

Careers in Management Consulting



WetFeet Insider Guide

2005 Edition

The WetFeet Research Methodology

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Each WetFeet Insider Guide represents hundreds of hours of careful research and writing. We start with a review of the public information available. (Our writers are also experts in reading between the lines.) We augment this information with dozens of in-depth interviews of people who actually work for each company or industry we cover. And, although we keep the identity of the rank-and-file employees anonymous to encourage candor, we also interview the company's recruiting staff extensively, to make sure that we give you, the reader, accurate information about recruiting, process, compensation, hiring targets, and so on. (WetFeet retains all editorial control of the product.) We also regularly survey our members and customers to learn about their experiences in the recruiting process. Finally, each Insider Guide goes through an editorial review and fact-checking process to make sure that the information and writing live up to our exacting standards before it goes out the door.

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Careers in Management Consulting

2005 Edition

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Careers in Management Consulting

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Management Consulting at a Glance

Opportunity Overview

- Undergrads from all majors are heavily recruited for 2- to 3-year positions as analysts.
- MBAs compete for a large number of tenure-track slots at all firms.
- Many firms court JDs, PhDs, and other advanced-degree holders.
- Midcareer people are hired on an ad hoc basis into various levels by most firms.

Major Pluses about Careers in Consulting

- Excellent opportunity to learn about a wide variety of businesses and business issues.
- Work with a talented, fun, young, and hardworking group of people.
- Outstanding pay and perks.

Major Minuses about Careers in Consulting

- Long, intense work hours (55 to 60 per week on average) and lots of travel.
- Your life's not your own—it belongs to your clients.
- A step or two removed from actual decision-making and profit/loss responsibility. Consultants can only make suggestions; they can't guarantee that they'll be successfully implemented.

Recruiting Overview

- Formalized and competitive process.
- Primary channel is on-campus recruiting.
- Emphasis on academic and analytical abilities.
- Case interviews mandatory for most firms (and painful if you're not prepared).

What Recruiters Look For

- On resumes, recruiters typically look for evidence of communication skills, quantitative aptitude, leadership ability, and academic achievement.
- In interviews, recruiters want to know how students think; they encourage candidates to be themselves, to answer questions directly and honestly, and to explain their thinking clearly.
- Recruiters agree that students who succeed in consulting have strong problem-solving skills, work well in teams, and share a commitment to help clients.

The Industry

- Overview
- The Bottom Line
- Outlook
- Focus on Consulting
- The Big Picture
- Trends in Consulting
- Picking and Choosing

Overview

So, you're about to graduate, and you think you want to be a management consultant. Or, more likely, you think you'll spend a few years as a consultant and then move on to other things. You're not alone. Consulting firms are traditionally among the largest employers of top MBA and college graduates. But with single-digit growth projected for the industry in 2004 and 2005, expect competition for jobs to be as tough as ever.

More than half the people in top MBA programs and a significant number of college seniors flirt with the idea of becoming a management consultant after graduation. It's a high-paying, high-profile field that offers students the opportunity to take on a lot of responsibility right out of school and quickly learn a great deal about the business world.

In essence, consultants are hired advisors to corporations. They tackle a wide variety of business problems and provide solutions for their clients. Depending on the size and chosen strategy of the firm, these problems can be as straightforward as researching a new market or as complex as totally rethinking the client's organization. No matter what the engagement is, the power that management consultants wield is hard to scoff at. They can advise a client to acquire a related company worth hundreds of millions of dollars, or reduce the size of its workforce by thousands of employees.

The big names in management consulting are well known. Bain, the Boston Consulting Group, McKinsey, and a solid crop of similar firms vie for contracts from the Fortune 500. Each firm has a slightly different focus, culture, and approach. Pay attention to these differences so you can show in your interviews

that you understand why Company X is far superior to the rest of the field, and what makes you the perfect fit. We provide a few pointers in this guide to help you distinguish between the players. Insiders throughout the industry stress that knowing the differences between firm practices and cultures is critical to getting hired. For those of you interested in a closer look at a particular firm, WetFeet publishes the company Insider Guide series.

One word of clarification: “Consulting” is a big, one-size-fits-all term that includes virtually any form of advice-giving. This report focuses primarily on the flavor known as management consulting. Often called *strategy consulting*, this segment of the industry includes firms that specialize in providing advice about strategic and core operational issues. Although some of the highest-profile firms populate this segment, they’re not the only ones doing consulting.

Thousands of other organizations and individuals call themselves consultants, make money by selling their advisory services, and offer plenty of opportunities for employment. If you like the idea of giving advice to other businesses, and you have a particular interest in computers, human resources, corporate communications, mobile communications, health care, financial services, real estate, e-commerce, or some other specialized field, there’s a good chance you can find a position with an organization doing precisely that.

IT services, in particular, has been a growing segment in the past 10 years. Many of the biggest consulting firms, including IBM Global Services, Capgemini, and Accenture, derive a significant portion of their revenue through systems integration and outsourcing engagements. These firms work with a client to develop hardware and software solutions and then often manage the systems (hence the term *outsourcing*).

By and large, the things insiders like about consulting are similar across the board. They enjoy the variety afforded by working in different industries for

many different clients, the intellectual challenge of pushing themselves to the limit as they tackle complex business problems, and the people with whom they work. And they like the money and the perks. The industry pays very well, and consultants travel in style.

Consulting insiders also offer a litany of complaints: 60-hour workweeks are standard (with crunch times calling for more), extended travel is the rule, and personal plans must often be put on hold. “The deadlines are driven by the clients and not by you,” says an insider. That’s not a complaint; it’s a fact—be aware of it. In addition, at some point most consultants long for the opportunity to actually implement their great ideas.

The Bottom Line

Consulting is a fantastic long-term career for a few, a great short-term experience for many more, and the wrong place for many others. The work is challenging and diverse, but it’s a step removed from actually operating a company. It requires intellect, people skills, and a willingness to work hard. The pay is outstanding, especially if you’re in one of the well-known firms. While just about anybody with a few skills can find work as a consultant of one sort or another, competition for jobs at the elite firms is particularly intense. “Really do your research. Do you think this is going to be the right environment, the right career? Consulting can be invigorating, but it’s very challenging as well,” says one insider. Know why you want to be a consultant, know why you want to work at the firms you’re applying to, dot all your *i*’s, and cross all your *t*’s.

Outlook

After several down years, firms began recruiting again in 2004. The economic recovery kicked in around August to September 2003, and is expected to drive single-digit growth for the consulting industry through 2006. “I think [2004] is a year of renewed growth for the consulting industry, which means a period of renewed growth for recruiting as well,” one insider says. Firms are reporting more contract wins and utilization rates well above the norm. “The outlook is positive,” another insider says. “We see a movement upward in the number of hiring. We’re seeing a lot more deals, and our capacity is at the highest mark that it’s been in a couple of years. The management team absolutely thinks the work will continue.”

This should be good news for graduates, right? Well, kind of. Fueled by corporate strategy, reengineering, enterprise resource planning (ERP), the Internet boom, and Y2K technology scares, the consulting industry grew at mostly double-digit rates from the 1970s until 2000. But when the economy hit a wall, consulting crashed hard, too. Overall revenues shrank in 2001, stayed flat in 2002, and grew about 3 percent in 2003. According to *Consultants News*, about 60 percent of firms entered 2004 without plans to change staffing levels, instead hoping to get more productivity out of existing staff.

