

# Finding the Right Human Resource Consultants & Experts... What Tools are Out There to Make Life Easier?

By James Leathem

## **Finding the right HR Consultants & Experts... what tools are out there to make life easier?**

So you've decided you don't have HR expertise you need inside your organisation. What are you going to do about it? This article looks at your options, and evaluates in details the tools available to help you find the best available consultants when that's the option you take.

Typically, there are three options to resolve a requirement for expertise:

1. Train an employee to get the skills required, but this can take time, and you can never be sure that the skills learned will be at the level required.
2. Hire a new employee, but beside the difficulties in selecting the right person, there is also the ongoing cost of the permanent employee, and in many cases the skills are only needed in the short term.
3. Source and engage an external consultant or expert for a defined period or project. The benefits of consultants is you can gain highly skilled resources for the period of time required to complete the task, and there are no residual costs once the task or project is completed.

This article focuses on the third option. And it asks the next important question: **IF you decide to bring in an external HR consultant or expert, HOW do you work out who is best-suited to deliver the results you need and is worth meeting?**

It explores these two questions by evaluating the tools that are available.

**Search Engines** as a tool for finding consulting expertise...The classic search is where you as the buyer do all the searching via a tool like [Google](#). This is probably the most common starting point for buyers, though it presents a few challenges.

+ Positives: Search brings back a lot of results. Most consulting firms and individual experts have a website these days that you can search for and interpret.

- Negatives: This brings back a lot of results. The key problem is that you get hundreds or even thousands of search results, and the onus is on you to sort through the clutter and find the sites you need. Because listings are either ranked by popularity, they aren't very helpful in identifying who is the best and what you specifically need. Additionally, they will bring back websites that are trying to sell you books etc... that have the key words you searched on.

**Targeted Business-to-Business Marketplaces** as a tool for finding consulting expertise...With the web 2.0 revolution these marketplace tools are changing radically and becoming a great option. The best example of this in relation to Consulting and Professional Services space is [www.ExpertMagnet.com](http://www.ExpertMagnet.com). Rather than you doing the searching, it runs on a 'magnetic market' approach. It allows you to post your requirements, and relevant companies are prompted to submit detailed responses outlining why they are worth short listing and meeting.

+ Positives: More efficient as you only need to post your requirements once (no more explaining what you need ad nauseam), and you get your request in front of the widest possible marketplace. Additionally, only those companies interested in working with you respond, so you are not wasting your time speaking to companies that have no capacity to do the work, or the completely wrong skill set. Most sites, like Expert Magnet, are free, and once you have reviewed the responses you can shortlist the ones you like and start negotiating with them offline. Also, you can stay anonymous during the process, so you only speak to the companies you want to, and don't end up on a marketing list of those you don't want to speak to.

- Negatives: You need to log on and it might take a couple of days for you to get quality responses (but given the total time you invest is a lot less not sure this is a real negative). You need to articulate what you want (but the good ones like Expert Magnet provide templates and tools to make this easy).

**Online and Offline Directories** as a tool for finding consulting expertise... This search is where the buyers search through a site that has already done some aggregating. Typically this means using a site like Yellow Pages.

+ Positives: Search brings back relevant results, as they usually sort by geography as well as industry. Most consulting firms and individual experts will have a listing in the big directories.

- Negatives: They are generally in alphabetical order, so the best match might be halfway down the page, or on the third or fourth page, which means you need to look at all the results to find them. Often there is no website on the result listing, so to get a better feel for the company before calling them, you need to do a separate search for their website.

**Peak Industry Bodies and Association websites** as a tool for finding consulting expertise... Many professionals and experts are members of an association body, which may provide professional accreditation, and an opportunity for networking and professional development. These associations normally have websites that contain a directory of their membership base.

+ Positives: The companies listed are members of the association, so normally have minimum qualifications, and generally have to adhere to a code of conduct. The search brings back relevant results, as they are also usually sorted by geography.

- Negatives: As with Directories, they are generally in alphabetical order, so the best match might be halfway down the page, or on the third or fourth page, which means you need to look at all the results to find them. Again, often there is no website on the result listing, so to get a better feel for the company before calling them, you need to do a separate search for their website.

**Word of Mouth** as a tool for finding consulting expertise...This is a very popular method of finding good businesses, because it involves asking those people you trust to recommend a business that can provide you with what you need.

+ Positives: It can work well, as you usually get an honest assessment of what they are like if you do your homework too. It's easy and conversational.

- Negatives: This can be complex. It is limited to the people already known within your **network**. It is sometimes tricky to work out if the reference is based on them trying to assist you as the buyer, or assist the vendor get business. Some people will mention anyone they know just to be that person who is well **networked**. Others don't want the responsibility associated with making a referral so they refrain from making comment to avoid the hassle

### **So what's the best tool available?**

To be fair, they all have their place. However, it seems that the market is increasingly interested in the newest comers to this suite of tools being the targeted **B2B** marketplace tools engines like ExpertMagnet.com because they are so much more efficient and targeted at your specific needs. At the end of the day, it will probably end up being a combination of approaches, and it's worth giving them all a go to see what works for you.

James Leathem has extensive experience in business and consulting services across Australia and North America. He is now the managing director of ExpertMagnet.com.

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