

BIG money in this high end BPO!

Onkar Tiwari | March 31, 2005 | 15:00 IST

It's Act 2 of the Indian BPO story.

As the number and variety of services grows, a large number of new career opportunities are being created.



One of the most exciting is in the outsourcing of legal processes.

Pangea 3, a Mumbai outfit, typifies this trend. Founded by Sanjay Kamlani and his partner David Perla, it deals with clients in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. It provides them an array of legal services in interesting new areas like patent prosecution, drafting and reviewing of commercial contracts, etc.

This work is different from the traditional voice-based/ transaction-oriented model followed by most BPOs today.

It involves greater analytical skill, is more subjective and is critical to the client's business. "It is a high-end BPO," stresses Perla.

The areas

Like Pangea, there are a host of firms providing legal services and, hence, a lot of careers waiting to be made. These are in four key areas:

i. Legal Transcription and Drafting Services

Law firms have extensive documentation requirements. Since it is non-value added for them, they outsource it to companies in India.

This involves data entry and/ or conversion. For example, a firm may send voice recordings that are to be converted to text. It may also involve activities like sending correspondence, document management and indexing, drafting memos, etc.

ii. Patent Prosecution

By consensus, this is the hottest area in outsourcing of legal processes. It involves helping file patent applications, infringement studies, trademark searches and the like.

For an update on the potential of this area, please click [here](#).

iii. Legal Research

This involves performing legislative history research and jurisdiction studies.

When dealing with corporate activities, it is important for mergers and acquisitions to look at potential targets or acquirers and their accompanying legal issues.

In the US, especially with state and central laws often differing, legal research is a big area.

iv. Other Services

Besides the broad categories listed above, firms also provide certain niche services.

These are often for a specific area like wills and probates, injury compensation, workplace laws, etc. This usually happens when the founding management of the company specialises in a particular field.

Getting hired

What kind of people are these outfits looking for?

This depends to a large extent on the job and company, but here are a few key requirements:

1. A good academic record.

As Zachary Bossenbroek of Gurgaon's Lexadigm says, "We look at graduates in the top 10% of the class."

This stress on academics is consistent across all companies. Also, jobs in intellectual property and patenting would require a strong scientific background.

2. Relevant work experience.

Most of these firms do not recruit freshers. They prefer those with one to four years of work experience for entry-level positions.

This is waived in certain circumstances like an outstanding academic record.

The experience requirement gives rise to the new industry paradox: the firm wants someone experienced,

but the industry itself is new.

In such situations, they give preference to an equivalent Indian experience.

For example, if you have worked in the patent prosecution area for Indian companies, you are more likely to be hired for a similar profile for US companies.

Experience with US and UK legal processes is a plus. But most organisations recognise that this is not widespread. As a result, they have inhouse training mechanisms to plug this gap.

3. Required personality trait.

As an American who has co-founded a company in India (the reverse of what most Indians would like to do), David Perla is quite clear about it: "An entrepreneurial drive with passion is most important."

This is essential since the sector is new and most companies are in the range of zero to two years old.

What you get

If you fit the above profile and are hired, there are many benefits.

i. Quality of work

Since this area involves cases and issues that are mostly unique, it is intellectually stimulating (except in some lines of legal transcription). This is enough to have it grouped under Knowledge Process Outsourcing.

ii. Little or no night shift

Since the work does not involve 'live' client interaction, like voice transactions, it can be done during the day.

The work is processed and then sent in the evening to the client, at whose end it is morning. Only in emergencies or certain select services does this not apply.

iii. Strong international affiliations

Most Indian law firms do not have strong international affiliations. These BPOs offer a way to learn the legal system of a foreign country.

Also, they are new and professionally run, so chances of merit-based, as opposed to referential, recruitment are higher.

iv. Great pay

Since BPOs realise significant savings compared to their home country operations (usually in the region of 50 per cent or more), some of it is passed on to employees in the form of slightly higher salaries.

The icing on the cake is the ability to share profits. Jaya Shrivastav of Varinate Global, says, "We provide stock options and other profit-sharing incentives."

