



How to Find a Premier Search Firm

By Richard L. Bencin and David Maggiore

A good **call center management search firm** can often identify that special candidate to provide top-notch leadership for a call center. Improved productivity, enhanced quality, state-of-the-art technology, and great sales and customer service can therefore result.

Too often, companies will do a call center management search simply by placing a help wanted ad in the newspaper or on some job Web site. Much of what is surfaced by these methods includes perennially out-of-work or completely off the mark candidates. Sifting through volumes of “paper” can be frustrating and time-consuming. Instead, it makes great sense to find a premier call center search firm for two main reasons: First, to tap into its inventory of candidates, and second, to take advantage of its recruiting process.

Finding the right call center search firm is the first step. Once you’ve identified one, there are specific questions to ask a call center search firm to determine their ability to perform.

How long has your firm been in the call center search business? There’s an industry joke that says that if an out-of-work call center manager can’t find a job, he or she will simply go into the consulting or job search business. Therefore, there may be some inexperienced and fringe players in the **call center management recruiting** business.

Look for a firm with at least ten years of direct call center management recruiting experience. If a search firm has been able to run their business successfully for ten years, then they

probably are doing some things right. However, be wary of long-term search generalists who have been in the search business for some time but just recently have taken a chance on trying to do business in our field. Generalists are notorious for “specializing” in current high demand areas.

How many years have you spent hands-on in the call center field? Ask them to describe their experience. Many recruiters have never managed a call center. They’ve never handled a call center P & L, managed a site, handled metrics, pursued quality, conducted training, developed a schedule, worked with technology, or motivated agents.

How can these recruiters ask the most pertinent questions of candidates and judge their responses? They can’t. That’s why clients are often bombarded by resumes from recruiters who are just trying to see if, by chance, something sticks.

How many years of successful sales experience have you or your firm had prior to going into recruiting? Be sure to ask for details. If a recruiter hasn’t ever been a true professional sales executive, how would they know how the sales process should work? Again, how do they even know which questions to ask and what the responses may mean?

A call center recruiter with successful field sales experience will know exactly what questions to ask and how to interpret the replies. Responses to questions that address how the candidate creates a sales plan, develops a database of prospects, does lead generation, sets appointments, closes business, and keeps clients are vital. Someone who has never successfully sold before (or managed others who have) cannot make the distinction between the sales pretenders and the true ~~Remember~~ that an improper candidate choice of a sales executive can cost an outsourcer millions in lost client revenue. Why risk the success of your company on a recruiter who does not have the ability to both source and quantify the premium sales candidate?

Which professional call center membership organizations does your firm belong to? There are several major call center membership organizations for professional firms: the ATA, the ICESA, the DMA, SOCAP, NACC, and ICMI, as well as the recruiter’s local Chamber of Commerce. Look for membership in at least three. Beware of call center recruiters that belong to none!

Why are these memberships so important? They show a commitment to the industry and are great places to network. Under-the-radar candidates can often surface through referrals from fellow members.

What is the size and quality of your resume database? This database is the immediately available inventory of candidates that a recruiter can tap. It contains previously screened candidates over the years; all the chaff should have already been removed.

Established recruiters carry larger candidate inventories;

they’ve been around longer, know more candidates, and have built up a reservoir of talent over the years. How can one ascertain a truthful answer to this question? It’s tough, but one great test is to ask for a resume search of a major city or state (not where the client is actually looking). Try **Chicago** or the **state of Florida** and ask how many matches they have. In one particular case, a firm was asked about Chicago and could offer only three candidates. That’s not indicative of a premier database.

How many client commendation letters can you provide from satisfied clients? Ask for copies of the letters so you can determine the sizes and types of clients served. Look for comments regarding the search firm’s communications and the quality of the candidates submitted. Further, check out how long the searches took and how satisfied the clients were with the candidates hired. Client lists in addition to the letters will also be helpful. Has the recruiter been good enough to successfully handle the Fortune 500 and/or top call center service agencies?

What type and how much media advertising do you do? Some **executive search firms** are too small or don’t have the resources to commit to the industry and therefore don’t advertise at all. It’s extremely important to make the cash investment to drive candidate resumes. Executive search agencies have been known to generate fifty to a hundred resumes daily as a result of advertising. This is vital if the search firm is serious about building a premier internal database. Of course, those resumes should be screened as they come in, at least on a visual basis.

What special awards, commendations, or momentous experiences does your firm have to justify our awarding you a search agreement? For most **call center recruiters**, this is a jaw-dropping inquiry. This response will separate the serious players from the pretenders. Good responses may include being nominated for or winning the ATA’s Telepro Award, being considered a pioneer within the industry, having been a former executive with a call center membership organization, being an expert witness for call center court trials, or finally, receiving commendations from state or federal agencies. This is the icing on the cake in the selection process.

Unfortunately, most clients do not even ask *one* of the previous questions in their quest for a recruiter! They often just hire a bunch of recruiters without regard to quality. Hopefully, companies looking for top talent for their call centers will begin to be a little more judicious in their search firm selection by asking the appropriate questions. It’s certainly a lot better than throwing darts. Good luck. ☛

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