An ongoing economic slump was responsible for the industry’s poor performance, but other factors have been in play as well. Many companies have hired former consultants, reducing their reliance on outside firms. Many have grown more demanding, forcing firms to hire industry experts over MBAs. The focus on cost-cutting and caution regarding IT and other spending chipped away at the availability of consulting work. Fee growth has

generally been flat since 2001. Outsourcing, which transfers activities from a company to a consulting firm, provides stable margins, but doesn't create more jobs for consultants.

The growth that appears to have begun won't mirror that of the go-go 1990s. "I don't think we'll see the spiking growth that we saw in the late '90s," says an insider. "We moved through the early 2000s on cost reduction. Now the focus is on growth of the bottom line. The focus isn't so much on how fast I can grow my top line or how I can cut my costs, but how can I improve my productivity. I think those initiatives are going to drive the opportunities for growth in the consulting industry."

A few things are different from hiring a few years back. One, buying patterns are changing. "What I've been seeing is that the buyers are looking for less hype and more substance. Over the boom years, there were a lot of high-flying firms with a lot of hype around them," an insider says. "Now what we're seeing is a buying community that's a little more savvy, a little more senior. There's a trend that the decision to hire consultants is being moved up higher in the organization."

As a consequence, firms are looking for more experience in those they hire. "For the pre-MBA experience, it would be advantageous to make sure they're getting some serious, substantial experience—industry experience for the type of client engagements they want to work in post-MBA," an insider says. "Some MBAs will look at the summer associate program as an opportunity to try something completely different. But if they're trying something for variety, and they want to work in a post-MBA position in a field different than their summer position, they're putting themselves at a disadvantage."

Focus on Consulting

The consulting industry doesn't lend itself to easy numerical comparisons. First, many firms are privately held, so revenue and profit figures aren't readily available. Second, there is considerable disagreement over what constitutes consulting revenue. Are we to consider all of the fee income or management consulting revenue only? How do we handle firms that have several different business units that provide consulting? Third, firms operate in a wide variety of sectors, from outsourcing IT to strategy, which makes it challenging to classify industry players. For instance, it's clear that McKinsey is a management consulting firm, but what about IBM, which has a large systems consulting group? All this is to say that you should pick your own favorite number, decide what it means to you, and be sure to take it with a grain of salt.

The rankings below are from an annual survey of MBAs who named the companies they'd most like to work for in 2004 and *Consulting Magazine's* list of top firms to work for. Despite McKinsey's internal issues (see firm profile), the firm's name cachet landed it in first place for the 8th year in a row. Bain dropped a couple of spots; Boston Consulting Group fell out of the top ten after finishing third in 2003; and Booz Allen Hamilton rocketed from 26 to ten. Overall, consulting firms fared worse than in previous years.

Where MBAs Want to Work

|  Consulting Firms that Ranked in the Top 50 | |
|--|--|
| Rank | Firm |
| 1 | McKinsey & Company |
| 7 | Bain & Company |
| 10 | Booz Allen Hamilton |
| 11 | Deloitte (includes consulting and audit units) |
| 13 | The Boston Consulting Group |
| 27 | Accenture |
| Source: Based on a study by Universum and <i>Fortune</i> of more than 2,500 MBAs at 40 business schools in North America. Ann Harrington, <i>Fortune</i> , April 19, 2004. | |

|  Consulting Magazine's Top Five Firms to Work For, 2003 | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Rank | Firm |
| 1 | Bain & Company |
| 2 | McKinsey & Company |
| 3 | Pittiglio Rabin Todd & McGrath |
| 4 | Hewitt Associates |
| 5 | The Boston Consulting Group |
| Source: <i>Consulting Magazine</i> , www.consultingmag.com/CMBestFirms.html . | |



Firm Thumbnails, 2003

| Firm | World Mgmt. Consulting Revenue (\$M) | Professionals (World) | # of Projects at Once | Favored Location for Work |
|--|---|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Accenture | 11,820 | 75,000 | 1 | Client |
| Advisory Board Company | 122 | 596 | Varies | Office |
| A.T. Kearney | 857 | 4,000 | 1 | Client |
| Bain & Company | n/a | 2,100 | 2 | Office |
| BearingPoint | n/a | 16,000 | 2 | Client |
| Booz Allen Hamilton (WCB) | 2,500 | 13,000 | 1 | Client |
| Boston Consulting Group | n/a | 2,600 | 2 | Office |
| Capgemini | 7,222 | 55,400 | n/a | Client |
| CGI Group | 2,719 | 25,000 | 1 | Varies |
| Corporate Executive Board | 210 | 1,284 | Varies | Varies |
| Computer Sciences Corp. | 17,200 | 90,000 | 1 | Client |
| Deloitte Consulting | 3,245 | 12,000 | 1 | Client |
| DiamondCluster | 158 | 458 | 1 | Client |
| IBM Global Services | 42,635 | 180,000 | Varies | Varies |
| L.E.K. | n/a | 450 | 2 | Varies |
| Marakon Associates | n/a | 300 | n/a | Client |
| McKinsey & Company | n/a | 6,200 | 1 | Client |
| Mercer Management Consulting | 459 | 1,400 | 1 | Client |
| Monitor Group | n/a | 1,200 | 2 | Office |
| Navigant Consulting | 318 | 959 | 1 | n/a |
| PRTM | n/a | 450 | 1–2 | Varies |
| Roland Berger | n/a | 1,700 | 1 | Client |
| <p>Notes: All numbers are estimates based on information from publicly available sources. Different firms count professional employees differently. Fiscal years differ among firms; revenue and professionals are current as of summer 2004. Privately held firms do not disclose revenues. Source: WetFeet research.</p> | | | | |

The Big Picture

These days, it seems like just about everyone and her brother professes to be a consultant. “Hold on,” you say. “How can Aunt Suzie, who has her own consulting business, and those people in the blue suits at the famous New York addresses all be doing the same thing?” All of them might really be consultants, but you can bet they’re not all doing the same thing. Just as there are many different sorts of doctors, there are consultants with all manner of expertise and specialty.

As mentioned, this report deals primarily with management consultants, the elite consulting firms that make the most money advising the biggest and most powerful companies in the world. However, there are a number of specialized groups within the management consulting field and many more types of consulting firms that provide specialized advice and services in other areas.

People who want a career in consulting can find a number of attractive choices. To help you get a better handle on the options, we’ve grouped the consulting world into several different segments. Keep in mind, however, that our groupings are flexible. Firms in one group can and do compete directly with players in other segments. Also, consolidation, growth, and market gyrations rapidly change the landscape. One final caveat: Where we’ve placed a firm does not reflect the quality of the organization. Brief profiles of a few of the major categories follow.

Elite Management Consulting Firms

This group is populated by a few top strategy firms—Bain, Booz Allen, BCG, McKinsey—and a host of smaller challengers. The bulk of the work done by

these firms consists of providing strategic or operational advice to top executive officers in Fortune 500 companies. For this, they charge the highest fees and enjoy the most prestige. They also have the biggest attitudes, work the most intense hours, and take home the most pay. The elite management consulting firms fight to woo the top graduates from the best graduate and undergraduate schools. Although some elite firms differentiate themselves by specializing in particular industries or functions, most consultants who work for this group of firms are generalists who work on a wide variety of projects and industries.

Representative firms: Accenture, A.T. Kearney, Bain & Company, Booz Allen Hamilton, The Boston Consulting Group, Marakon Associates, Mercer Management Consulting, McKinsey & Company, Monitor Group.

