VIEWPOINT
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Big or Small?

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We are constantly confronted with decisions that relate to buying "branded" or "competitive" products. We've all bought generic pharmaceuticals when we were confident that the quality was not going to be sacrificed. We've all eaten at McDonalds or Burger King but no one would argue that either is the best hamburger out there. Choices abound as well in today's crowded executive search arena. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of smaller regional or specialized search firms have been spawned from the dozen or so international mega-search firms. The challenge to the buyer of executive search is "big or small?" We submit there are numerous advantages to hiring a smaller firm. Members of the World Search Group, although individually smaller in staff, offer all the resources of larger firms with the added benefits of dealing with an owner-operated company of high integrity, flexibility and most importantly, well steeped in old-fashioned customer service.

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Owner Operated

Direct involvement of the firm's owner is the single most important benefit in selecting a smaller search firm. The principal of the smaller firm is almost always strategically involved in every search executed by the firm. More importantly, you can depend upon the longevity and stability of that person who has a vested interest in the success of your search because his or her name is on the door. This stewardship and the active day-to-day involvement of the principal are always advantageous to the client. The principals of these owner-operated firms have the benefit of numerous years of business as well as search experience and can advise the client in both areas.

The principal of the owner-operated firm often has entered the executive search business after many years in senior management roles in the private sector. This experience when coupled with years of search and company ownership brings an added dimension to your assignment. That dimension is the ability to understand your corporate culture, style and values as well as a sharing of your sense of urgency. This cannot be appreciated by an individual who has not been in the trenches, meeting commitments, budgets and deadlines. To the owner-operator you are more than an invoice number and a bonus check. You are the stuff of survival and prosperity of his/her equity.

Searches Fortified with Integrity

Small search firm presidents set the tone for their companies. Their constant involvement in every aspect of the business ensures that all processes are executed with the highest degree of professionalism and integrity. The absolute proximity between the owner and the firm's staff insures adherence to their company's stated value proposition. Search consultants at these firms are stakeholders and they realize that it is performance, not publicity that ultimately brings in new business and provides them with their livelihood.

In no other area is professionalism more evident than in the quality and timelines of communications between a small search firm and its client. The relatively flat organization structure of the small firm lends itself to the free flow of information essential to quality search execution. You will never have to worry

about being "just another search" or playing phone tag with your contact. Smaller firms tend to have a smaller client base so they cherish every client and work diligently to maintain and enhance each relationship. They pride themselves on the level of communication and come to be viewed as trusted advisors to the client. Consultants from smaller firms become ex officio members of your organization. They come to know your company more intimately, paying specific attention to managerial style, culture and internal communications. He or she is best qualified to convey that information to a prospective candidate.

The Benefits of Fewer Clients

The proportionately fewer number of clients of smaller search firm allows yet another benefit to perspective clients — a less restrictive "off limits" list. This means you do not have to worry about being shut off from viable candidates just because your chosen search firm has a relationship with some or all of your competitors. Fewer clients also permit consultants at smaller firms to have more manageable workloads, generally 4-6 assignments as compared to double that number at larger firms. Working on proportionately fewer searches allows them to spend the time needed to meet the demands of each individual client.

The owner-operated retained executive search firms believe in the "what ever it takes principal"

Since smaller firms must depend on the talent and knowledge of each member of their staff they are, of necessity, very selective when adding new staff members. The template for hiring at the larger mega-firms is generally a very well educated individual with 3-5 years of business experience. They receive excellent training and are brought along slowly, often departing for smaller firms after several years of solid experience. Working with a smaller firm improves your odds of having the most mature, seasoned and versatile professionals in the search industry.

"What Ever It Takes"

The owner-operated retained executive search firms believe in the "what ever it takes principal." This mindset is particularly helpful to clients and prospective clients operating in specialized industries. These firms are comfortable deviating from their standard search procedures to meet the timelines and other requirements unique to a particular client. Since the owners of these companies are "hands-on," they can quickly react and employ non-traditional measures when required. They are typically also more flexible when structuring a search agreement, making it meet the client's requirements without the burden of layers of managerial approval and rigidity.

Partnership

Smaller firms tend to draw on the knowledge and resources of other firms to provide their clients with the most comprehensive search capabilities possible. Search partnerships, such as the World Search Group, are particularly valuable for clients with international footprints who may, from time to time, need to search for talent in other countries. "Partner firms" can offer, on-the-ground capabilities and candidate sourcing as well as the benefit of information on employment laws and practices in a specific foreign country, thereby saving clients' time and money.

In summary, smaller search firms, like the World Search Group partners, offer their clients the following benefits:

- Direct, passionate involvement and support from the firm's owner.
- Seasoned and professional search consultants who are empowered to use the best search practices and resources.
- Maturity and experience to understand the client's total business issues.
- Search capability focused and specialized toward a smaller client base.
- Willingness to partner with other search firms to meet client needs.
- Good old fashioned customer service.

Smaller search firms don't have the luxury of a well-known "brand"; rather their distinction is integrity, flexibility, and unflinching dedication to their clients. Now ask yourself, which type of search firm would you rather use to assist you in hiring the best executive talent available, "big or small?"