

# Rob Andrews

CEO and chairman | Allen Austin Global Executive Search



is extraordinarily hot right now.

**What have you learned is the most popular perk that lures an executive?**

I don't think perks are too terribly important when it comes to luring an executive. You can throw things in that kind of stir the pot, but I don't think it will work to attract top-quality CEOs. In the past there might have been more focus on perks, but this is a time when CEOs have to perform and everyone is under the microscope.

**Is it difficult to get people to move to Houston?**

There are challenges from time to time. I'd say it's substantially easier than it was 10 to 15 years ago. A trip or two down here usually does the trick. I've lived here since 1961, so selling this city is easy. If you live here, you love it.

**What is a must-have characteristic or quality of a good executive?**

We're about facilitating matches that last. There are some universal qualities such as leadership quality, vision, the ability to lead a workforce and have empathy for others. It's not so much command and control that we saw in the past. Those methods are pretty ineffective today. We're dealing with a different generation and different work ethic. It takes a leader to sell a vision, to unite a workforce.

Personally, we look for CEOs and senior executives with strong leadership, honesty, who are transparent and altruistic, because we think those are the things that last.

**What's a deal breaker?**

Arrogance, dishonesty, slash-and-burn guys.

**Are there more male or female candidates?**

Most of the people we place are happily employed and we have to go and pry them out. Because of the demographics, most of them are males. There's a great demand for diversity. There are more female executives today than 10 years ago, and hopefully in 10 years there will be more than today.

**Does someone have to be already employed to catch your eye?**

If you had asked me that question five years ago, I would have said 99 percent of the people we place are employed. A fair amount of them today are in transition. There are no hard and fast rules. ■

**R**ob Andrews has been in the executive search industry for 23 years and makes it his business to find the right executives for the job. Houston-based Allen Austin Global Executive Search ranked No. 2 on *Houston Business Journal's* 2011 Largest Houston-Area Retained Executive Search Firms list (see page 28). The list is ranked by the number of searches completed in 2010, in which Allen Andrews had 204.

In the forward of Andrews' book, "High Performance Human Capital: Real World Solutions for Hiring and Retaining CEOs and Executive Talent in 2011 and Beyond," he says the executive hiring process typically works like dating and marriage, with very similar results: "Just like dating, we usually start out with a woefully inadequate description of precisely who we are, exactly what we are looking for and specifically what we are trying to accomplish."

Below, he shares his insights into the industry with *HBJ* intern Bayan Raji.

**What companies are looking for executives?**

Most of our practice is middle market. We work primarily with companies valued at \$10 million to a little over \$1 billion. Clients are looking for CEOs and C-level executives who are focused on solutions, not problems. We all know about the problems. We want someone who can give solutions.

**How is hiring for those companies?**

I think it's kind of a mixed bag. A significant amount are hiring senior levels, but I don't think it's trickled down to rank and file yet. It's also different by sector, for example, the drilling sector



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## LARGEST HOUSTON-AREA RETAINED EXECUTIVE SEARCH FIRMS (Ranked by Number of Searches Completed in 2010)

Source: Questionnaires.

