



How To Use Job Boards And Advertisements To Jump Start Your Job Search

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WHEN YOU START THINKING ABOUT A CAREER move, you may choose to begin by looking on Internet job boards and in the classifieds—either those in the legal newspapers or those on the Internet (such as LawCrossing.com or Monster.com)— and answer the job opportunities that seem interesting and attractive, even if you are not completely sure of your direction. Answering advertisements benefits your job search in several significant ways:

Reading want ads gives you a general idea of the viability of the job market in the geographical area you are considering.

Scanning help-wanted pages familiarizes you with the kinds of credentials that legal employers are seeking in your specialty area.

Responding to advertisements within your particular area of expertise will provide an opportunity to “test the waters,” to see what response your resume triggers and discover how well your credentials attract employers.

Advertisements that result in interviews also offer the occasion for you to sharpen your interviewing skills, practice describing your accomplishments, and see how you do as a “free agent” in the legal job market.

Remember, answering classified ads is not the most time-efficient or effective way to find a new legal job, nor is it a substitute for self-marketing. Answering ads is not enough by itself. As an ancillary way of seeking employment, however, it is well worth the effort. Indeed, comprehensive Internet job boards, such as LawCrossing.com, provide you with detailed information regarding current legal-job market trends and often have resources to enhance your search. By studying the job descriptions, you can learn how employers view their open positions.

In addition, there is a sort of a strange psychological benefit, a “halo effect,” that happens when a job seeker starts answering even a few advertisements per week. An exercise as seemingly simple as mailing in a cover letter and resume answering an ad gives a person a sense of momentum, a feeling that at least he or she is doing something to move into the future and beyond the present job.

Your Ad Response Letters

Your reply letters to various legal employment ads are, by nature, business communications. So no emails, please, unless requested by the advertisement. For many law firms, electronic mail still seems too casual a form of communication for job applications.



The content, or the form, of your letter answering a given advertisement will, in general, be dictated by:

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the credentials described in the legal advertisement

the level of your own interest in obtaining the particular position offered

In other words, is the ad mildly interesting, but not so exciting that it demands an immediate reply? On the other hand, does the described position read as if it were written exactly for you? I recommend three formats for the letters you use to answer advertisements, both legal and non-legal, depending upon the interest occasioned by the ads. Samples of these letters and the classified ads that triggered them are on the pages that follow.

Two Generic Letters for Mildly Interesting Advertisements

The situation: Stephanie Dillon is a graduate of Boston University School of Law with a GPA in the middle third of her class. Stephanie enjoyed law school, but was never quite sure what she wanted to do with her law degree. After receiving her J.D., Stephanie returned home to the Philadelphia area and took the Pennsylvania Bar. Through family friends, she obtained her first law job with The Honorable Seamus Fogerty, a Judge in the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas.

Her clerkship was a learning experience for Stephanie, and after a year clerking for Judge Fogerty, she moved to a new position with the Defender Association of Philadelphia. Stephanie has since discovered that she has a flair for litigation and she enjoys her work. But after almost three years as a public defender, she feels it is time to make her move into the private sector.

Browsing a local legal newspaper one day, Stephanie notices this want ad from a defense litigation firm. Fortunately, she has also been admitted to the New Jersey Bar and feels she meets the ad's basic requirements. Stephanie decides to respond with a resume and cover letter to see what happens.

This classified ad is a typical advertisement for lawyers who are relatively recent law school graduates seeking to make their first lateral moves. The firm's hiring criteria are basic, except for the reminder that an applicant's ability to generate new business is a "major plus."

Center City Philadelphia medium-sized Defense Litigation firm seeking attorney admitted in NJ & PA w/at least 3-7 yrs. of litigation experience for Philadelphia, PA, office. Must be skilled in file handling, deposing experts, handling arbitrations, trials, etc. Ability to generate business a major plus. Competitive salary & benefits. Please forward resume w/salary req's to: Human Resources, Ste. 123, 1234 Chestnut St., Phila., PA 19108 or Fax to: 215-987-6543.

The 50-to-60% rule should inform whether you should apply for a particular position. When



answering ads, it often helps to remember that legal want ads are usually written with the ideal candidate in mind, and applicants should not be deterred from responding just because their credentials do not meet some of the employer's stated requirements. On this topic, the Job Goddess, in one of her legal-job search columns, makes a neat distinction. There is a difference, she writes, between what a firm advertises and what it will accept. If a person finds an interesting ad and meets 50-60% of the hiring criteria, then he or she should reply.