Big Four—Affiliated Consulting Firms

The Big Four were the Big Five until Andersen went bankrupt after the Enron scandal, driving what at the time seemed to be the final stake into the heart of a historically lucrative marriage between consultants and auditors. When Andersen went bankrupt, consulting firms were already separating from their audit partners: Ernst & Young had sold its consulting practice to Cap Gemini to form Cap Gemini Ernst & Young (now Capgemini) and KPMG Consulting had broken off from its accounting side and gone public (it has since changed its name to BearingPoint). Other members of this group include PricewaterhouseCoopers, which sold its consulting unit to IBM in July 2002, and Deloitte Consulting, where a buyout by consulting partners was scotched (the consulting arm has since been reintegrated into Deloitte). This past year, there were whispers about accounting firms rebuilding their consulting practices, as some of the conflict-of-interest issues have faded. The Big Four firms offer strategic advice, information systems support, and other more specialized consulting services to many of the same corporations served by the elite consulting firms. They also

boast strong information technology capabilities on projects requiring heavy systems implementation work, and in some cases offer outsourcing to compete with the technology and systems consulting firms.

Boutique Strategy Firms

Within the universe of strategy and operations, consulting firms constitute a significant subgroup of firms that specialize in a particular industry, process, or type of consulting. Although it encompasses too many firms to name, this group includes players that have expertise in particular fields. If you're interested in a particular industry or type of consulting, these firms offer excellent career opportunities. Typically, they're smaller than the big-name strategy firms and work with a more specialized group of clients—so they won't usually require you to work in industries that don't interest you. Insiders tell us that working for one of these firms may give you more marketable experience if you decide to leave the world of consulting.

Representative firms: Cornerstone Research (litigation support), Gartner Group (high-tech research), Pittiglio Rabin Todd & McGrath (high-tech operations).

Technology and Systems Consulting Firms

If you're technologically inclined and love designing computer systems and applications, this might be the area for you. Firms here typically take on large projects to design, implement, and manage their clients' information and computer systems. In contrast to pie-in-the-sky strategy consulting, which involves work that can often be done at the home office, technology consulting often takes place in the bowels of the client organization. A typical project might involve creating a new inventory tracking system for a national retailer. Such a project might include analyzing the client's informational needs,

acquiring new hardware, writing computer code to run the new system, and syncing the systems to deliver information in real time over the Internet. In general, this kind of consulting job requires large teams of people who actually do the computer work. As a result, there are usually more opportunities for people from undergraduate or technical backgrounds than from MBA backgrounds, but it's not the same high-prestige work strategy consultants are known for. Technology and systems firms have also moved aggressively to take on business-process outsourcing in order to manage elements of a client's business, such as a call center. In most cases, these jobs pay less than those at the top strategy firms.

Representative firms: American Management Systems (recently acquired by CGI) , Accenture, BearingPoint, Capgemini, Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC), Electronic Data Systems Corporation (EDS), HP Services, IBM Global Services, Novell, PeopleSoft, Oracle, SAP, Synopsis, Unisys.

Human Resources Consulting

Technology's not your thing? How about the other end of the spectrum? A number of consulting firms specialize in providing human resources advice. This can include everything from designing an employee evaluation and compensation system to conducting organizational effectiveness training to helping an organization through a significant change event, such as a merger. Because such work is so important, HR consulting firms often work with relatively senior employees at client organizations. The firms hire MBAs and undergrads, but they also have an interest in people from other master's programs, especially those with training in HR management and organizational design and effectiveness. HR consultants often work as long and travel as much as their counterparts in general management consulting.

Representative firms: Accenture (Change Management Group), Buck Consultants, Deloitte, Hay Group, Hewitt Associates, Mercer Human Resource Consulting, Towers Perrin, Wyatt Group.

Trends in Consulting

Each consulting firm has a set of new programs and developments. However, you should familiarize yourself with a number of industry-wide trends. If you're interested in a particular firm, explore the role the following industry trends are playing in its practice.

The Rise of RFID

Wal-Mart and Tesco, the largest retailers in the United States, and the Department of Defense (DoD), one of the world's largest buyers of IT services, plan to require that suppliers add radio frequency identification (RFID) tags to pallets, cases, and cartons of material—creating a potential bonanza for consultants. RFID lets retailers track buying trends—information that helps them put in accurate orders and change marketing to meet demand. RFID is becoming progressively less expensive, and is easier than bar codes, because the RFID tags don't require line of site to be read. Manufacturers are hiring consultants to understand what they must do to meet the requirements and how the new technology can help their companies operate more efficiently. While many are in reactionary mode, no doubt consulting firms will soon be

working with them to implement RFID to save money and generate greater profits. AMR Research estimates RFID will generate about \$1.2 billion in business in 2006, up from about \$400 million in 2003. RFID also has potential Big Brother-type applications—the DoD could use a car's spark plug, for instance, to track where somebody drives. IBM and Accenture are current leaders in this field.

Public to Private

Last year, *Consultants News* reported that between 2002 and 2005, the government sector was poised for double-digit growth, much of it thanks to the Office of Homeland Security. After 9/11, a number of firms, including American Management Systems, BearingPoint, Booz Allen, EDS, and IBM Global Services, rushed to offer homeland security consulting. In 2004, however, public sector business appears to be slowing down, with analysts suggesting financial services will make a comeback. This could hurt the bottom line of some of the public sector winners, such as BearingPoint and Booz Allen, but it will undoubtedly help that of many others.

Tsk, Tsk, Tsk

In recent years, consulting firms have been finding themselves in hot water for ethical transgressions—and this past year was no exception. Among some of this year's highlights:

- IBM was accused of bribing South Korean government officials, who helped it win tens of millions of dollars in government contracts.
- Capgemini faces a lawsuit for overbilling millions of dollars. The case alleges the firm billed clients for the full retail price of travel expenses though it had negotiated discounts of up to 50 percent, and that these transgressions took place over a 10-year period. PricewaterhouseCoopers, now a part of IBM

Global Services, was also named in the suit, and settled its part for a sweet \$54 million. KPMG and BearingPoint, also named, settled for \$17 million each.

- BearingPoint was accused of having an unfair competitive advantage by a federal investigation. After helping to write specifications for developing a “competitive private sector” in Iraq, BearingPoint got the \$240 million contract, which seemed to suggest a conflict of interest.
- Deloitte’s Italian practice allegedly ignored and hid accounting anomalies at Parmalat, but the company denies wrongdoing.

Return of the Accountants?

The first phase of Ernst & Young’s noncompete agreement with Capgemini ran out in 2003, and the audit firm is rebuilding its consulting capabilities with an emphasis on health-care consulting. If it succeeds, KPMG (whose noncompete with BearingPoint runs until February 2006) and PricewaterhouseCoopers (whose agreement with IBM extends until the second half of 2007) might follow the lead. Stay tuned.

The Challenge to Outsourcing

Outsourcing has been one of the greatest revenue builders for many of the IT firms like Accenture, but a number of India-based firms, such as Infosys, are getting in on the game. These players can charge \$30 an hour versus the \$150 IBM Global Services, Accenture, and EDS must charge. To counter their overseas rivals, some consulting firms are throwing in hardware and other consulting services to sweeten their bids. It doesn’t seem to be enough to bridge the gap: Indian firms have advantages on both cost and quality. Look for North American firms to begin acquiring Indian firms (which is what IBM did with Daksh eServices, one of the world’s largest call center operations) as well as Indian outsourcing to boom.

Offshore Backlash

In April, *Consultants News* reported that the number of bills in state legislatures attempting to regulate the outsourcing of work formerly done in the United States had mushroomed from 30 to 140. That fact, along with the Defending American Jobs Act of 2004, which was designed to bar U.S. companies from receiving government financial aid if their policies appear to favor overseas workers, reflects a growing trend toward curtailing outsourcing of jobs overseas—a favorite consulting recommendation in recent years for reducing costs.