Rank	Last Year's Rank	Name of Firm Address Telephone   Website	Number of Searches Completed in 2010	Number of Placements in 2010	Number of Local Employees/ Offices	Number of National Employees/ Offices	Minimum Compensation of Executives Placed	Sample of Occupational Specialties and Services Offered	Top Local Executive/ Year Founded Locally	Parent Company or Owner/ Headquarters
1	1	<b>Korn/Ferry International</b> 700 Louisiana, Suite 3900, Houston 77002 713-651-1834   www.kornferry.com	237	DND	21 1	DND 20	\$270,000	board, CEO, COO, CFO, general counsel, human resources, procurement, industrial, energy and natural resources, health care and life sciences, and financial services; leadership and talent consulting, succession planning, executive coaching, education, leadership assessment	Eric C. Nielsen, senior client partner and managing director, Houston 1970	Korn/Ferry International Los Angeles
2	3	<b>Allen Austin Global Executive Search</b> 4543 Post Oak Place, Suite 217, Houston 77027 713-355-1900   www.allenaustinsearch.com	204	DND	11 1	22 11	DND	board director, CEO, C-level, vice president search and leadership advisory consulting in all industries and professions; energy, consumer, emerging technology, advertising	Rob Andrews, chairman and CEO 1996	Allen Austin Lowe & Powers Houston
3	4	<b>Heidrick &amp; Struggles International</b> 600 Travis, Suite 6875, Houston 77002 713-751-3047   www.heidrick.com	129	94	17 1	1,615 15	\$240,000	energy, upstream oil and gas, energy service and equipment, alternative energy, chemicals, health care, financial services, CEO and board practice, financial officers practice, leadership consulting, leadership advisory, succession planning, board review	Les Csorba, partner in charge 1994	Heidrick & Struggles International Chicago
4	6	<b>Egon Zehnder International</b> 700 Louisiana St., Suite 2750, Houston 77002 713-331-6700   www.egonzehnder.com	110	DND	16 1	282 10	\$400,000	CEO, COO, CFO, CIO, human resources, operational leadership, commercial leadership, board placement, management appraisal, team effectiveness review, executive integration, succession planning across all industries with an emphasis on energy	Trent S. Aulbaugh, Houston office leader 2005	Egon Zehnder International Zurich
5	11	<b>The Alexander Group</b> 2700 Post Oak Blvd., Suite 2400, Houston 77056 713-993-7900   www.thealexandergroup.com	97	97	11 1	15 5	\$200,000	board directors, CEO, COO, CFO, CIO, general counsel, human resources, sales and marketing, global energy, professional services, health care, not-for-profit, manufacturing; board searches, diversity searches, behavioral assessments	Jane Howze, managing director 1983	Innovative Strategies Inc. Houston
6	Not Ranked	<b>Manhattan Resources</b> 1221 McKinney, Suite 2950, Houston 77010 713-980-1400   www.manhattanresources.com	94	112	20 1	21 2	\$80,000	oil and gas, energy and petrochemical industries: all functions; consulting, executive coaching, high performance team building	Chris Schoettelkotte, president and CEO 1999	Manhattan Resources Inc. Houston
7	5	<b>Preng &amp; Associates</b> 2925 Briarpark, Suite 1111, Houston 77042 713-266-2600   www.preng.com	92	87	16 1	16 1	\$210,000	provide services to the total energy value chain	David Preng, president 1980	Preng & Associates LLC Houston
8	Not Ranked	<b>Maxwell Drummond Inc.</b> 10375 Richmond Ave., Suite 1830, Houston 77042 713-316-4480   www.maxwelldrumsmond.com	88	81	18 1	18 1	\$150,000	energy industry, oil and gas, upstream, midstream, downstream, board of directors, executive management, senior, professional and technical labor market consulting; management consulting	Jamie Ferguson, vice president, U.S. and Latin America 2001	N/A London
