

How to Choose a Recruiter Based on Recruiting Style

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Every recruiter's individual style has certain merits. However, there are recruiters who are truly exceptional at what they do. Choosing an exceptional recruiter is even more important in a bad market because the methods he or she uses determines if a candidate will find employment.

As the CEO of a recruiting company, I am constantly astonished by the methods many recruiters use. We train our recruiters very carefully to recruit in a certain way and we are always very aware of how they are performing. I have been in the recruiting industry for a long time and I have certainly come to appreciate all recruiting styles. One thing I would suggest you do when choosing a recruiter is take time to really understand how he or she works. Below, I discuss some of the most common recruiting styles and the merits of each, as well as the bearing their methods may have on your search for employment.

1. The Cougar: The Cougar lies in wait, seeking out ideal job candidates—or sometimes hunting them down. They know the exact jobs to submit the candidate for and the best candidates likely to fill those jobs. The Cougar's method of recruiting and placement is based on the idea that (1) he knows the jobs that he is placing very well, and where a candidate is likely to get placed; and (2) by having a very highly developed sense of the market he is likely to get his candidates the best interviews.

Under the Cougar's method of recruiting and placement, the recruiter spends a great deal of time thinking about firms and potential candidates for those firms. Very few candidates may be represented by the Cougar at one time; however, each candidate represented is likely to get interviews. A candidate may be submitted to as few as one or two firms. In addition, the recruiter tends to form very close relationships with a limited number of firms. This, in turn, results in the recruiter's candidates being looked at quite closely. This type of recruiter also forms an excellent and very close, trusting relationship with each candidate he represents.

In situations where there are as many as 10 potential opportunities in the market for the candidate (i.e., 10 active jobs), the recruiter may submit a candidate to as few as two or three jobs under the belief the candidate is most likely to be the best fit at those specific firms. Cougars know their market.

The Cougar's method of recruiting and placement is based on having a very strong focus. It bears noting this is the most typical method of recruiting and placement among recruiters nationally, and it can be quite effective. It is not necessarily the primary method advocated by me. However, the effectiveness of this method cannot be disputed.

The advantages of the Cougar's method of recruiting and placement are (1) they form close relationships with [law firms](#), which helps them make placements other recruiters would likely not make (because they often learn about the available jobs before everyone else does); (2) they have a very good understanding of the types of candidates firms are likely to hire; (3) their candidates typically get a high number of interviews vis-à-vis the number of submissions made, and (4) a close, trusting relationship is formed with the candidate.

The disadvantages of the Cougar's method of recruiting and placement are that (1) by taking on so few candidates, they miss numerous opportunities to make placements; (2) they develop fewer new jobs and less of an in-depth understanding of their markets through proactive marketing of candidates, and (3) their candidates are not exposed to the highest number of potential opportunities (i.e., possible fits) in the market.

2. The Market Penetrator: This style of recruiter believes (1) each respective candidate's goal is to get the best job possible, and (2) candidates need to be aggressively marketed because (a) they will [find a job](#) (through the recruiter or otherwise) and (b) the recruiter should be the one who gets them that job. This method is also based on the belief that the recruiter cannot possibly know everything that is going on in her market and therefore must constantly be pushing to market the candidate to new opportunities matching the candidate's interest.

The Market Penetrator's method of recruiting and placement is based on sheer force and aggressiveness. The recruiter will seek to represent a high number of candidates under the belief that she is constantly taking the pulse of the market (through submissions) to see where the opportunities are most likely to be. This, in turn, enables the recruiter to make choices about proper submissions due to the constant feedback the market provides.

The Market Penetrator typically takes candidates and researches (1) their current jobs, (2) their past jobs, and (3) all potential jobs. First, the recruiter will examine the current jobs where the candidate is or is not a good fit, and she will then compare these jobs to a list of active jobs in the database. Second, the recruiter will look at the candidate's past jobs, and depending on the candidate's practice area or the strength of a given market, the recruiter will select a certain type and number of prospective jobs for the candidate. Third, the recruiter will use reference sources and knowledge of the market, gained from periodicals and so forth, to develop a potential list of firms to "hit" with the candidate's materials, in order to see if the firm has any interest. In some instances, the firms the recruiter "hits" will be firms the recruiter and/or recruiting firm has not dealt with in the past, some of which may not even have any immediate openings.