Tech Firms Join the Consultants

Computer hardware and software firms continue to elbow their way into consulting through business process outsourcing—wherein service firms take over management of noncore business functions such as purchasing or accounts payable. Web-based applications have made it increasingly easy to outsource this work as well as to manage it remotely. Oracle, HP, and Dell are a few of the hardware and software firms following the lead of IBM Global Services by beefing up their consulting services. As one consultant says, “The large hardware manufacturers know that their traditional core businesses have become little more than commodity businesses and that the real value is in services. Consulting services are a perfect complement to hardware and software sales. Manufacturers not only benefit from higher margins with consulting services, but they can also build their hardware sales through an enlarged relationship base.”

Picking and Choosing

Every consulting firm will tell you that it stands out from the crowd: “We actually do implementation,” “We make change happen,” “We don’t provide cookie-cutter solutions,” or everybody’s favorite, “It’s our people that make us different.” The reality is that most of the big firms are relatively similar, but we suggest that you avoid expressing this notion during your interviews. Consulting firms have a set of practices and cultural sensibilities that distinguish them from their competitors in nuanced ways, and they want you to pick up on those nuances. As you go through the interview process and, more important, as you seek a good match for yourself, look at the things that make the firms different. To give you a head start on that process, we’ve put together a simple guide that will help you distinguish one firm from another when you’re out in the field (or in the interview cubicle).

The Practice Angle

Most consulting firms’ marketing pitches reveal a constant tension between two competing messages: “We’re specialized” (and therefore different from our competitors) versus “We do everything” (so there’s nothing our competitors do that we can’t do better). Nevertheless, if you pull a consultant aside, buy him or her a few drinks, and refuse to accept a slippery answer, you might be able to squeeze out a carefully worded admission: Most firms do have a primary focus. McKinsey, Bain, and BCG are known for their strategy work. Booz Allen is particularly strong in organizational work. Accenture has traditionally had a strong information technology and systems focus.

The Job Angle

Other differences between firms include how many projects you work on at once, how formal the project team hierarchy is, how much the firm integrates client staff as team members, and where most of the work is done. These are all things you'll want to learn as you go through the interview process—they can have a significant impact on your day-to-day life. Both Bain and BCG typically require their consultants to take on two projects at once, whereas many other firms assign consultants only one project at a time. Bain and BCG also value face time with the client less than A.T. Kearney, Booz Allen, and Mercer do.

“ ”

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The Attitude Angle

Much of each consulting firm's recruiting and publicity resources go toward convincing candidates that “our firm has the best attitude in the business.” For Bain, this means a strong emphasis on its youthful culture and company traditions like the Bain Band. For McKinsey, it means that consultants dress casually (well, sort of) for company information sessions. For Mercer, it's one of eight key values: “We do better work when we have fun.” Any assessment of a firm's attitude is highly subjective. You'll want to develop your own sense of a firm's culture and lifestyle—and how you fit in with each—through your interactions with recruiters and staff.

All the Rest

Many other factors differentiate consulting firms. How international is it? What is its appraisal system? What are its levels of seniority? How much attention does it pay to diversity issues? What is its attitude toward balancing work and life? What is its growth curve? To help you get a better sense of how different firms answer these questions, we've included brief profiles in the next section. In addition, you may wish to see WetFeet's company-specific Insider Guides for extensive inside information about the firms.

The Firms

- Profiles of Major Players
- Mini-Profiles

Note: The information on the following firms comes from firm websites, published articles, and WetFeet research. We've done our best to provide accurate information, but due to variations in reporting, changes due to market conditions, available information, and human error, there may be some discrepancies with actual numbers.

Profiles of Major Players

Accenture

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www.accenture.com

Ticker: ACN

A consulting behemoth, Accenture—formerly Andersen Consulting—started out as the consulting sibling of tax and accounting firm Arthur Andersen. In 1999, tired of having to share profits with its poor relation, Andersen Consulting asked for its independence. Arthur Andersen refused, and the case was submitted to an international arbitration court. The arbitrator put much of the blame for the split on Arthur Andersen, and ordered Andersen Consulting to give up its name and pay \$1 billion in exchange for its independence, significantly less than the \$14 billion Arthur Andersen wanted. In 2001, Accenture spent \$175 million to reintroduce itself under its new name and went public (the name rhymes with “adventure” and was meant to convey the firm’s “accent on the future”). The timing couldn’t have been more fortuitous—Arthur Andersen imploded in the wake of the Enron scandal.

Accenture has five operating groups with 18 industry groups serving clients in every major industry and two capability groups, business consulting and technology and outsourcing, which offer services across industries. CEO Joe Forehand, who oversaw the company’s split and was also there when it went

public, becomes Chairman of the Board in September 2004, with COO William Green replacing him. Green doesn't plan any management shakeups. In May 2004, *USA Today* reported that Accenture planned to hire 8,000 tech consultants in the United States and 30,000 employees worldwide in 2004—good news for job seekers.

The Inside Scoop

“[Accenture] does more work behind the scenes, actually helping the client—not just creating more work for ourselves. We've even advised clients to hire competing vendors.”

“Supervisors take an active interest in whether you're becoming better at business, and in your technical and industry knowledge.”

Key Facts

- Accenture's outsourcing business grew by 37 percent in 2003 and accounts for 30 percent of revenues.
- Accenture (which is based in Bermuda to avoid U.S. income tax) runs the Internal Revenue Service's website.

Key Financial Stats

2003 revenue: \$13,397 million

1-year growth rate: 2 percent

Personnel Highlights

Number of consultants: 83,000

1-year growth rate: 11 percent

Buy the WetFeet Insider Guide on Accenture for more information about the firm.

The Advisory Board Company

2445 M Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20037
Phone: 202-672-5600
Fax: 202-672-5700
www.advisory.com
Ticker: ABCO

The Advisory Board Company falls somewhere between a consulting firm, a think tank, and a publisher, providing syndicated and customized research along with daily news to member organizations on best practices in the field of health care. It hires undergraduates, MBAs, and advanced-degree candidates to research issues of concern to its membership, and it pays close attention to the written and visual expression and presentation of its research results.

Founded in 1979, the Advisory Board counted half of the Fortune 500 as clients after 18 months. It split off its corporate research offerings into the Corporate Executive Board in 1999. In 2000, it started offering shorter, more frequent publications and began offering its research online, through Advisory.com. It also created H*Works, a workforce that collaborates with hospitals and health-care systems to improve performance through application of Advisory Board research. In late 2001, the firm went public.

Nearly 2,300 hospitals, health systems, pharmaceutical and biotech companies, health-care insurers, and medical device companies are members; 2003 saw an 87 percent member renewal rate. In 2004, the Advisory Board launched the Revenue Cycle Performance Program to assist chief financial officers.

The Inside Scoop

“My learning curve is always vertical. I’m in way over my head all the time.”

Key Facts

- Publishes 50 major studies and 3,000 customized research briefs a year.
- Specializes in research for health-care organizations; the average study surveys 2,000 pages of literature and requires 100-plus interviews, and captures ten to 20 business or clinical practices.
- Unlike other consulting firms, it focuses on helping clients think through broad trends in an entire industry’s structure and direction.

Key Financial Stats

2003 revenue: \$121.8 million

1-year growth rate: 21 percent

Personnel Highlights

Number of employees (2004): 575

1-year growth rate: 11 percent

A.T. Kearney

5400 Legacy Drive
 Plano, TX 75201
 Phone: 972-543-7500
 Fax: 972-543-7680
www.atkearney.com

A.T. Kearney founder Andrew Thomas Kearney was J.O. McKinsey's (of McKinsey & Company fame) first partner. The firm took its current name in 1946, though its predecessor firm was started in 1926. It competed with the elite strategy firms, offering strategy, operations, and technology consulting. In 1995, computer services firm EDS acquired A.T. Kearney, making the pair competitive with the likes of Accenture and IBM Global Services for system-level projects.

