



Case Study – Global Search

The Client

Paramount Farms, Inc. (PFI) is the largest grower and processor of pistachios and almonds in the world. A privately-held company headquartered in Los Angeles, PFI is vertically integrated and utilizes industry-leading process controls and food safety standards. This allows PFI to offer a consistently superior quality and supply to their customers in consumer, industrial and export markets. Company brands include Wonderful Pistachios®, Everybody's Nuts! Pistachios® and Almond Accents®.

PFI has experienced strong growth in the last several years and has partnered with Walter Rach, Managing Director of the Food and Beverage Industry Search Practice at Cook Associates Executive Search, to conduct several key domestic and international search assignments.

International Search Strategy

Cook Associates Executive Search is the exclusive U.S. partner of InterSearch, one of the top international executive search consortiums in the world. With 90 offices in 45 countries, InterSearch allows Cook to offer global executive search capabilities to its clients through proven and trusted partners.

In 2009, PFI's international growth created key search needs for a Director of Sales, South America and a Director of Sales, India. Mark Masten, the Vice President of Worldwide Sales at PFI contacted Walter Rach at Cook based upon their prior successful working relationship. Walter realized that InterSearch offered the most effective solution to PFI's requirements.

Before he introduced Mark to the InterSearch partner firms located in Brazil and India, Walter conducted in-depth meetings with the respective offices to discuss the nature of the search need and to determine the capability of the InterSearch partner to successfully complete the assignment. "These initial consultations are a critical component of the search process. I absolutely need to determine if my InterSearch partners are the right fit for my clients prior to making any introductions," Walter Rach explained.

Assured that the InterSearch partner firms in Brazil and India were confident and capable to handle PFI's needs, the 2009 PFI-Cook-InterSearch partnership began.

Director of Sales, South America

Following Walter's recommendation, PFI hired Renata Filippi Lindquist of Mariaca / InterSearch (based in Brazil) to conduct the search for a Director of Sales, South America. This individual would report to Mark and be responsible for the start-up of the PFI business in South America, initially developing the Brazilian retail market.

Renata realized that a major search challenge would be the issue that "pistachios and almonds are still not part of Brazilian's daily consumption. In fact, they are quite expensive and not well known. The initial hurdle would be to create an awareness and demand for the products."

Marketing competence, therefore, became an additional key component of this position. Candidates employed by large, multinational Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) companies were identified and thoroughly vetted by Renata.

Case Study – Global Search

Renata added that it was important to screen these large company candidates in order to identify “a strong entrepreneurial profile. Most of them are not ready to work on their own, nor in a home office environment. They enjoy the safety of the structured multinational companies, with a defined career development program and large teams to manage.”

Final candidates were referenced and presented in English to PFI. Initial in-country interviews were conducted by an executive from Roll International (PFI’s parent organization), who is Brazilian.

The top two candidates traveled to California for in-depth interviews with Mark and the PFI management team.

In June 2009, Mariaca / InterSearch placed Carlos Henrique with PFI as Director of Sales, based in Brazil.

“We had a very positive experience working with Paramount Farms” said Renata. “I would like to emphasize how important it was to have the client working closely with us, being always available for any information that was needed. Mark was always polite, ready to help and open to hear our suggestions, especially when we wanted him to analyze candidates that were ‘out of the box’.”

Director of Sales, India

Based upon Walter’s recommendation, PFI retained Srimanto Bhattacharya of Spearhead InterSearch (based in India) to conduct the search for a Director of Sales, India.

Unlike the start-up situation for Paramount Farms in Brazil, India represented a somewhat more established and on-going business and included an in-country manufacturing facility, which processed and packaged nuts exported from California. Nevertheless, PFI’s presence in India was still in its infancy stage and the primary issues for this position were to strengthen the company’s sales leadership and to grow the business for the region.

Srimanto of InterSearch commented, “When the search began, we initially identified candidates who had experience in developing a new category of products across the FMCG space. We targeted the food and beverage companies in India.”

Candidates from multinational corporations, with a strong understanding of the Indian workplace and with substantial marketing experience, were identified, evaluated, and personally interviewed by Srimanto. Care was taken to ensure culture fit and, specifically, the ability to articulate growth plans for the business were closely evaluated. Subsequent client interviews were scheduled and thorough referencing and Thomas profiling was done on the finalists.

According to Srimanto, “The experience of working with PFI was a great learning experience and pleasure. PFI was open and clear on their requirements. They were very cordial and responsive to suggestions. Even when it came to the offer stage, our opinion mattered. They were very patient and helpful in coordinating every aspect until the person came on board.”

In January 2010, InterSearch placed Jishnu Changkakoti with Paramount Farms. Because of Jishnu’s depth of experience and strong leadership abilities, he was appointed as General Manager for India, the top leadership role for the country.

Case Study – Global Search

Both searches were successfully completed and candidates with progressive and successful backgrounds with large, multinational, FMCG companies were appointed at Paramount Farms.

Mark Masten was pleased with the experience of working with InterSearch and he commented, “Everyone in the network that I’ve worked with was excellent. They understood the company, the specs and provided a good choice of candidates. Lastly, they stayed involved to ensure a proper fit.”

“Thus far, both new business leaders in Brazil and India are off to a great start” added Mark.

Walter also valued the experience of partnering with InterSearch and stated, “It was great to get to know Renata and Srimanto and it was a pleasure to work with them. They kept me well-informed throughout the search process, which gave me the confidence knowing the searches were in good hands. Both projects were very successfully done and the client was pleased with the results. This collaboration with InterSearch serves to greatly strengthen and enhance Cook Associates’ reputation and partnership with Paramount Farms.”

About Walter Rach

Walter Rach is Managing Director located in the firm’s Chicago headquarter office. With over 25 years of executive search experience for Cook Associates, he has built an impressive record of search success. Walter has a strong and proven reputation for his consultative approach to search strategy and management and his impressive execution abilities are validated by on-going and repeat client business.

Throughout his search career with Cook Associates, Walter has conducted executive search assignments for companies producing products for both the consumer and industrial marketplaces. His client base has included Fortune 500 companies, mid-sized organizations and small manufacturing firms and he has experience working with public, private and private equity owned organizations. Walter’s executive search practice at Cook Associates has had a particular focus on the Food and Beverage Industry.

Walter develops a comprehensive understanding of the strategies, operations, management and culture of his clients and his broad and extensive search experience gives him a strong knowledge of the various functional disciplines within an organization. He has experience conducting searches at the C-level as well as for the heads of functions such as Sales, Marketing, Operations, Supply Chain, Finance, Human Resources, Quality Assurance Research and Development and Nutrition.

Walter received a Master’s Degree in Business Administration from the University of Wisconsin - Madison and a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration Degree from the University of Illinois - Urbana. Prior to joining Cook Associates, he spent several years in key account sales for the Carnation Company.

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