

# How to Attract Quality In-House Counsel to Your Company

Even though, to the knowledge of everyone concerned, including that of your boss, colleagues, or partners, the market is overflowing with qualified lawyers available at the going rates of a dime a dozen, probably you have started to doubt that assertion. If, you are reading this line, then you recognize that the task of attracting quality in-house counsel to your company is not a job that is going to happen easily, but itâ€™s a task that needs planning, research, and information.

Compensation packages and other recruiting process elements are only part of solving the puzzle in attracting and recruiting quality in-house counsel: in the legal profession, if the candidates do not believe in the reputation of the people under whom they would be working, they would find alternative employers. Understanding this fact is the key to attracting and recruiting quality in-house counsel.

At the same time, you also need to recognize that in every professional field in the world regardless of geography or time, qualitative scarcity and quantitative overcrowding is an accepted premise of reality. The presence or absence of an economic boom or recession does little to influence that premise. Nobody knows that better than recruiters do, and your task of recruiting â€˜qualityâ€™ in-house counsel starts with emphasizing that premise upon stakeholders in the recruitment process.

## **First, decide upon a decent budget for recruiting in-house counsel and selling your prospects to the right target audience**

At this level, your job is simple enough â€“ you need to create and approve a compensation package first. The compensation package â€“ including both salary and non-salary components â€“ is the most important element of recruitment, and would also define the limits of your recruitment budget in terms of what is justified, and what not.

Your way out is to do thorough research of similar job advertisements, compile data and current salary statistics on similar jobs, with respect to locally adjusted costs and expenses, and then create a median compensation package with approved tolerance. Also, support your data with the experience and involvement of a reputed legal recruiter. Your task would become a lot easier for you. Based upon the value of the compensation package, and the market rates of advertising for jobs and other avenues of hiring, you can create a practical budget for hiring in-house counsel.

Once, you have a budget with known and defined limits â€“ you can plan out the campaign to attract the candidates. But whatever you do, and before you do anything whatsoever â€“ first create a well-planned recruitment budget and an approved compensation package.

## Okay, that was the first step, we got a budget and a compensation package “ but how to attract “quality” in- house counsel?

If you are still reading, you know the catch is in that little qualifier “ œquality,“ otherwise popular perceptions rule and lawyers are a dime a dozen. But, we are going to help you out by letting you on to the fundamentals of recruiting “quality” lawyers. This is not a problem faced only by companies trying to recruit in-house counsel, but each law firm out there faces the same problem because its survival depends on being able to attract top talent.

To solve the problem of attracting “quality” in-house counsel, you need to understand that at least in the question of recruitment dynamics, in-house legal departments are remarkably similar to law firms. Blaring advertisements and catchy slogans may work to flood your inbox with applications, but would do little to attract “quality” candidates who need to be enticed and convinced.

This happens because the law profession is still more people-oriented than process oriented when it comes to recruiting talent. The lawyers’ community is tightly knit through bar associations and other professional bodies, and word-of-mouth marketing and leadership reputations, references and etiquette, are more important elements of the recruitment process than advertising graphics.

### Best practices for reaching and attracting quality in-house counsel

- 1. Identify and target your recruits:** Use external legal recruiters and the competitive intelligence team of your business or company to identify potential candidates at competing businesses and external law firms. Screen and reduce the number of potential candidates and create a shortlist. Now, send out feelers for lateral recruitment.
- 2. Initiate word of mouth marketing:** Spread the news of your vacancy or vacancies by word of mouth. Also, use all reliable channels for advertising your jobs like law firm newsletters, direct mail, alumni websites, professional forums, professional social networking sites, law blogs, and other points of maximum social density within the normal channels of a professional lawyer’s life. If you have already identified a list of candidates, then it becomes easier to search out places frequented by your targeted candidates, whether online or off-line. You can limit or confine your advertisements and news of vacancies accordingly.
- 3. Use legal search companies as conduits of communication:** As remarked in a research done on the matter of recruiting the best lawyers and published in Journal of Legal Marketing, July 2008, law firms successful in lateral recruiting make it a point to use legal search firms as communications conduits. Successful law firms send press releases, news of significant hires and relevant articles on recent business events regularly to law firms and recruiters. When the professional community of legal recruiters and law search firms are regularly aware of your survey rankings, awards and events “ the task of hiring quality in-house counsel becomes much easier.

1. **Use legal recruiters and intermediary references:** When approaching talented lawyers for recruitment as your in-house counsel, it is wise to use legal recruiters and intermediary references to arrange meetings and negotiations. Talented lawyers, the kind of lawyers you want as in-house counsel (usually does not include law firm rainmakers) usually prefer small and dense social networks, because they have little time or inclination to explore and multiply relationships. Consequently, they are reluctant to trust offers that do not come through known or recognized channels.
5. **Push your leaders to go out and do the recruiting:** Real handshakes work more effectively while trying to recruit quality in-house counsel than phone calls and other channels of communications. Phone calls, emails, etcetera work only to the extent of arranging meetings. But winning over the candidate happens through social cues acceptable to lawyers. A friend or colleague arranging a meeting is automatically of much more importance than a phone call or an email. Similarly, a business leader actually meeting with the candidate, or acquaintances of a candidate to spread the word around, works much better than directly calling a candidate over for an interview.

The job of recruitment marketing in your case is to sell your business leaders to the candidates, and the job of the rest of the recruiting process is to bring in those business leaders. It's as difficult to say which comes first "in-house counsel reputation or recruitment, as it is difficult to say which comes first "the chicken or the egg. Thus, while recruiting in-house counsel, you have to be very careful of a chain reaction. Initial better quality recruitment increases the chances of attracting better quality in subsequent phases, and poor quality initial recruitment decreases the chances of hiring quality candidates later.

In the legal profession, the world is much smaller than business leaders in other trades would ever understand. If you talk of a global "village," it's really the legal profession of today, and here the reputation dynamics has all the hallmarks of that in a real village "secrets exist, but everybody knows them" only outsiders don't. It's tough for "strangers" but easy for those who come through established and recognized channels and references.

#### Sources:

1. Lori Lecker and Laurie Lenigan, "Which Came First, the Chicken or the Egg? or in This Case, the Recruits or the Reputation?," *Strategies: The Journal of Legal Marketing*, July 2008