Bankruptcies at major EDS clients WorldCom and US Airways, an SEC investigation, and earnings shortfalls led EDS to set cross-selling quotas and reduce Kearney's autonomy and compensation as part of a larger cost-cutting effort. Kearney consultants bristled. In March 2003, a new CEO took over at EDS and set about restoring Kearney's independence. A nine-person board was established to manage the firm and handle back-office tasks like compensation, recruiting, and benefits, with four members appointed by Kearney and five by EDS. Some analysts wonder if the damage has been done, with the connection to EDS diminishing Kearney's brand strength as an elite firm and declining revenues. Nevertheless, Kearney remains a player, with its consultants writing several recent books, including *Winning the Profit Game* and *Stretch! How Great Companies Grow in Good Times and Bad*. The firm has offices in more than 60 cities and 35 countries.

Key Facts

- Organized into both industry and business practice groups.
- Kearney has a partnership-style governance, in which the senior employees elect the CEO—common for consulting firms but not for public companies.
- The firm publishes *Executive Agenda*; abstracts of articles are available online at the company's website and can be ordered by students.

Key Financial Stats

2003 revenue: \$846 million

1-year growth rate: −16 percent

Personnel Highlights

Number of consultants: 2,700

1-year growth rate: 0 percent

To find out how A.T. Kearney describes itself, check out the free company interview at www.WetFeet.com.

Bain & Company

131 Dartmouth Street

Boston, MA 02116

Phone: 617-572-2000

Fax: 617-572-2427

www.bain.com

Bain & Company is a leading strategy consulting firm with 30 offices around the world. It provides strategic advice and recommendations for business problems to leading companies in virtually every economic sector. Bain was founded in 1973 by Bill Bain, a former VP at the Boston Consulting Group, and several others. In the beginning, Bain distinguished itself by forging long-term relationships with clients by agreeing not to work with their competitors in exchange for reciprocal fidelity. Bain's capabilities include strategy, customer and product management, growth, organization, supply chain management, cost and capital management, M&A, core process redesign, and private equity.

The firm—as well as its clients—has performed particularly well over the last 10 years (see the stock chart on its homepage). In 2003, Bain was named one of the ten best workplaces in Germany. In 2004, Bain Director and Global Strategy Practice Leader Chris Zook's *Beyond the Core* came out, which focuses on how companies can grow profitably by focusing on their core business.

The Inside Scoop

“I think of Bain as more street-smart and entrepreneurial.”

“We're data-driven, but we're also very thought-driven. Your assertions are just as important as proving them.”

Key Facts

- Strong culture—there is definitely a Bain way of doing things.
- Consultants and associate consultants are often staffed on two projects at once.
- The Bridgespan Group is a nonprofit launched by Bain to bring strategic consulting to the nonprofit sector.

Key Financial Stats

Not available

Personnel Highlights

Number of consultants: 2,100

1-year growth rate: –33 percent

Buy the WetFeet Insider Guide on Bain & Company for more information about the firm. And to find out how Bain describes itself, check out the free company interview at www.WetFeet.com.

BearingPoint

1676 International Drive

McLean, VA 22102

Phone: 703-747-3000

Fax: 703-747-8500

www.bearingpoint.com

Ticker: BE

BearingPoint, formerly known as KPMG Consulting, is a system integrator and business advisor. Offering a range of services across five broad industry areas, BearingPoint solves problems for clients of all sizes. Alliances with technology companies such as Cisco Systems, Microsoft, Oracle, and SAP demonstrate the firm's prowess with digital business services. The firm traces its roots to 1870, when William Barclay Peat (the P in the former KPMG moniker) founded his London accounting firm. More than a century of mergers culminated in 1987, when Peat Marwick International and Klynveld Main Goerdeler merged to become a modern, world-class firm. The consulting arm separated from KPMG, its Big Four parent, in 2000. In 2001, BearingPoint/KPMG went public, and in 2002 it changed its name to BearingPoint. It also went on an acquisition spree, adding 17 practices, including KPMG Consulting AG and the practices of Andersen Business Consulting in Australia, Brazil, China, France, and many other countries. Today, the firm has offices in 39 countries.

Unlike former rivals such as Accenture and IBM Global Services (which swallowed up PricewaterhouseCoopers), BearingPoint doesn't have an outsourcing business. Its government practice has done well, but some analysts suggest the firm may lose ground as the commercial sector improves. In 2003, its revenues increased internationally but declined in North America.

The Inside Scoop

“People are competitive with themselves, but not with each other.”

Key Facts

- Consultants average 12 years of experience.
- Clients include all 14 Cabinet-level departments of the U.S. federal government.
- More than 40 percent of strategy revenue comes from public service (government) work.

Key Financial Stats

2003 revenue (6 months): \$1,554 million*

1-year growth rate: 1 percent

*BearingPoint changed its fiscal year in 2003 and reported 6-month rather than full-year results.

Personnel Highlights

Number of consultants: 16,000

1-year growth rate: 0 percent

Booz Allen Hamilton

Corporate Headquarters:

8283 Greensboro Drive
McLean, VA 22102
Phone: 703-902-5000
Fax: 703-902-3333
www.boozallen.com

Worldwide Commercial Business:

101 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10178
Phone: 212-697-1900
Fax: 212-551-6732

Booz Allen Hamilton, one of the oldest and best-established firms in the consulting industry, is a major force both domestically and internationally, with more than 100 offices on six continents. Ed Booz, one of the early pioneers in management consulting, founded Booz Allen in 1914. The firm divides its consulting divisions into two separate business sectors: Worldwide Commercial Business (WCB) and Worldwide Technology Business (WTB). WTB has more than twice as many employees as WCB and works mostly with government organizations. WCB competes with top-tier consulting firms and specializes in private-sector management consulting, with a focus on strategy, information technology, and operations. The firm's government business has been particularly strong, with some suggesting its commercial practice is losing clout.

Booz expects to hire 3,500 people in 2004. The firm was singled out in 2004 for its training, ranking fourth on *Training* magazine's list of Top 100 companies.

The Inside Scoop

"Titles don't matter. Here I'm a senior consultant; at another firm I'd be an associate. You can call me 'elephant' and I'd still be doing the same thing."

"The Booz Allen culture is cooperative rather than competitive, and people routinely share information with others."

Key Facts

- In 2003, Booz Allen was ranked among the top ten in *Working Mother's* "100 Best Companies for Working Mothers" list, marking its fifth straight year on the list and second in the top ten.
- Half of Booz Allen's employees have government security clearances and 40 percent have advanced degrees.
- Clients include Greece, for which Booz Allen is helping to manage the transportation for the Athens Olympics, and the National Security Agency, for whom Booz Allen is the biggest contractor.

Key Financial Stats

2004 revenue: \$2,700 million

1-year growth rate: 23 percent

Personnel Highlights

Number of employees: 14,800

1-year growth rate: 18 percent

Buy the WetFeet Insider Guide on Booz Allen Hamilton for more information about the company. And to find out how Booz Allen describes itself, check out the free company interview at www.WetFeet.com.

The Boston Consulting Group

Exchange Place, 31st Floor

Boston, MA 02109

Phone: 617-973-1200

Fax: 617-973-1399

www.bcg.com

The Boston Consulting Group is one of the top-tier management consulting firms. Founded in 1963, BCG came to prominence in the 1970s when it began challenging McKinsey & Company for high-level strategy work with large corporations. The firm has developed a number of analytical tools such as capability-driven competitive strategies and concepts such as total shareholder return, which are used throughout the consulting industry. BCG has always had a strong international presence; its second office was in Tokyo.

