

A Personal Candid Reflection of Executive Search....

Taking a moment to reflect on a question I was asked recently by a family member...."how did you research BEFORE LinkedIn?" For the record, he is a young 20 something....and I'm pretty sure he won't ask me this question again.

As I answered his question in great detail, I thought of sharp pencils, countless library trips, lined paper, micro-fiche, thousands of pages of 5pt size print, antiquated phone systems, NO computer, NO internet, NO email, NO voicemail, AOL, fax machines and high heels! That's a vision.

I realized I have been in an informational "research" function for 20+ years. In the early days, I physically went to the library in heels with a briefcase in tow filled with freshly SHARPENED pencils with a MANUAL pencil sharpener, and hundreds of blank paper tracking sheets in a butterfly clip in a file! I was on the hunt for information!

Claiming a large work table with my overstuffed briefcase as a flag, I planted myself in the "business section" of the main public library for 8+ hours a day for a week+ per search. Even library personnel were asking me what I was doing and why? So I engaged their expertise to help me find information which they gladly obliged. They became more familiar with their resources too, and as I got to know them, I could call on the phone for specific information and save time. It was a win-win!

I searched thousands of pages in resource directories by SIC category and company, with published names and numbers in a font size less than 5pt, using a magnifier much of the time... then line-by-line, wrote them down on paper with a pencil! No way to sort hard copy! Using micro-fiche, I searched for industry related periodicals to copy...yes, micro-fiche. The "Directory of Associations" was the motherload of resources that provided industry associations we could join to get the golden hardcopy membership directory. Upon it's arrival in the mail, it was immediately copied to ensure we could stock the office library with various industry membership directories.

Returning to a small office with an antiquated phone system that wasn't hands-free, surrounded by tall metal filing cabinets, I dialed for hours with a reference script on hand at all times with a pencil in one hand writing diligently as I uncovered more information, realizing how much of the print information was outdated. At that time, research, name gen, and sourcing was a single function. And not all passive prospects were receptive to receiving a sourcing call at this level from.....a woman! A quick read over the phone was critical to engage and extract qualifying information in the form of conversation. Luckily, my early career was in male dominated industries.

Every morning with java in hand, I recalled walking briskly to the FAX machine to find pages of resumes on a fax machine that ran out of paper and ink, that only a few of us seemed to know how to restore to functionality.

THEN, in 94', I purchased my first Apple computer, which I wish I still had. At that time, dial-up AOL was a part of the Apple package. I found the AOL Membership Directory and it rocked my research world! I realized because members entered their personal information in the privacy of their own home, many didn't realize their information was shared by the entire AOL community. This meant I could search this directory by company, title, and location AND email prospects and find phone numbers. Prospects on the receiving end at that time would always ask, "how did you get my name?", to which I replied "you were a confidential referral". Technically, that was true. This resulted in several placements/hires, which ultimately resulted in OFFICE internet usage and a single dedicated research computer.

Eventually, hard copy tracking information was transferred to pre-Microsoft and pre-ATS DOS systems with only 1 user, and rarely, if ever, updated. At that time, the concept of a short-shelf life wasn't much of a consideration.

Then the ATS boom, that so many companies and firms bought into, not realizing the overhead, training, and keen basic keyboard skills required to maintain and validate fresh usable information on a DAILY basis. Much to the advantage of the search industry, many companies still struggle with maintaining a quality ATS system.

Boom again! There is internet access without dial up, computers and devices at our fingertips EVERYWHERE with broadband, DSL, hotspots, jetpacks, cell phones, Bluetooth, hands-free, Wi-Fi, texting, networks, Clouds, portals, social media, AIRS, and more! I now have access to library resources online, and information comes to me from all directions at all times. Hoovers was actually FREE at one time as an online library resource! With access to all of this information now, how do I quickly decipher and streamline quality information into usable cultivated pipelines?

Despite this plethora of information, there is still no valid "one-stop" for research, and hopefully, there never will be in my lifetime...lol. Research in the area of search requires identifying relevant information, validating information, and the ability to quickly connect the dots and strategically utilize the information. Library resources are STILL a good ROI. SOME industry membership directories are still a good ROI. LinkedIn is also a good resource that continues to evolve, however, only as valid as the members/users allow it to be.

I have found the most effective timeless resource to be networking/netweaving. The concept of networking has evolved too! I recall attending various industry trade shows, and "networking" events, and so many people would wander around aimlessly with a stack of business cards and their rehearsed speech, only to be found later slumped over a bar table. Networking has evolved into netweaving which, in short, is *cultivating quality* relationships. Not rocket science, but to many outside of the world of search, it is.

From my lenses, cultivating long-term quality relationships is a considerable differentiator amongst the Coleman Search Consulting and Career Advisor Services teams. I see it and hear it every single day from corporate and individual clients, industry colleagues, acquaintances, friends, and even some competitors. This DNA and our combined life experiences drive what we do and has become a competitive edge. I value being a part of a dedicated team that makes a difference!

Part of moving forward is navigating with purpose. Onward....

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