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Human resources & personnel

Simplifying the search for executive talent

by Bob Rodgers

The National Association of Personnel Services (NAPS) cites over 30 million staffing or personnel companies in the United States, with gross national revenues of over \$75 billion. Pair that with Gwinnett County, one of the fastest-growing counties in the U.S., and you've got a nucleus of career advancement and executive opportunity.



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We are going to talk about the execu-

tive-level search firm, different from the others in process and delivery. With 20 percent of Fortune 500 companies having built branches, headquarters or manufacturing plants in our county, according to a 2002 publication of Gwinnett Magazine, the resources of the executive search firm are being called upon regularly.

Let's look at ways you can assess which style of recruitment will best suit your company's strategic and economic interests.

Your first decision is whether you should engage a contingency

search firm or a retained executive search firm. The differences between the two go far beyond the obvious – the method of payment for the search that will be conducted.

In a contingency recruitment situation, the agency's fee is paid upon the hire of the candidate brought for interview. A contingency recruiter works on many cases at once, usually for mid- to upper management availabilities in a salary range of \$45,000 to \$80,000. Speed is often of the

essence in these searches, particularly because no money is paid unless a recommendation results in a hire. A contingency firm will work to bring your company many readily available candidates at this mid-level range.

A retained executive search firm is retained, in good faith, to seek out the highest, most sophisticated candidates for executive openings – senior executives, C-level and board-level placements. What your company is paying for is the refined relationship and process that you will be receiving from the retained recruitment firm.

Put simply, the level of sophistication of the position that is vacant should match the level of complexity of the work the search firm can provide you.

A successful search outcome yields three candidates deemed most suitable for your job opening. You, the client, always have final decision authority.

Once you establish the level of erudition of the position, there are a few questions to ask yourself when determining which firm will best meet your business and economic interests:

What are some of the strategies the firm will employ in order to obtain the upper echelon of talent? Are you comfortable with these plans? (Strategies reach far beyond the Internet databases, particularly at the C-level and board member retained searches.)

Along these lines, you will want to know precisely what lists are "off limits" for a particular firm's use. For example, know that some of your main competitors are ethically off limits to your firm due to any placement relationship they have with this particular recruiter.

Does the consultant understand your organization, your market, and your industry in depth?

Will the company act as your organization's best ambassador in the market place?

Do the firm's top consultants have the necessary time to devote to your search?

Check references to validate the viability of success.

Above all, you must feel trust in a firm's ethical standards. Its goal, whether via a contingency or a retained search situation, should always be to ethically and confidentially meet your needs. A successful outcome results in a final hire derived from a pool of three or four bona fide candidates. 

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