In 2003, Hans-Paul Burkner was elected to CEO as the first non-U.S.-born president and chief executive. In that same year, *Trading Up: The New American Luxury*, by BCG Vice President Michael Silverstein and alumnus Neil Fiske, was released. BCG has more than 50 offices in some 34 countries, and nearly two-thirds of its business comes from work outside the United States.

The Inside Scoop

“The impact you have on clients, irrespective of your title, can be huge.”

“People feel like they’ve gone through a hard time together, and they’ve all come out of it. Now, I think people are much happier.”

Key Facts

- Heavier focus on strategy and operations projects than other firms.
- Arguably one of the most prestigious consulting firms in the world.
- CEO was named the industry's number-one consultant by *Consulting Magazine* in 2003.

Key Financial Stats

Not available

Personnel Highlights

Number of employees: 4,250

1-year growth rate: 5 percent

Buy the WetFeet Insider Guide on BCG for more information about the company. And to find out how BCG describes itself, check out the free company interview at www.WetFeet.com.

Capgemini

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75017 Paris, France
Phone: 33-0-1-47-54-50-00
Fax: 33-0-1-42-27-32-11
www.capgemini.com

U.S. Headquarters:
5 Times Square
New York, NY 10036
Phone: 917-934-8000
Fax: 917-934-8001

Capgemini, the largest supplier of information technology services in Europe, became the world's second-largest consulting practice when it acquired the management consulting side of Ernst & Young in May 2000. The two organizations brought complementary strengths in information systems integration. By acquiring Ernst & Young, Capgemini significantly increased its North American business, which in 2003 represented nearly a third of the company's revenues. The combined entity is structured into three service areas: consulting, technology, and outsourcing. Sogeti, a wholly owned subsidiary of Capgemini, provides information technology services to businesses and public sector organizations.

Revenues declined by double digits in every geographic region except Central Europe in 2003, and the acquisition of Ernst & Young has not gone well. Some observers have wondered if a spin-off of the U.S. unit is on the horizon.

Key Facts

- Capgemini stock is publicly traded on the Paris Bourse, but not in the United States.
- On April 2004, changed name to Capgemini, dropping Ernst & Young from its name as part of its rebranding campaign.
- Outsourcing rose from 27 percent of revenues in 2002 to 30 percent in 2003; project and consulting declined from 67 percent of revenues in 2002 to 62 percent in 2003.

Key Financial Stats

2003 revenue: \$7,222 million

1-year growth rate: 2 percent

Personnel Highlights

Number of employees (2004): 55,416

1-year growth rate: 0 percent

CGI Group

1130 Sherbrooke Street West, Fifth Floor
 Montreal, Quebec H3A 2M8
 Phone: 514-841-3200
 Fax: 514-841-3299
www.cgi.com
 Ticker: GIB

U.S. Headquarters:

600 Federal Street
 Andover, MA 01810
 Phone: 978-946-3000
 Fax: 978-686-0130

CGI Group is the largest Canadian IT services firm, offering end-to-end IT and business process outsourcing services. Founded in 1976, CGI is 30 percent owned by BCE Inc., Canada's biggest telecom group. CGI has grown rapidly the last several years by acquisition, averaging more than five a year since 2000 and with a strong telecommunications and financial services practices. In May 2004, its acquisition of American Management Systems (AMS) closed, adding 5,000 employees and making CGI Group one of the world's ten-largest computer consulting firms. (AMS's 1,700 person IS Defense Intelligence Group was sold to CACI, a U.S. federal government vendor.) The acquisition also makes CGI Group a player in public services, with AMS doing half its business with federal, state, and local governments. AMS, based in Fairfax, Virginia, was founded by four former Pentagon employees in 1970, went public in 1979, and targeted government, financial services, and the communications, media, and entertainment industries for its enterprise integration, managed services, and innovation and transformation services. Its revenue had been falling. CGI expects the acquisition to increase overall revenue between 20 and 30 percent in 2004 and expand its opportunities in the United States, which accounted for 17 percent of revenue in 2003.

Key Facts

- CGI Group has a set of “fundamental texts,” including a “dream,” “the initial desire that led to the creation of our company and continues to drive its operation and growth.”
- CGI founders Serge Godin and Andre Imbeau continue to run it.
- The firm was selected for the 2004 edition of Mediacorp Canada’s Top 100 Employers.

Key Financial Stats

2003 revenue: \$2,014 million

1-year growth rate: 47 percent

Personnel Highlights

Number of employees: 20,000

1-year growth rate: 37 percent

Computer Sciences Corp.

2100 E. Grand Avenue

El Segundo, CA 90245

Phone: 310-615-0311

Fax: 310-322-9768

www.csc.com

Ticker: CSC

Computer Sciences Corp. (CSC) provides IT services to U.S. government agencies, including the Department of Defense, and corporations such as DuPont, Merrill Lynch, and Visa. Founded in 1959 with \$100 and a contract from Honeywell to develop a business language compiler, it is today one of the largest computer services companies in the U.S. government market. The company provides a broad spectrum of services to its clients, including business strategy, change management, and value-added solutions for the chemical and energy industries, including management consulting, systems integration, and outsourcing. It has a strong systems integration practice and strategic alliances with major firms including IBM, Sun, SAP, and PeopleSoft. The company operates in more than 80 countries.

CSC ended 2004 strong, with \$17.2 billion in business awards, and added a \$1.6 billion outsourcing contract with Sears to the mix in June 2004.

Key Facts

- Cofounder Roy Nutt was a member of the IBM team that developed FORTRAN.
- CSC provides business consulting and IT services to the U.S. Postal Service.
- The U.S. Federal Government (Department of Defense and Civil Agencies) accounted for 40 percent of the firm's revenue in fiscal 2004.

Key Financial Stats

2003 consulting revenue: \$14.8 billion

1-year growth rate: 30 percent

Personnel Highlights

Number of employees (2004): 90,000

1-year growth rate: 0 percent

The Corporate Executive Board Company

2000 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20006

Phone: 202-777-5000

Fax: 202-777-5100

www.executiveboard.com

Ticker: EXBD

The Corporate Executive Board was born in 1993 as the corporate practice of the Advisory Board. It spun out in an IPO in 1999. The Corporate Executive Board provides best-practice information to businesses, specializing in strategy, operations, and general management issues. It doesn't consider itself a consulting firm, but calls its niche "the business-to-business content arena." It operates on a membership model, in which it delivers functional and industry-specific research and education to senior executives at more than 1,900 member companies. Companies join to gain access to cutting-edge research in the form of complex research studies, short-answer research on specific issues customized to members, on-site education and training, and networking opportunities with other members. The company has offices in Washington, D.C., and London.

In 2004, the Corporate Executive Board launched a Controllers' Leadership Roundtable to focus on best practices such as implementing Sarbanes-Oxley control requirements and the Communications Executive Council, which is targeted at senior executives responsible for media relations and internal communications and focuses on practices such as managing company reputation and communications department performance.

Key Facts

- On average, 25 percent of employees are promoted every 6 months.
- Conducts more than 40,000 interviews every year with executives, managers, consultants, and economists across 18 distinct research programs.
- Named to *Fortune*'s list of the "100 Fastest Growing Companies in America" in both 2003 and 2002 as well as *BusinessWeek*'s Hot Growth Companies.

