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When One Consultant Is Better Than a Dozen

by Carol Hymowitz

- ▶ **Business Talent Group's experts don't carry expensive overhead.**
- ▶ **"I didn't need a big team off in the corner working by itself."**

When Mark Greenstein, executive vice president for strategic initiatives at Heartland Dental, sought consulting help earlier this year, he didn't call his former employer McKinsey. He turned instead to Business Talent Group, which matches companies with experienced but less costly independent consultants. "I needed one top person who could work side by side with my managers," says Greenstein, whose company, based in Effingham, Ill., provides administrative services including payroll, accounting, and IT to 750 dental practices, "not a team of senior and junior consultants" that could "cost several hundred thousand dollars a week."

Midsized companies such as Heartland, which has about \$1.1 billion in annual revenue, often require consulting help—on everything from digital marketing to expanding overseas—but they don't want the teams that big consulting firms often assign or the hefty expense of hiring them. Many are turning to companies like Los Angeles-based BTG, which allow them to choose from a range of independent consultants, typically for about one-third to one-half what a Big Three consulting firm would charge.

Founded nine years ago, BTG contracts 5,000 consultants and professionals around the world. Most have MBAs and years of experience working or consulting in various industries. When a client needs help, BTG assesses the scope of the project and offers a choice of a few potential consultants with suitable backgrounds. Most projects require a single person or a small team. And because they're self-employed, BTG's consultants don't come with the overhead costs of those employed by a large company. "Clients hire only the person or people they need for the time they want, and we provide access to talent that can be hard for midsize companies to get," says BTG's co-founder and chief executive officer, Jody Greenstone Miller.

More than one-quarter of BTG's clients are businesses with revenue of \$1 billion or less—and that share's been steadily growing. "We market mostly to big companies, but midsize firms are finding us, either through word of mouth or through the



Jody Greenstone Miller, BTG's co-founder and chief executive officer.

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investment community,” Miller says. BTG gets a cut of each project fee; revenue has grown 50 percent annually for the past five years and is on track to surpass \$40 million in 2016, she says.

Heartland’s Greenstein told BTG he needed a senior consultant who understood the administrative outsourcing his company handles. He also sought someone who’d work closely with his five-person staff and help them broaden their problem-solving skills. “I’m a huge fan of McKinsey and the work they do, but I didn’t need a big team off in the corner working by itself or the overhead costs that go with hiring them,” Greenstein says. “With BTG’s model, when we need an extra day or two to think things through or to clean up data, we can afford to take that time.”

The consultant he hired through BTG, Christian Frank, was, like Greenstein, a former McKinsey employee, and had experience in health-care and administrative outsourcing. He’d also been an executive at IBM and at ADP, a provider of administrative services to global companies, and he’d run his own startup.

Heartland is already acting on Frank’s recommendations. With smaller clients, “you’re much closer to the ultimate decision-makers than at large corporations,” the consultant says. “Sometimes everyone agrees with an idea you’ve helped formulate, and then, instead of being sent through seven different management layers for approval, it’s put into action the next week.” Frank is now starting a second consulting project at the company aimed at lowering costs and improving quality in operations.

Other midsize companies use both traditional consulting firms and BTG. At Broadridge Financial Solutions, which has \$3 billion in annual revenue and provides investor communications and technology to financial institutions, Chief Operating Officer Tim Gokey hired consultants from big companies including Boston Consulting Group to carry out due diligence on acquisitions, plot strategy, and handle projects that require a lot of data analysis. They could get a lot done quickly, didn’t need his supervision, and also had access to extensive research from their firms, he says.

Gokey taps BTG for projects requiring a single consultant who can help him and his managers map a strategy. Six years ago, soon after he arrived at Broadridge, based in Lake Success, N.Y., Gokey hired a consultant through BTG to help him reshape marketing. He liked the consultant’s work so much, after six months he hired her as his full-time chief marketing officer. BTG’s extensive network is cost-effective, Gokey says, “and sometimes we can even recruit from it.”

The bottom line: With 5,000 consultants on tap, Business Talent Group has seen revenue grow 50 percent annually for the past five years.

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