In regard to replying to this type of basic legal advertisement—particularly if the applicant has little time, but wants to answer as many ads as possible—I suggest the use of one of the following two Generic **Response Letters**. The second is a bit more detailed than the first, but both are essentially resume transmittal letters, have the advantage of brevity, can be easily stored in a document file, and can be quickly edited to answer many different legal ads with basically the same content. **Note especially** how Stephanie deftly finesses the firm's request for salary requirements in the two letters that follow.

STEPHANIE DILLON, ESQ.

2056 Delancy Street
Philadelphia, PA 19021
(215) 123-4567
stepdillon@lawnet.com

April 8, 2002

Director of Human Resources
Suite 1100
1234 East Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19108

Dear Director of Human Resources,

Enclosed is a copy of my resume in response to your recent advertisement in the March 28 issue of the *Legal Intelligencer*.

I look forward to the opportunity of describing for you in greater detail the kinds of skills I can contribute to your practice. Salary requirements are negotiable, and I am available for an interview at a mutually convenient time.

Sincerely yours,

Stephanie Dillon, Esq.

Enclosure



STEPHANIE DILLON, ESQ.

2056 Delancy Street
Philadelphia, PA 19021
(215) 123-4567
stepdillon@lawnet.com

EDUCATION

Boston University School of Law, Juris Doctor, 1998

Assistant Editor, *BU Civil Litigator*, 1997–1998

Syracuse University, Bachelor of Arts, Political Science, 1995

Vice President, Student Senate, 1994–1995

Staff Reporter, *Daily Orange*, 1993–1995

EXPERIENCE

The Philadelphia Defender Association, 1999–Present

Assistant Public Defender

Successfully defended an indigent client falsely accused of sexual harassment. Competently represent clients charged with various felonies, including bank robbery, automobile theft, rape, extortion, and assault. Prepare trial documents, interrogate witnesses, negotiate pleas and undertake aggressive defense of accused at trial. Recipient, Special Achievement Award, 2001.

The Hon. Seamus Fogerty, Court of Common Pleas, City of Philadelphia, 1998–1999

Law Clerk

Comprehensive experience in litigation management, caseload administration, electronic research using Westlaw and LexisNexis, and the preparation of written memoranda of law. Also oversaw document review and file management.

BAR ADMISSIONS

State of New Jersey, 1999

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1998

INFORMATION RESOURCES

Westlaw, LexisNexis

INTERESTS AND ACTIVITIES

Women's Law Caucus, Big Sisters



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April 8, 2002

Director of Human Resources
Suite 1100
1234 East Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19108

Dear Director of Human Resources,

I would like to apply for the position of litigation associate advertised in the March 28 issue of the *Legal Intelligencer*. As detailed in my enclosed resume, for the past two years, I have worked in litigation defense for the Philadelphia Defender Association. Previously, I was Law Clerk for The Hon. Seamus Fogerty of the Court of Common Pleas.

As a result of these experiences, I am comfortable working with a variety of defense litigation issues, and possess considerable skills in deposing witnesses from all educational backgrounds and walks of life. In addition, because of my judicial clerkship, I can bring to your firm, not only my superior abilities in task organization and file management, but my familiarity with trial procedures and the complexities of the judicial process.

Salary requirements are negotiable. I look forward to the opportunity of discussing with you further the kinds of competencies I can offer your firm and am available for an interview at a mutually convenient time.

Sincerely yours,

Stephanie Dillon, Esq.

Enclosure



When a Job Advertisement Makes You Scream, "That's Me!"

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One day, you open the paper to discover an advertisement that describes your credentials and your experience almost as if you had written the classified ad yourself. It is exactly you, your dream job. This happened to Bradford Bunting one morning as he was browsing legal advertisements in the Wall Street Journal.

The situation: Until his recently being laid-off, Bradford had been corporate counsel and a senior executive of an international company, Kinvara, Ltd. However, Kinvara has recently merged with Roc, a French-based construction company, and as a result, Bradford was let go, along with several other Kinvara executives. Although his termination involved a sizeable severance package, Bradford is in his late 40s and, with his considerable experience, considers himself too young to retire. So he is seeking a lateral move to another major construction company.

At first, he contacted a legal recruiter, who sent him on two or three interviews; but for one reason or another, Bradford's credentials were not quite the right fit. Then, one day, he happened to notice this classified ad in the Wall Street Journal:

Major Delaware Valley Corporation seeks a Chief Counsel of Litigation for this fast-paced, hands-on, sophisticated position. The selected candidate will actively participate in contract negotiations, strategic litigation planning, regulatory compliance, risk management, and the supervision of outside counsel, as well as counseling and educating internal clients. The ideal candidate is a law firm partner with 10-15 years' experience at a major law firm and who has had first-chair trial experience on major cases. This key position in the corporate legal department has a solid compensation package, including base, bonus, and options. Please send resume and letter, along with salary requirements, c/o VP of Human Resources, Gnostic Construction Corporation, Inc., P.O. Box 123, Devon, PA 19333. No phone calls or emails, please.