Key Financial Stats

2004 revenue: \$210 million

1-year growth rate: 30 percent

Personnel Highlights

Number of consultants: 1,284

1-year growth rate: 28 percent

Deloitte Consulting

1633 Broadway, 35th Floor
 New York, NY 10019
 Phone: 212-492-4500
 Fax: 212-492-4743
www.deloitte.com

Deloitte Consulting, along with Deloitte & Touche LLP (one of the Big Four accounting firms), is part of the global professional services organization Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu International. The firm offers its clients a selection of service lines that include enterprise applications, human capital, outsourcing, strategy and operations, and technology integration. It focuses on nine industries: aviation and transport services; consumer businesses; energy and resources; financial services; life sciences and health care; manufacturing; the public sector; real estate; and technology, media, and communications. Deloitte Consulting had a plan in place to separate from the tax and audit group and rename itself Braxton, after its strategy group, but the plans were abandoned in 2003, and Deloitte Consulting has since been reintegrated into the parent firm.

Consultants News calls Deloitte Consulting one of the profession's "smartest firms" but also reports that morale is low: A February 2004 survey showed 57 percent of recent MBA hires expected to leave in one year, with 14 percent already looking for new jobs.

The Inside Scoop

"There are a lot of partners who welcome you walking into their office or giving them a call."

Key Facts

- In 2003, Deloitte & Touche was named to *Working Mother's* “100 Best Companies for Working Mothers” list for the tenth consecutive year.
- Deloitte’s publishes the “Straight Talk Series” of books that addresses business and industry issues without the usual hyperbole.

Key Financial Stats

2003 revenue: \$3,245 million

1-year growth rate: 3 percent

Personnel Highlights

Number of employees (2002): 12,000

1-year growth rate: 0 percent

Buy the WetFeet Insider Guide on Deloitte Consulting for more information about the company. And to find out how Deloitte Consulting describes itself, check out the free company interview at www.WetFeet.com.

DiamondCluster International

The John Hancock Center, Suite 3000

875 N. Michigan Avenue

Chicago, IL 60611

Phone: 312-255-5000

Fax: 312-255-6000

www.diamondcluster.com

Ticker: DTPI

DiamondCluster International was formed in 2000 when Cluster Consulting and Diamond Technology Partners merged. Cluster, which was founded in 1993, was more international; Diamond Technology Partners, founded in 1994, was known for its use of small interdisciplinary teams. The firm works with companies to help them effectively employ emerging and disruptive technologies. The firm serves Global 2000 clients and has nine offices in North America, Europe, and Latin America. It also operates the Exchange, a program that facilitates conversations among top executives and experts in strategy, technology, operations, and learning.

The company grew rapidly through the dot-com boom, but saw business drop off dramatically, resulting in a significant reduction in staff size and declining revenue. In fiscal 2004, the firm has shown that it's rebounding; after 2 consecutive years of declining revenue, revenue increased 16 percent for the year.

Key Facts

- Company's target is 25 percent revenue growth for fiscal 2005.
- During hard times, CEO Mel Bergstein voluntarily reduced his pay to zero for 6 months.
- DTPI is the company's stock symbol and an acronym for the qualities the company aspires to: "discipline, talent, partnering, and intellectual capital."

Key Financial Stats

2004 revenue: \$177 million

1-year growth rate: 16 percent

Personnel Highlights

Number of consultants: 481

1-year growth rate: 6 percent

IBM Global Services

International Business Machines Corporation

New Orchard Road

Armonk, NY 10504

Phone: 914-499-1900

Fax: 914-765-7382

www-1.ibm.com/services

IBM may be better known for its computer hardware, but Big Blue's largest division is Global Services, which competes with the likes of Accenture, EDS, and HP Services. Originally, IBM ran a consulting unit under the name IBM Consulting, but in 2000, it merged that group with its systems integration group to provide end-to-end business solutions. In 2002, IBM acquired PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), a 30,000-person firm that traced its lineage back through Price Waterhouse and Coopers & Lybrand. PwC brought a client roster that included about 45 percent of the Fortune 500; higher-margin consulting skills; and experience in financial services, government, and consumer products that expanded IBM Global Service's expertise and capabilities.

Today, IBM uses its size to win business transformation and outsourcing engagements; *Consultants News* expects it to be the number-one firm for market position in 2004. IBM Global Services works with large and small companies across industry throughout the world. Its strengths include systems integration, business transformation, and outsourcing.

The Inside Scoop

"I didn't have much of a technical background when I joined the firm, but [my training] changed that."

"[The firm] has deep pockets and is able to afford training and knowledge databases that a lot of smaller firms can't. It makes my life easier."

Key Facts

- New recruits go through IBM Global Services Institute, where IBM professionals teach them the ropes.
- In 2003, Global Services made up 48 percent of IBM's overall revenues and was the fastest-growing business line for IBM.
- In a 2003 *Wired* magazine survey, IBM ranked number one for workplace privacy policies.

Key Financial Stats

2003 revenue: \$42,635 million

1-year growth rate: 17 percent

Personnel Highlights

Number of employees: 180,000

1-year growth rate: not available

L.E.K. Consulting

28 State Street, 16th Floor

Boston, MA 02109

Phone: 617-951-9500

Fax: 617-951-9362

www.lek.com

L.E.K. Consulting was founded in 1983 and has since advised 20 percent of the largest companies in the United States, Europe, and Australia. It works with companies on prioritizing business opportunities, entering new markets, improving performance, and evaluating acquisitions around the world. L.E.K. Consulting divides its expertise into three principal areas: business strategy, shareholder value, and mergers and acquisitions. It emphasizes research and analysis to make data-driven recommendations and targets the mid-market in many of its practice areas. About a third of its business is in M&A.

The firm offers consultants an opportunity for rapid career growth—it can take as little as 4 to 6 years to go from consultant to manager to partner—and is decentralized, with partners taking responsibility for developing their own businesses. With the addition of a Tokyo office in 2003, L.E.K. now has 16 offices in 11 countries.

Key Facts

- L.E.K. was founded in London in 1983 by three former Bain & Company partners, and today the firm considers itself more global in its thinking than U.S.-focused firms.
- Staff members complete an average of ten projects a year, and partners spend 70 percent of their time working with consultants and associates.
- A recognized leader in the area of shareholder value; the firm is known for its “Shareholder Scoreboard,” published annually in the *Wall Street Journal*.

Key Financial Stats

Not available

Personnel Highlights

Number of employees: 450

1-year growth rate: −12 percent

Marakon Associates

245 Park Avenue, 44th Floor

New York, NY 10167

Phone: 212-377-5000

Fax: 212-377-6000

www.marakon.com

Three former corporate finance executives from Wells Fargo Bank and one academic formed Marakon Associates in 1978. Two of the four founders remain today; Paul Kontes, a third, retired in March after 25 years and stays involved as chairman emeritus. A small firm, with six and a half consultants per partner, Marakon assists CEOs and other top management with strategy and organization. The firm is known for “values-based management,” which is all about maximizing shareholder value for client businesses. While that concept may seem clichéd today, it was a pioneering idea when the firm was founded in 1978. It also makes the firm plenty of money: Marakon regularly ranks among the top U.S. consultancies in revenue per consultant.

The firm requires all consultants, regardless of seniority, to spend a significant part of their time working with clients. Marakon is still relatively unknown despite its age, pedigree, and impressive growth, with about half of its clients in the financial services sector. The company has five offices, including three in the United States and one each in London and Singapore.

Key Facts

- Marakon typically serves 12 to 18 clients per year.
- Employees get 200 hours of formal training in their first 15 months.
- Benefits include 12 weeks of paid maternity leave.

Key Financial Stats

Not available

Personnel Highlights

Number of employees: 300

1-year growth rate: –20 percent

To find out how Marakon Associates describes itself, check out the free company interview at www.WetFeet.com.

