



How to select your Executive Search Partner: Are the big firms just a perception?

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It is a strange thing that many companies still regard executive search as recruitment. In this day and age, this Headhunter sees the two as quite distinct services.

Recruitment is the domain of the agency. It is a quick fix, a means to put out a fire. Thousands of people sit scouring databases and hope, that from a list of 579 potential applicants contained in the latest query search, they might find their 5 approximations to the role in hand. If nothing is obtained, the description is cast into the recycling bin and the cycle begins again.

An Executive Search is a professionally run project. It has set timescales and a planned method – fitted to the peculiarities of the organisation and position. The client need only be called on to work to make the final decision. Even here though, it is guided and considered alongside various stages of assessment that have been carried out before.

Although the two spheres of Recruitment and Search will inevitably face an overlap in certain areas, really it is only search that can provide the senior decision makers in an organisation. These individuals cannot be merely matched to a paper specification, rather they must be assessed for a multitude of capacities and potentials. These are the people that will steer an organisation's future.

We can conclude from this that the advice given by an Executive Search company is crucial – delivery of the right person is mandatory. To be able to give and receive this advice, there must be a relationship between the Client and the Search Organisation.

It must be considered how advice can be given and both parties can be confident in its relevance and correctness. Companies can look at track record and recommendation (the strength of the latter should not be underestimated), however both of these involve different people, personas and relationships. The same affinity may not exist in an alternate case, despite an organisations prior record in a particular area. If one considers the people in their lives with whom they possess the greatest understanding, immediately the mind focuses on friends and family. Friends are people with whom one chooses to be associated. This often arises through common interest or background. The result of both of these connections is that they lead people to “speak the same language” and ultimately understand each other. If people can communicate then they will know what each other want in a given situation. Understanding what someone is looking for, means that you can advise them correctly.

This might seem like a simplification, but really the most secure way to ensure the quality of advice in Executive Search is to find a Headhunter that you like, and build a relationship with them.

The current demands of business mean that service providers will always strive to be able to provide an international service. Now, it will be quite apparent if this is the case or not, however then the perceived benefit of the wholly owned subsidiary or the independent partner from a larger parent organisation will come into play.

Above we have focused on quality of information. Again this would appear to be the key in this situation. A wholly owned subsidiary, still the dominant force overall in the International Executive Search market, has the benefit of a clear branding strategy. However is this brand just a misleading perception of what might lie beneath?

People in a multinational Headhunter do not work together out of choice. Their connection is their business card and their email address. An international partnership bonded by friendship and a common goal bears the qualities of an understanding relationship that has been exemplified above.

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At the same time, in this sort of partnership it is harder to standardise practice and method “by decree”, and a Client may feel more comfortable with a previous method – however between friends this will be communicated. But this is not the key, in this situation to the guarantee of quality of information.

In a multinational, employees are responsible for the advice that they give, and ultimately their job may depend on the integrity with which advice is given. However, it cannot be said that the same accountability is borne by the employee as the owner. Quality advice leads to delivery. For an owner, failure to deliver means they will not eat. Being truly accountable for the advice given to a client is the key to quality of information.

The choice would seem to be to use a responsible organisation with one brand and procedure, or to engage an accountable organisation that is wholly reliant on quality.

This Headhunter would work with a friend and build a relationship with that person and their friends worldwide.

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