For Bradford's response to this advertisement, a custom-designed, **Targeted Response Letter** is proper. In this document, the lawyer selects several of the advertisement's hiring criteria, matches them with his credentials, and demonstrates a "fit" of applicant to job with examples from his prior professional career. In Bradford's case, because he had previously developed a functional legal resume (included on the pages after his letter in a slightly compressed format), it was a relatively easy step for him to include descriptions of his career accomplishments in this targeted letter:



BRADFORD BUNTING, ESQ.

436 Quakertown Road
Wynnewood, PA 19096
(215) 123-9876
bunting@quaker.net

April 15, 2002

VP of Human Resources
Gnostic Construction Corporation, Inc.
P.O. Box 123
Devon, PA 19333.

Dear Vice President of Human Resources,

According to your April 12 advertisement in the Wall Street Journal, you are seeking a Chief Counsel of Litigation for your in-house legal department. I believe that there is an excellent fit between your company's needs and my 15 years' experience in corporate law with Kinvara, Ltd., where I was a Corporate Director and General Counsel. Some credentials I can bring to your company include:

Contract Negotiations

As General Counsel, initiated a joint venture that resulted in an agreement between Kinvara, Ltd., and Connemara Industries for the highly successful \$30-million Darby Swamp Reclamation Project. Personally undertook a series of negotiations that completely satisfied the needs of bonding companies, insurance carriers, lending institutions, and owners while still protecting the interests of the joint venture and Kinvara, Ltd.

Strategic Litigation Planning

Developed relationships with law firms amenable to litigation management and selected preferred outside counsel. Designed case strategies. Allocated responsibilities between in-house and retained counsel in areas of discovery, witness preparation, and research. Determined case budgets and billing formats as an oversight device and supervised implementation. Attended depositions of key witnesses and encouraged settlement opportunities at every step of the litigation process. Participated in major trials as first-chair.

Risk Management

Arranged for emergency actions in response to major PCB spill at company site adjacent to



nearby waterway. Immediately coordinated efforts with EPA and DER officials, contracted for remediation, waste transport, disposal, and follow-up site monitoring. Because of these timely actions, no citations, fines, or litigation resulted, and environmental impact of spill was minimized.

The enclosed resume details some of my other qualifications. Salary requirements are negotiable. I look forward to meeting with you to describe in greater detail how my corporate background and credentials can enhance the continued growth of your company.

Sincerely,

Bradford Bunting, Esq.

Enclosures

BRADFORD BUNTING, ESQ.

436 Quakertown Road
Wynnewood, PA 19096
(215) 123-9876
bunting@quaker.net

PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

Fifteen years' progressive experience as corporate legal counsel. Secretary and General Counsel of the Kinvara Corporation. Conducted extensive and successful negotiations with EPA, OSHA, NALB, and other regulatory agencies. Excellent communicator and presenter. Demonstrated abilities to resolve disputes quickly and at minimal company cost through alternative dispute resolution. Experienced in managing outside counsel in situations where litigation is unavoidable. B.A., Business Administration, Douglass College. J.D., Temple University School of Law. Instituted company-wide program of preventive law practices. Highly confident working both at company senior-management level and with client organizations. Excellent market-forecasting and business-analysis expertise. A self-motivated and creative corporate executive with outstanding interpersonal skills.



SELECTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Contract Negotiations

Initiated a joint venture proposal resulting in an agreement between Kinvara, Ltd., and Connemara Industries for the federally funded \$30-million Darby Swamp reclamation project. Successfully conducted negotiations on both agreements and satisfied the needs of bonding companies, insurance carriers, lending institutions, and owners while protecting interests of the joint venture and the Kinvara Corporation.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

Negotiated contract between the Radnor Hydro Development Corporation (RHDC) and the Kinvara Corporation for the construction of the \$50-million Schuylkill River hydroelectric facility. Upon default by RHDC, orchestrated project bailout and retained outside counsel for litigation, but resolved dispute through negotiation, mediation, and binding arbitration. Obtained substantial arbitration award and payment for Kinvara Corporation.

Litigation Management

Developed relationships with law firms amenable to litigation management and selected preferred attorneys within these firms. Delineated case strategies and goals. Assigned responsibilities between corporate and retained counsel in areas of discovery, witness preparation, and legal research. Agreed upon case budget and billing format as an oversight device. Developed settlement opportunities throughout litigation process. Organized documents and attended key depositions. Finally, will participate as second-chair should case go to trial.

Regulatory Compliance

Arranged for emergency actions in response to major PCB spill at site adjacent to Darby Creek. Immediately coordinated with EPA and DER officials and contracted for site remediation, waste transport, disposal, and follow-up site monitoring. As a result of these timely actions, no citations, fines, or litigation resulted; and environmental impact of spill was minimized.

