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## Law Schools Offer Small Firms Recruiting Assistance -- for Free

Julie D. Andrews

Small Firm Business

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You know the drill: Most small law firms don't do on-campus recruiting. But, by offering a bevy of new or expanded services, law schools nationwide are changing rapid-fire refusals into a question of, "Why not?"

Career services offices are tailoring their placement services to better meet the needs of small firms by offering Web sites (where small firms can post jobs and access student resumes any time of the year free of charge); panel discussions where there's less pressure to hire; and informal CLE-earning luncheons.

"Law schools are making recruiting more service-oriented so that small firms don't feel they have to get entrenched in a big recruiting program," says Arthur Fama, dean of the Office of Career Services at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law in New York. "We're now doing for small firms what a recruitment firm would," he says.

Of course, there is one difference: Most schools offer recruiting benefits for free.

**CYBER-RECRUITING**

For small firms, there is no rigid recruiting season.

The construct just doesn't fit your more-immediate, as-the-need-arises hiring. So the challenge for law schools became: How else can a school facilitate connections between its students and smaller firms, outside the confines of on-campus recruiting? Technology provided one answer.

In January, Duke University School of Law in Durham, N.C., unveiled its adoption of Symplicity, a Web-based recruiting system that enables registered law firms to connect with students. Duke not only encourages all law firms to register with its electronic recruiting system, says Camesha McAllister, director of recruiting, but any firm, regardless of its size, must register on Symplicity before participating in on-campus interviews or even posting a job.

Technology is also allowing small firms to expand their geographic reach. In April, Law School Connect -- a videoconferencing service based at William & Mary Law School in Williamsburg, Va. -- debuted. By July, the University of Texas became the 17th law school to join the nationwide videoconferencing network that allows firms to interview students around the country without incurring travel expenses.



Arthur Fama, dean of the Office of Career Services at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

Image: Courtesy Photo

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Additionally, firms can post job openings online, browse member-school resumes and pre-select students to interview. Internet-based, the service costs less to firms than traditional teleconferencing methods that operate through phone lines. Firms of 20 or fewer attorneys can become members by paying a \$100 monthly fee. And, firms that don't have video equipment can pay \$160 per hour to use one of the company's 250 public videoconferencing rooms.

In the future, look for law firm profiles to be featured on the site. This fall, Howard University in Washington, D.C., is sponsoring a virtual job fair, inviting firms in Los Angeles, Miami and Atlanta to have video interviews with students.

## **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS**

By and by, small firms are being enticed into some form of recruiting activity, even if under a different guise: relationship building.

Dave Diamond, of six-lawyer Los Angeles-based Diamond, Burt, & Akhkashian, goes to his local law school, Southwestern University School of Law, to meet candidates to fill his one to two summer associate positions. He values the interaction with students, the scheduling details being handled for him and the free on-campus interviewing space. All this without his feeling pressured to hire.

In April, Southwestern holds a Small Law Firm Day networking event.

"This can be a better fit for small firms because large firms tend to have the monopoly on the fall on-campus recruiting," says career services associate Robin Prophete. "The turnout for the low-key mingling event is always higher than it is for the formalized small firm spring recruiting fair."

Also seeking informality, on a tip from students, Gina Rowsam, assistant dean of the Oklahoma City University Professional and Career Development Center, moved her school's Brunch With a Lawyer program off campus to local restaurants and got better results.

"These are small events, but can have a high marketing impact for the firm," she says. "Students talk to their friends."

The bottom line is that small firm recruiting is about initiating and retaining relationships, says Rowsam. And, because on-campus interviewing can often be limited to the top 10 percent of students, the brunch gatherings offer opportunities to those who may have missed the on-campus interview requirements.

In April, the James E. Beasley School of Law at Temple University in Philadelphia hosted its first CLE-credit event where small firm lawyers and students could get to know one another. Representatives from 14 local firms attended the one-hour Small Firm CLE and Networking Event that covered modern litigation ethics. At a cocktail reception afterward, students were able to approach lawyers regarding summer and post-graduate positions.

## **LOGISTICS MADE EASY**

Some schools started offering bait of a different sort, luring attorneys by offering to pay their travel and accommodation fees -- leaving little excuse for refusal. Every fall, 33-lawyer Tiffany & Bosco in Phoenix sends two members of its recruiting committee to two major, local law schools: Arizona State University in Tempe and University of Arizona in Tuscon, to recruit for two summer associate positions. Occasionally, says partner William Finnegan, committee members go out of state on their own dime (often an alma mater or another school where there is a personal link) to search for students. San Diego-based Thomas Jefferson School of Law made the short list when its placement office offered to cover airfare and hotel accommodation costs for Tiffany & Bosco to interview on campus.

## **OFF-CAMPUS RECRUITING**

And then there are schools that bring the campus to the firm. Florida State University College of Law in Tallahassee made its way onto Atlanta-based Schreeder, Wheeler & Flint's recruiting roster by promoting its

September off-campus recruiting events in which second- and third-year law students will travel to Atlanta and Birmingham to interview with potential employers.

Participating law firms will receive selected resumes three weeks in advance of the event and choose the students with whom they would like to meet. Students will then travel to the firm at their own expense for any call-back interviews.

"This is a very cost- and time-efficient means of conducting interviews," says partner Alex Simmons. "What law schools now recognize is that maximizing a potential employer's time makes it wholly more likely that the firm will look at the school's students."

Other schools have found school-year or summer internships a way to link small firms with students.

"It was always a struggle for us to figure out how to reach small firms," says Tim Henderson, assistant dean of career development at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law. "We'd invite them to campus every year, but it seemed they were just not geared up for that type of activity."

In April, Henderson joined forces with the Colorado Trial Lawyers Association to jump-start a small firm internship initiative. Through the program, 42 students interned at small firms this summer. Henderson, who's been in his position for four years, says this is by far the most substantive involvement by small firms he's seen.

"Internships may be better for small firms," he says, "because they allow them to get the help they need and test-drive the abilities of a student with little financial risk."

#### **SERVICES FOR SMALL FIRMS, TOO**

As Elaine Petrossian, assistant dean for career strategy and advancement at Villanova University School of Law in Villanova, Pa., sees it, "It's not as much an issue of offering new and improved services as much as it is about reaching out to the small firm marketplace to show them how recruitment services save time and free up a limited support staff."

When Cardozo School of Law founded a spring small firm recruiting program two years ago, only about 50 small firms participated; this spring, some 250 small firms took part in the program through resume collection, job postings or on-campus interviewing.

"When small firms start to hear someone on the other end of the phone line offering more services, the response begins to change," says Fama.

Law schools usually begin their outreach efforts by contacting alumni or firms that have successfully placed their students before. Some career services offices, such as the one at Villanova, keep an eye on the small firms being recognized in legal publications.

But, if your phone isn't yet ringing, there's no reason to sit back and wait. Chances are, if you make a call to your local law school to ask, "What can you do for me?" they'll have an answer ready for you.