

# 21st Century Recruiting: Globally Connected, Locally Committed

*Senior Level Job Mandates Are Increasingly Requiring Both a Strong Base of Experience At a Specific Country Level Plus At Least a Foothold In a Specific National Culture – With Ability and Proven Experience to Work Globally and Cross-Culturally On Remote Teams. To Be Competitive, Candidates Must Be Inter-Culturally Savvy and Highly Adaptive. Here's Why . . .*



March 18, 2016 - The search for top-flight talent is now a global industry where the largest search firms maintain dozens of offices across every continent. But advancements in technology have allowed even the smallest firms to compete far beyond the borders of their own countries. One recruitment organization is combining the range of the largest players with the personal touch of a boutique to great advantage. It is a composite approach filled with opportunity and challenge. Today, IRC Partners is a confederation of 80 offices with more than 300 consultants in 45

countries.

In the following interview, Rita Kaufmann-Linke, CEO of the intercultural management think-tank, [IRC Institute](#), and managing director and proprietor of IRC Austria, discusses her skills at consensus-building, reviews the dynamic changes happening in the European Union that have made it easier for internationally mobile candidates to move within Europe and accept assignments outside their home countries, and takes a close look at the challenges of managing a confederation of search firms spanning 45 countries.

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*Rita, you enjoyed a career in environmental politics and HR prior to entering recruiting. What events led you to start your own search firm in 2010?*

I started my firm because I felt it was the best business venue for me to apply many of my key strengths. I have always been curious by nature. I have many interests and I'm keen on learning and developing myself. In my former political role, the ability to network, influence, present and build consensus around your thoughts and ideas was very important. My work in search provides me great satisfaction in bringing people together around shared goals as well as developing networks on a more global scale. During my tenure in corporate HR, I went through numerous management assessments and all of them pointed out that I had very strong entrepreneurial skills and drive. HR gave me a lot of insight into organizational development and the talent acquisition process. I knew I

would need strong sales skills so I consciously strived to enhance my skills in sales very early into this phase of my career. I'm energetic and I love collaborating internationally to create synergy around the business of people. My most recent endeavor is my work in launching the IRC Institute, which is a global community of professionals focused on the issues of intercultural management. Six years later, I'm very happy with the decision to combine entrepreneurship with search and HR consulting.

*Your home country, Austria, is a member of the European Union. How has the E.U. structure affected how companies and their search partners approach talent acquisition and talent management?*

When communism collapsed in 1989, my hometown of Vienna became an important hub for international business for Central and Eastern Europe. Many headquarters were established and the demand for leadership talent led to a need for competent executive search practitioners in Austria. Times are more challenging nowadays. Changes within the political and economic landscape have seen Eastern European countries become strong members of the E.U. Vienna's role as a hub in the region has been eroded and therefore there has been a reduction in the number of executive search projects conducted locally. On the other hand, the E.U. structure makes it easier for internationally mobile candidates to move within European countries and accept assignments outside of their home countries. In addition, clients have become more flexible in regards to candidate's national backgrounds and sometimes even location. On the candidate's side, international experience and multiple language skills have become more important than ever. These dynamics underscore the importance that multinational companies place on top talent being mobile and able to move across borders for their career.

*IRC Partners is a confederation of independently owned search firms around the globe. How challenging is it for IRC to manage the cultures of firms spanning 45 countries?*

There are several strategic orientations, which all IRC member firms have to commit to sharing when joining the network. These are relentless customer focus, high ethical standards, very strong local market knowledge & networks and that 'personal touch' that boutique firms are known for when dealing with clients. Our motto is 'Globally Connected and Locally Committed' which sums this up quite well. As owners of our firms, all partners bring a strong entrepreneurial spirit to the table which can be a challenge in, and of, itself. In addition to our diverse nationalities, we all have a variety of different professional experiences, skills and educational backgrounds. To ensure alignment of 300-plus executive search professionals in over 40 countries we set up regular structures of personal exchange and interactions in regional meetings, industry clusters, specific work groups as well as global meetings and conferences. New initiatives, like our 'think tank' IRC Institute, further helps to create international cooperation in and outside of the IRC. Working on themes and content relevant to our clients also deepens the cooperation within the IRC group.

*Rita, are you finding that senior level search assignments are increasingly bending towards candidates with a broader global backgrounds and skill-sets?*

Yes, very much so. This has been a growing trend and one that our global partners are experiencing

practically universally. Clients are increasingly requiring both a strong base of experience at a specific country level plus at least a foothold in a specific national culture combined with ability and proven experience to work internationally, cross-cultural and with remote teams. To be competitive, it is crucial for candidates to be inter-culturally savvy and to be highly adaptive. By the way, this is another reason why we selected inter-cultural management as the key theme for the IRC Institute.

*Has this made candidate identification more challenging and how does the IRC network work together to target candidates between countries?*

Finding senior talent with the requisite balance of skills and experience coupled with a broad global background can be quite challenging. Sometimes senior managers have less international experience than younger generations who are known to begin seeking international exposure early on. While the younger candidates are often more fluent in foreign languages, they still lack the required seniority and experience in terms of leadership. Another common challenge is motivating candidates to accept roles in locations that may be at odds with their phase of life and family situation, too. Within our network, we have developed exchange processes and a global database to share information about strong internationally versatile candidates. From the perspective of the client, we follow the one-stop-shop principle, where one partner is the trusted key account manager and 'face' to the customer while coordinating the search across relevant countries in cooperation with other IRC partners.

*Executive search firms have all been diversifying their business platforms. Is this the right move at the right time?*

It is hard to say whether this is the right move for the industry because I think it depends on whether a firm offering adjunct services has the internal competency to deliver on them. I strongly believe that a consulting firm shall only offer services based on their key core competencies, carried out by consultants who are able to deliver at a high level of quality in the respective field. Unfortunately, recent history has shown that the low barriers to entry into the search profession has resulted in a large increase of new search firms starting up. Many of these lack the adequate academic training, knowledge and professional experience to deliver on some of the types of ancillary services being offered today. Given the pressure on margins and shrinking revenues in some markets, some firms are aggressively seeking new income streams and trying to diversify – often in fields beyond their core competence. This ultimately leads to multiple HR service offerings, diluted market prices, offer low service quality, and finally unhappy customers. In my view, it is highly unprofessional and counterproductive to offer services for which both knowledge and expertise is lacking. Do clients require a portfolio of different services from the same consulting firm? It depends. I think the jury is still out on that one.

*Contributed by Christopher W. Hunt, Publisher, Hunt Scanlon Media and Scott A. Scanlon, Editor-in-Chief, Hunt Scanlon Media*

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