Crisis Management

Defused both pending criminal and civil actions, with potential for incarceration and damage



against officers and corporation, after employee reported illegal dumping of hazardous waste materials on company property. Persuaded company's President and State Attorney General's Office to pursue negotiated settlement. As a result, developed and implemented a hazardous materials/waste management program as a key element of the negotiated dismissal of all criminal and civil actions.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Kinvara, Ltd.

Director, Secretary and General Counsel 2000–2001

Secretary and General Counsel 1997–2000

General Counsel 1995–1997

The Kilfenora Electric Company 1992–1995

Senior Contracts Specialist

Yeats & O'Casey, Ltd. 1985–1992

Associate, Corporate Legal Division

EDUCATION

Temple University School of Law, J.D., 1985

New York University Graduate School of Business, M.B.A., Marketing and Finance, 1982

Douglass College (Rutgers University), B.A., Business Administration, 1976

PROFESSIONAL LICENSES

State of New Jersey Bar, 1987

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1985



Some Suggestions

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The Letter Format. Notice that Bradford does not treat his letter as if it were a duffle bag, into which he stuffs all of his credentials. Rather, he writes a one-page letter with no unnecessary clutter. The "Less is more" rule also applies in this situation. Don't dump everything all at once; be secure enough to understate.

Bradford correctly views his letter, not as a comprehensive description of all his experience and accomplishments, but as a "door-opener," a way to tease the interest of the reader. So he selects three of what he perceives to be the top hiring criteria enumerated in the classified ad and then subtly adapts three items from his resume as illustrations of the way his skills match the needs and requirements of the advertiser.

"Offer" Verbs. Also worthy of note is the fact that both the Bunting and Dillon letters use "offer" verbs, such as "enhance," "bring to," "contribute," "provide," and so on. Too often in response letters, the focus (indicated by the excessive use of the word "I") seems to be on the needs of the applicant, rather than those of the employer. So it is critical in responding to classified ads to detail what kinds of abilities you can contribute to the success of the firm or company. This is merely an application of the primary rule of all marketing: Match needs now.

Salary Requirements Are Negotiable. Both of the classified ads in the examples cited above requested that applicants include information on their salary history. All three of the answering letters responded with "Salary requirements are negotiable." Is that answer the most appropriate response?

Absolutely! By asking for salary information before you are interviewed, firms are trying to gain a negotiating advantage should you become a serious candidate. When they request salary information before you know their requirements for the position, they are depriving you of your bargaining power. Before they sit down to play poker, they want to see your hand, know what cards you're holding.

Most sensible job seekers, when faced with advertising copy that reads "Please forward your resume, including salary history, to ..." or "Please send a resume and salary expectations to ...," hesitate at first to respond, unwilling to address the salary issue so early or give up a negotiating advantage so easily. They feel as if they are in a no-win situation; they lose whether their figure is too high or too low. If too low, they have probably forfeited an increase in compensation; if too high, they have screened themselves out of consideration. So they take a chance and respond with "Salary requirements are negotiable," but still feel uneasy that their failure to quote an exact figure may have killed their chances for an interview.

Then other advertisements will state bluntly "Send resume w/salary requirements (only resumes w/both will be considered) to P.O. Box..." And given that ultimatum, most people, if they really want to be considered for the position or are anxious to find work, accede to the advertiser's request.



How should an applicant answer requests for a salary history? Until recently, most career consultants would say not to quote an exact figure, give an ambiguous answer, keep your fingers crossed, and hope that you would still qualify for an interview. This seemed the common sense answer, but there was really no way to know for sure.

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Now there is empirical data to back up that educated guess. Several years ago, in a *National Business Employment Weekly* article, author Stanley Wynett described how he interviewed representatives at 200 companies and nonprofit organizations that ran employment ads requesting salary information in the *New York Times* and the *National Business Employment Weekly*. Of the 200 companies surveyed, 94% said that they considered every cover letter and resume received, whether the salary information was included or not. Of the remaining 18 companies, only 4 actually insisted that they would not consider resumes that did not provide requested salary information.

To Summarize:

Browse the legal classifieds (online job boards and newspapers) on a regular basis and answer the ones you find mildly interesting with a standard, timesaving generic letter.

For those ads that offer the kind of employment you are seeking, use a targeted letter and match the employer's criteria with several specific accomplishments that illustrate the skills you can offer the firm or company.

Use "offer" verbs whenever possible in answering an employment ad.

Save salary specifics until the very end of the interviewing process. In addition, never, never, never say anything more, in answering an advertisement's request for a salary history, except that "Salary requirements are negotiable."