9	9	<b>Outside the Box Executive Search</b> 20810 Pierceton Court, Katy 77494 281-395-6530   www.greattalent.net	76	76	3 1	3 1	\$25,000	board, president, C-level, vice president, management; global recruitment	Suzu Houston, president 2004	Suzu Houston Enterprises LLC Katy
10	8	<b>Ashen &amp; Associates Executive Search</b> 2914 Lakeview Drive, Missouri City 77459 713-271-1983   www.ashenandassociates.com	73	73	1 1	1 1	\$160,000	CEO, COO, CFO and vice president levels of both oilfield service and oil companies worldwide, categories include operations, manufacturing, engineering, finance and sales/marketing at senior levels for local, country, hemisphere or global management, management assessment, restructuring and startup consulting	Diane Ashen, president 1977	Diane Ashen Houston
11	12	<b>The Energists Ltd.</b> 10260 Westheimer, Suite 300, Houston 77042 713-781-6881   www.energists.com	62	62	6 1	6 1	\$125,000	worldwide executive and senior technical contributors within the exploration and production sector of the oil and gas industry	Alex Preston, president 1979	The Energists Ltd. Houston
12	Not Ranked	<b>Boyden Global Executive Search</b> 3 Riverway, Suite 1150, Houston 77056 713-655-0123   www.boyden.com/houston	60	56	13 1	97 11	\$180,000	board of directors, C-level executives, oilfield and industrial services and equipment, finance, oil and gas, consumer products, manufacturing, legal, supply chain; board assessment, succession planning	Thomas C. Zay Jr., Alicia K. Hasell and James J. Hertlein, managing directors 1994	Boyden World Corp. Hawthorne, N.Y.
13	13	<b>Kristan International Inc.</b> 12 Greenway Plaza, Suite 1100, Houston 77046 713-961-3040   www.kristan.com	49	49	5 1	5 1	\$100,000	sales, marketing, manufacturing, executive management, human resources, engineering, oil and gas services, finance, energy, technology, commercial real estate, procurement; international searches for vice presidents, general managers, presidents and management level contractors, executive/board level references	Robert P. Kristan, president 1983	Kristan International Inc. Houston
14	15	<b>The Edge Group</b> 6135 Clyde St., Houston 77007 713-802-9822   www.edgegroup.cc	38	36	3 1	3 1	\$80,000	energy, health care, manufacturing, development, finance, education; contract recruiters	David Seeley, president 1994	The Edge Group Houston
15	16	<b>B+R Partners</b> 952 Echo Lane, Suite 312, Houston 77024 713-785-0706   www.brsearch.net	35	35	4 1	4 1	\$120,000	oil and gas	Bob Rule, Ed Brooks, Kathie Forney and Roger Rule, partners 2000	partnership Houston
16	14	<b>Witt/Kieffer</b> 10375 Richmond Ave., Suite 1625, Houston 77042 713-266-6779   www.wittkieffer.com	25	20	5 1	154 16	\$150,000	health care and higher education consultants	Marvene Eastham, senior vice president 1994	Witt/Kieffer Oak Brook, Ill.
17	18	<b>Lowry Rhoads Associates</b> 21 Waterway Ave., Suite 300, The Woodlands 77380 281-363-3041   www.lowryrhoads.com	25	25	3 2	6 2	\$120,000	midstream and upstream energy, manufacturing, engineering and construction, not-for-profit, industrial distribution, oilfield service, accounting and finance	W. Randall Lowry, partner 2000	Partnership The Woodlands
18	17	<b>Clarey/Napier International</b> 1221 McKinney St., Suite 3112, Houston 77010 713-238-6705   www.cnintl.com	21	21	3 1	3 DND	\$175,000	representative clients/sectors of expertise include E&P, renewable energy, power, private equity, energy investment banking, oil field services and emerging companies	William A. Clarey II and Ginger L. Napier, partners 1998	Partnership Houston
19	19	<b>Abaco International</b> 2 Riverway, Suite 1710, Houston 77056 713-965-0876   www.abaco-intl.com	19	19	4 1	4 1	\$258,000	providing multinational companies in energy, industrial, technology and manufacturing with executive search services; competency fit, cultural fit, top grading, Hogan assessment, executive integration, 90-day onboarding	Marie Guillot, CEO 2008	Abaco International Inc. Houston