In most companies, these are available only after a year's service and are not publicly traded, thus reducing their utility.

v. Low attrition

Ultimately, the best indicator of the satisfaction of any job is, of course, the attrition rate.

KPOs like legal process outsourcing really score over their BPO rivals in this regard. The attrition rate is typically below 20 per cent compared to BPOs, where it hovers around 40 per cent.

That is half the dissatisfaction or, put another way, double the satisfaction!

This advantage is limited in two instances, though:

- If you want to specialise in India-related matters, this would not be a good option.
- If you plan to practise litigation internationally, this would not help.

Most countries like the US require candidates to pass local exams for litigation.

Consequently, the outsourcing firm's employees are restricted to paralegal services and the work is reviewed by counsels and attorneys with the required licenses in the US.

The growth path

Being a sunrise sector brings uncertainty and making long term career plans difficult.

Luckily, there is a clear path most firms follow.

"Career growth can be in two directions," explains Perla, "vertically specialising in a single practice like intellectual property, or horizontally across different areas like intellectual property, contracts and so on."

Zachary Bossenbroek gives a clear picture of the various stages especially for attorneys and those in patent prosecution: "After the first year, an attorney/ patent draftsperson participates in profit sharing, which gives monthly bonuses based on hours billed and efficiency. From the second or third year onwards (depending on proven abilities), the employee has the ability to mentor and oversee a staff of attorneys/ patent drafters and benefit from their productivity in the first couple of years. Ultimately, the best performers become managers, which compares to partners in a law firm."

Remember, most of these firms are experiencing rapid growth. Hence, your learning curve will be steeper.

The better you manage people, the faster you will rise.

Starting the hunt

If all this excites you, the next step is to start detailed search and application.

Where should you begin looking? For starters, the table below gives a list of some of the more popular BPO firms that have an established practice or have been quoted in the press.

Visiting their web sites gives an idea of the firm and how to contact them (*see below list*). For additional information on the industry as a whole, please browse the links provided to various articles (*see related articles below*).

Getting recruited demands a different process, though. Most firms follow one or more of four methods:

i. Referrals through existing employees.

ii. Placement agencies. This is because they may wish to remain anonymous or may not have the local contacts.

iii. Online web sites like www.naukri.com. It is also a widespread practice for placement agencies to scan CVs on the web site on behalf of the hiring firms.

iv. Advertisements in trade-specific publications, for example, patent openings may be advertised in journals on intellectual property.

Advertisements in job sections of newspapers and direct recruitment are not widespread, though they are likely to grow in importance.

A note of caution

Being in the legal business, there is a strong emphasis on confidentiality.

Firms require employees to sign confidentiality agreements on joining. It is important to understand the terms and conditions carefully before doing so.

The business model of legal processing outfits, unlike the earlier dotcoms, is solid. However, companies vary greatly in their management skill. So be selective about where you want to work.

If everything falls in place and you do join a legal process outsourcing firm, expect the advantages listed earlier.

But, above all, be prepared for the hectic and action-packed ride on the fastest growing sector of the economy!

A List of Legal BPO firms in India

Name	Website	City
Pangea 3	www.pangea3.com	Mumbai
Office Tiger	www.officetiger.com	Chennai
Lexadigm	www.lexadigm.com	Gurgaon
Variante Global	www.varianteglobal.com	Delhi
Lawwave	www.lawwave.com	Chennai
Intellevate LLC	www.intellevate.com	Delhi
QuisLex	www.quislex.com	Hyderabad
Mind Crest	www.mindcrest.com	Mumbai
Atlas Legal	www.atlaslegal.com	Bangalore
Manthan Services	www.manthanservices.com	Gurgaon

Also, please visit the [database of BPO firms](#).

Related articles on the web

There is a useful list of articles that you can read to understand the overall developments in the industry.

- [Briefed in Bangalore](#)
- [The next wave of offshoring](#)
- [Legal services going offshore - a critical trend!](#)

URL for this article:

<http://www.rediff.com///getahead/2005/mar/31bpo.htm>

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