co-workers, family members and colleagues in your industry for referrals to recruiters. Then, place calls to those individuals and mention your mutual contact.

"If you can present yourself as a referral of someone who's used the firm before, it's always good," says Mr. Jacobus. Whatever you do, don't come across as desperate. Most recruiters don't appreciate being pressured by callers, he says.

If a recruiter phones you about a job and you aren't interested, he or she almost always will ask if you know anyone who might be appropriate for the assignment. You'll gain favor with the recruiter if you can make referrals.

"I make a note of who's been helpful in recommending other candidates," says Joe Zaccaro, president of the Human Resources Consulting Group Inc., an executive search firm in Lakewood, Colo. "But don't give names just to give names. Suggest people who genuinely may be good."

Barbara Bogart, a strategic-alliance executive for a Maryland-based software firm, found her current job through a recruiter after being downsized from her previous position. She still gets two or three recruiter calls each week. She says she always speaks with search professionals and provides referrals if she can. These efforts will pay off the next time she's in the job market, she says. "It's relationship-building, pure and simple," says Ms. Bogart.

Don't be a wallflower.

You'll improve your chances of being found by recruiters in your industry or function if you join professional societies, attend a conference and tell colleagues confidentially that you're open to speaking with recruiters. These are sources of leads for recruiters and their search researchers who help uncover potential prospects.

Prepare a 30-second "commercial."

"When you call a recruiter, first ask if he or she can spare a few minutes, says Mr. Jacobus. Succinctly describe who you are, what you do and what you're looking for. Then listen and allow the recruiter to let you know if he or she can market you effectively. Don't read your resume. Recruiters prefer dialogue that's short and sweet, says Mr. Jacobus.

Don't take silence personally.

"Good recruiters can and should be awfully nice to job seekers, but their first allegiance is to the client organization," says Ms. Rehberg. Realize that recruiters usually are working on multiple assignments and can't personally return all calls or letters. Don't take their lack of response personally.

"Even if your resume is impressive, it may not fit one of their jobs," says Mr. Cooper. "But three to six months from now, they may have a new assignment, search their candidate database and find your resume matches the requirements."

Says Ms. Bogart: "If you have the talent [recruiters] are looking for, they're all over you," she says. "If they're not trying to fill a position in your area, they won't call."

Moreover, search executives dread candidates who badger them with phone calls and resumes. If your job situation has changed since you first notified a search firm, simply send a new resume, but don't leave messages asking if they've received your resume or have new assignments you might fit.

Screen recruiters who call.

Check recruiters' credentials before revealing personal information. Ms. Bogart asks for the firm's name and whether it's a contingency or retained firm. Ask search executives to describe their typical assignments so you'll know if they recruit for positions that match your experience and career goals.

"I also ask the person who gave my name to the firm about [the firm's] reputation," says Ms. Bogart, who questions recruiters about their background in the software industry to see if they understand how software firms operate.

Be candid about your experience and compensation.

Once you're under consideration for an assignment, recruiters will investigate your background to make sure it's squeaky-clean before presenting you to a client company.

You won't hurt recruiters' feelings if you tell them up front that an opportunity isn't right for you. Also say early on if you're willing to relocate or if you might consider a counteroffer to stay with your current employer.

As employers try harder to retain staff in the current labor market, counteroffers are causing problems for recruiters because they prolong searches or cause them to fail. If you accept a counteroffer, it may jeopardize your relationship with a recruiter permanently.

"Accepting counteroffers hurts your credibility with the search firm and the client company," says Mr. Zaccaro.

Moreover, be prepared to answer frank questions about your salary or compensation package. Give the recruiter "an indicator of where you are," says Peter Felix, president of the AESC, but don't feel you have to disclose your exact compensation. Additionally, don't give this information out freely to search professionals you haven't screened.

"Use vague terms to describe your salary," says Ms. Rehberg. "Say 'The positions I'm looking at are in the salary range of \$150,000 to \$200,000,' or you might offer a range that captures your total compensation package."

Or turn the tables and ask about the compensation level for the available position. "If they say \$200,000, then you can say, 'I'm comfortable in that range,' but it doesn't mean that's what you're making," says Ms. Rehberg.

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