Some firms did not respond to requests for information.

When firms are tied by number of searches completed, the secondary ranking criteria is the number of local employees.

DND=Did not disclose this information.

N/A=Not available or not applicable.

List Researcher: Diana McKinney.

# Houston executive search firms remain busy finding top leaders

BY VICKIE D. ASHWILL  
SPECIAL TO HOUSTON BUSINESS JOURNAL

The number of companies seeking top-level executives is the most it's been since 2008, which has been a boon for Houston-area retained executive search firms.

Some say the increase means the economy is on the upswing, but also note global firms are filling spots opened by retirements and CEOs leaving highly scrutinized positions.

The end result is that companies are seeking very specific experts to take them forward in a still-tough economy.

"Retained search worldwide in late 2011 is almost back to 2008 levels, which was a record year," said Rob Andrews, CEO of Houston-based Allen Austin Global Executive Search.

However, retained searches this year have taken a huge leap forward from the downturn of 2009, when retained search suffered its worst decline in history and many search firms went out of business, he said.

C-level hiring is usually a precursor to economic recovery, said Andrews.

"The demand for C-level search is expected to increase substantially in the near term, and we're already seeing a critical shortage of executive leadership in certain sectors."

## RIGHT LEADERSHIP

Tough economic times call for different kinds of leaders, said Donald Minnick, managing consultant in the Houston office of London-based YSC Ltd., a group

“You can't assume that someone who is great at Shell will also be great at Exxon.”



Marie Guillot | Abaco International

of business psychologists who do executive assessments. Today's executive needs to be able to make difficult decisions and lead a company through recovery, different from the boom-time leader who seeks opportunities.



Minnick

Neither recruiters nor companies want to make a hiring mistake.

"We're talking about positions that make a quarter of a million dollars and up," said Minnick. "A hiring mistake in that kind of position is disastrous."

Minnick's firm specializes in vetting top candidates through behavioral interviewing, typically spending half a day collaborating with a candidate to help them identify strengths and what is important to the role. In the process, candidates learn what development themes are important as well, he said.

Executive hiring is indeed a tight market

again, said Marie Guillot, CEO of Houston-based Abaco International, who does not think business is up because of an improving economy.

"There is a need for the right kind of leadership. (Companies) want the best players," she said.

Guillot's company, like other recruiting firms, help businesses flush out job descriptions so they more clearly reflect the job details.

"You can take five pipeline companies; each has its own unique culture that makes one company different from the next," Guillot said. "You can't assume that someone who is great at Shell will also be great at Exxon. They may have been wildly successful at one company, but don't fit in the next."

Guillot's firm helps companies through a culture mapping exercise to help identify what makes employees successful. Candidates are first screened to see if they have a similar background, skill sets and other technical skills.

"We look at what motivates them — their soft skills — their style and other cultural things to see if they will be a fit."

Guillot described a client who moved from a highly matrixed organization, where collaboration is key, to an entrepreneurial organization.

"People fail because they don't fit in," said Guillot. "There was not enough of a culture check, or they had different expectations from the company."

Top-notch spots are being filled by executives who are probably happy with their jobs or have specialty skills that fit specific positions, said Guillot. She recently had a conversation with a top-level executive

who had just been promoted in his firm and was not looking for anything new.

"I am presenting an opportunity to him," she said. "This kind of high-level position won't come along very often."

Most C-level candidates come from jobs that they are already happy with and aren't looking for anything new, said Andrews. The vast majority are head-down happy, but, with the downturn in recent years, there is also some good talent on the sidelines.

"We don't reject candidates who may be in transition," said Andrews.

## PERKS

Unsurprisingly, C-level recruitment is mostly driven by salary, said recruiters. Abaco International had a minimum annual compensation of \$258,000 of executives placed in 2010.

"Potential candidates know they are in demand when they get a lot of calls," Guillot said. "The more specific you get (in the job description), the fewer candidates are out there. A client has to be willing to pay a premium to get who they want."

If not, companies must be willing to compromise and hire someone they believe has potential to fill the role — someone who is less trained or from another field, she said.

However, once a top executive gets the job, the pressure is on, said Guillot.

"It's the new person's job to fit in," she said. "(If it's a bad situation), they need to have some early wins. If it's a public company, it is more noticeable. It has a huge impact on the company if they don't succeed." ■

Vickie D. Ashwill is a freelance writer.

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