

## How To Market Yourself For An In-House Attorney Position

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Once you begin to work as an attorney, whether it's for a law firm, private practice, or the government, you will often find yourself too busy with the demands of the practice to find time to take the necessary steps to market yourself effectively for another position – whether that position is in-house or not. Gone is the on-campus interview process that allowed you to sample employers, practice your interview skills, and polish your resume. As a professional attorney, the responsibility for finding a job is your sole responsibility, and successfully marketing oneself for a job is often not a skill that attorneys naturally possess or are taught during their academic careers. Moreover, if you are seeking to transition your practice in-house, the need for effective marketing is even greater. Few available positions coupled with a large number of applicants make this process very competitive; hence, the increased need to effectively market oneself to land that coveted in-house attorney position. Here we provide you with helpful tips on how to market yourself for an in-house attorney position.

### **Marketing Starts Before The job Search**

Your chances of successfully landing an attorney job in-house are determined before you even start the search. Your choice of practice, for instance, will have a significant impact on your odds of going in-house. Given that the majority of in-house attorney positions are transactional, if you chose to focus on a litigation practice you will find the road to an in-house position that much more challenging. Of course, I am not suggesting that you should not make your practice choices based on whether or not you want to end up practicing in-house, but if you have an inkling that this may be your final destination, this is definitely something worth thinking about ahead of time.

### **Timing is (Almost) Everything**

While the allure of going in-house is strong for most attorneys, the reality is that few of them will ever make that transition successfully. One of the key factors to consider is timing. Companies that hire in-house counsels are looking for attorneys who are self-sufficient, who can work independently, with little support, and almost no supervision. That often means that corporate legal departments are not good training grounds either. The assumption that that you are already skilled in your practice area, can handle all of the documentation and processes that come with it, can provide strategic advice to your company, and can oversee the legal work of potentially more experienced outside counsels. In light of what companies expect from their attorneys, that means that you should consider gaining experience with a law firm least five (5) years before you consider making a transition in-house. While every firm is different in terms of the level of responsibility and training it provides, this minimum level can at least ensure that you have had the opportunity to be exposed to the various documentation and processes of your practice area. If you seek an in-house position too early in your career, you'll likely not receive any consideration because you will not be deemed experienced enough, and if you wait too long, you might be seen as either too expensive or too set in your ways to make that transition. Within this in mind, you should seek to make a move in-house between your 5th and 8th years of practice.

### **Demonstrated Flexibility is the Name of the Game**

While law firms reward experts, corporate legal departments seek generalists or attorneys who are able to spot issues and handle matters in a wide variety of areas. In short, they want more for their money. In

other words, most in-house counsel act like ER doctors conducting triage when the ambulance gets in. They have to quickly identify the problem, establish priorities, determine what they can handle themselves and whether they will require the services of a specialist, or in this case an outside counsel. Therefore, whether you are a corporate, employment, or litigation attorney looking to make a move in-house, you need to show that you are able to work in a wide variety of other practice areas, to spot the issues at least, and be able to know when it's time to call the experts. In addition to being able to handle a wide variety of legal issues, there are a number of other skills you will need to be competitive and successful for these positions. First, as an in-house attorney you need to have business sense. The ability to understand business objectives and provide legal advice to non-lawyers is crucial to succeeding as an in-house counsel. Secondly, you need to be able to work with a wide variety of people, from senior executives to employees on the floor. Therefore, having strong interpersonal skills and the ability to be comfortable in a variety of situations, from conducting formal board meetings to dispensing informal hallway advice, is very important as well. Finally, a successful in-house attorney must be able to provide practical advice. In other words, companies tend to turn to their counsel for solutions to their business problems, rather than for textbook advice or opinions. To be an effective problem-solver, an in-house attorney must not only be familiar with his company's business, structure or industry, but also its culture and its risk management standards. When you are sending your resume and cover letter, you need to make sure that your ability to work in a variety of practice areas, with a wide range of people, in a practical business context is highlighted.

### **Letters of Recommendation Are Important**

Whatever the circumstances under which you are leaving a current employer, always seek to get several letters of recommendation from the most recent employer. Ask at least one partner to write a formal letter of recommendation on your behalf before you leave. If you can, get several recommendation letters from various attorneys you worked with in different practice areas, as well as letters from clients. Letters of recommendation don't necessarily eliminate the need to check every reference, but they will help to back up claims you are making about your abilities, skills, and strengths. Multiple letters of recommendation may indicate that you are a valuable asset to many people and multiple practice areas, which may help broaden your appeal to corporate legal departments. Also, don't forget building up your recommendations on LinkedIn; many companies today do their due diligence online, so a strong profile supported by client and employer recommendations, can mean the difference between getting an interview or ending in the rejection pile.

### **Have a Consistent and Coherent Story Line**

Before you begin your job search, establish a story line regarding your current situation, why you want to go in-house, and stick with it. You should also make sure that your reasons for wanting to go in-house are coherent. In other words, avoid clichés of "wanting to work for one client," or "being closer to the business-side of things or the decision-makers." You will be better off if you can clearly articulate what it is you think you might bring to the table of a corporate legal department, and why that specific company or industry is the right fit for you. If you've been fired, just tell the truth. If you had a personality conflict with your partner supervisor, if you just didn't fit in, or if you were doing work you really didn't like, just explain what happened. At the end of the day, the truth will come out, and it's better if you are the one that reveals it rather than a third party source. If a company has even a slight suspicion that something fishy is going on, your chances for employment will be null. So, put your best foot forward, be truthful, and put together a story that makes sense for you and your potential employer.