The advantages of the Market Penetrator's method of recruiting and placement are that (1) she is likely to cover a substantial number of the places where a candidate is likely to work, (2) she is constantly turning up new jobs at firms she may approach (i.e., firms with inactive jobs or no jobs at all) that express interest in her candidates (a Market Penetrator may sometimes get a new fee contract from a law firm every week); (3) she gives the candidate the broadest possible choice of opportunities to make an educated decision about where the candidate may work; and (4) the recruiter approaches firms that other recruiters do not approach, and therefore her candidates have a better opportunity for employment, due to less competition.

The disadvantages of the Market Penetrator's method of recruiting and placement are that (1) it takes a lot of work and time in terms of research, (2) it emphasizes the candidate's interests over strong relationships with individual law firms, (3) it generally results in a lower percentage of interviews vis-à-vis submissions as compared to other recruiting methods, and (4) firms may become annoyed because they are receiving unsolicited résumés.

3. The Database Lover: This style of recruiter relies principally on the use of the recruiting firm's database to make placements. Candidates are sent to firms with active openings in the database. (Incidentally, this is where your résumé typically ends up when you email it to any established recruiting firm.)

This recruiting method is based on the belief that (1) if there is a real job, the candidate should be marketed to it, (2) the most likely source of a placement is with an available job, and (3) firms should be treated with respect and should therefore only be shown candidates when they have made it known that they have a specific opening.

Under the Database Lover's method of recruiting and placement, the recruiter will monitor active jobs closely and watch for candidates matching those jobs. Here, the recruiter will typically submit candidates to active jobs both within and outside of his territory.

The main advantages of the Database Lover's method of recruiting and placement are (1) he is able to provide firms with candidates matching their openings on an ongoing basis (and not upset firms with unsolicited résumés in the process); and (2) if he is aggressive, he can "hit" openings in odd areas (e.g., Maine, Sacramento, Indiana, Saudi Arabia) with appropriate candidates who are likely to be direct hits. The Database Lover can be an extremely effective recruiter.

The disadvantages of the Database Lover's method of recruiting and placement are that (1) he does not necessarily get thorough market coverage because he mostly only responds to current openings; (2) he may not take on candidates when there are no actual openings; and (3) his candidates are competing with every other candidate in the market that is being submitted by a recruiter to the same firms.

While there are many more types of recruiters, I believe the above characterizations show three key types of recruiting techniques. Make no mistake about it: the Cougars think they do the best work, just as the Database Lovers and the Market Penetrators believe they do the best work. The fact that there is tension between competing methods is a sign of a healthy organization.

No method is wrong. Instead, I believe that a combination of each style leads to the best recruiting system. Personally, I believe I am too much of a Market Penetrator and would likely be an even better recruiter were I more of a Database Lover or Cougar.

Ideally, you should be working with a recruiter who understands all three methods of recruiting. I call this type of recruiter a Parthenon Recruiter. When you see pictures of the Parthenon in Greece, you can see it has lasted for thousands of years, partly because it's supported by so many columns. If one column fails, the Parthenon will remain standing.

While using an ancient temple as an analogy may seem strange, the fact is your career needs to be supported by more than one type of job search style. Use multiple methods in your job search, and find a recruiter who supports your efforts on multiple fronts. This will make for a stronger job search, and likely one that is very successful.

THE LESSON

Recruiters use a variety of approaches, each of which has its merits; the best recruiters, however, use a combination of established methods. You need to work with a recruiter who understands these various methods, and supports your job search on multiple fronts. Exceptional recruiters are even more valuable in a bad job market, as their approach or combination of approaches will make the difference in whether or not you find employment.