McKinsey & Company

55 East 52nd Street, 21st Floor

New York, NY 10022

Phone: 212-446-7000

Fax: 212-446-8575

www.mckinsey.com

McKinsey & Company is perhaps the most famous consulting firm in the world. The firm has a long history of providing strategic advice to the top management of the world's largest corporations. McKinsey was founded in 1926 when James O. McKinsey teamed up with partner Andrew T. Kearney to form a business advisory service. They were later joined by Marvin Bower, a Harvard MBA who went on to actively manage the firm for more than 30 years. McKinsey is renowned for its strict business standards, its strong culture, and for the breadth and depth of its experience base. It's known to charge among the highest fees for its work, and among consultants, McKinsey is the gold standard by which reputation and success are measured.

From 1994 to 2001, the firm more than doubled in both consultants and revenue, but it has since struggled along with the market, laying off consultants and watching revenue fall. In November 2003, some associates reported that the road to partner track was lengthened and a salary cap was placed on the principal level, and there have been reports that many McKinsey resumes have been circulating. A *Consultants News* survey in February 2004 found that 50 percent of MBAs plan to leave within 1 year, second only to Deloitte, and twice the number than at BCG, which was third. The gold standard of consulting firms may have hit a bump, but don't count it out yet—McKinsey was still the number one place MBAs wanted to work in the 2004 Universum poll.

The Inside Scoop

“The people here are the biggest draw. They’re smart, and they have a respect for the integrity of ideas. Even if you’re the most junior person on a team, if you come up with a good idea, it will be respected.”

“The lifestyle is always a challenge. It’s always client first, and it’s a bummer to check your voice mail at 9:00 at night and realize there’s something you have to do before the morning. If you let it, work will consume you.”

Key Facts

- Famous for its strong network and strong culture.
- After growing revenues by a CAGR of 15 percent from 1988 to 2000, the firm’s revenues have shrunk in each of the last 3 years.
- A midlevel associate responsible for managing a single client costs around \$2,500 a day.

Key Financial Stats

Not available

Personnel Highlights

Number of consultants: 6,200

1-year growth rate: not available

Buy the WetFeet Insider Guide on McKinsey for more information about the firm.

Mercer Management Consulting, Inc.

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Fax: 217-345-8075

www.mercermc.com

Mercer Management Consulting was born in 1992, when parent company Marsh & McLennan merged two of its consulting subsidiaries, Temple Barker & Sloane and Strategic Planning Associates. Today, it is one of seven consulting arms of Mercer Consulting Group (see “Mini-Profiles”) focusing on growth and strategy. An aspiring top-tier strategy consultancy, the firm seems particularly proud of its “thought leadership,” eight books published by its consultants since 1995, the most recent of which is Adrian Slywotzky’s *How to Grow When Markets Don’t*, which came out in 2003. (In 2004, sibling Mercer Human Resource Consulting came out with *Play to Your Strengths*.) The firm’s capabilities—business design innovation, customer and brand strategy, operational breakthrough, organizational transformation, and portfolio redesign—are targeted to growing shareholder value. The firm now has 22 offices on four continents.

In April 2003, Oliver, Wyman & Company merged with Mercer’s financial services strategy and risk consulting units to deliver financial services strategy and risk management consulting.

The Inside Scoop

“I had some offers from more reputable, brand-name firms, but I just really liked the people and the culture of Mercer.”

“Partners have a real incentive to mentor you and give you the insight to get promoted and move on to the next level.”

Key Facts

- Less structure and more low-key attitude than other leading firms.
- Diagnostic tool on website lets users compare their growth to that of other companies.
- Offers its consultants externships, 6 to 24 months working for a client, start-up, nonprofit, or other organization.

Key Financial Stats

2003 revenue: \$2.7 billion for all Mercer consulting arms (Management and Organizational Change represented \$449 million of that total)

1-year growth rate: 15 percent (60 percent for Management and Organizational Change)

Personnel Highlights

Number of employees: 1,400

1-year growth rate: not available

The Monitor Group

Two Canal Park
Cambridge, MA 02141
Phone: 617-252-2000
Fax: 617-252-2100
www.monitor.com

Monitor Company was formed in 1983 by Harvard Business School professor Mark Fuller, his brother Joe, and five other HBS B-school graduates who wanted to create a better strategy-focused consulting firm. It quickly earned a seat at the table of the consulting elite. Today, it calls itself the Monitor Group, and is organized into three business groups—the Action Group, the Merchant Banking Group, and the Intelligent Products Group. Each business group is further subdivided into “group companies”; the strategy consultants are in the Action Group, while the Intelligent Products Group, consisting of Decision Architects, provides custom software and information systems. The Monitor Action Company (called the Action Company) is the firm’s largest and oldest operation. It goes head-to-head with McKinsey and the Boston Consulting Group and wins top-level strategy assignments from Fortune 500 clients. About half of the firm’s business is in North America, with 37 percent in Europe, Eurasia, and Africa. The firm has 30 offices in some 23 countries.

The Inside Scoop

“There are no guarantees around one’s level of responsibility or one’s compensation—it’s all dependent on skills and performance.”

“The company’s flexibility and willingness to let people make individual choices generates incredible loyalty and better performance from people.”

Key Facts

- Innovative recruiting, compensation, and career advancement policies.
- A quarter of the Action Company's work is strategy and a quarter is marketing strategy.
- *Consultants News* reported Monitor grew by 20 percent in 2003, although the company, which is private, doesn't make its financial results public.

Key Financial Stats

Not available

Personnel Highlights

Number of employees: 800

1-year growth rate: not available

To find out how Monitor Group describes itself, check out the free company interview at www.WetFeet.com.

Navigant Consulting Inc.

615 N. Wabash Avenue

Chicago, IL 60611

Phone: 312-573-5600

Fax: 312-573-5678

www.navigantconsulting.com

Ticker: NCI

Navigant is a global firm serving Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, law firms, and regulated industries. It provides litigation, financial, restructuring, strategic, and operational consulting services. Its two business units, energy and water and financial claims, include four key brands: Peterson Consulting, which helps clients with disputes, regulation, and change; PENTA Advisory Services, which provides financial consulting services; the Energy Practice; and Bookman-Edmonston, a water resources practice. Though its clients are primarily in the energy and utilities industry, Navigant also serves companies from other industries.

In 2002, Navigant bought Andersen's government contracts consulting practice and AD Little's Advanced Energy Systems practice. In February 2004, Navigant acquired the assets of Tucker Alan, a privately held litigation and business-consulting firm. Navigant Consulting has offices in 36 North American cities as well as in London.

Key Facts

- Formerly known as The Metzler Group.
- Don't mistake Navigant Consulting with Navigant International, the travel management services company (Navigant Consulting uses "Navigant" under license from Navigant International).

Key Financial Stats

2003 revenue: \$318 million

1-year growth rate: 23 percent

Personnel Highlights

Number of consultants: 959

1-year growth rate: 0 percent

Pittiglio Rabin Todd & McGrath

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Waltham, MA 02451

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Fax: 781-647-2804

www.prtm.com

Founded in 1976, Pittiglio Rabin Todd & McGrath is a management consulting firm to the high-tech industry, focusing on strategy, operations and supply chain management, strategic IT management, marketing and sales, customer service and support, and product and technology development processes (which it calls *product and cycle-time excellence*, or PACE). It serves start-ups as well as multinationals.

Candidates interested in the firm might want to check out cofounder Michael McGrath's 2000 book, *Product Strategy for High Technology Companies* and PRTM's *Insight*, which is published on the firm's website. Consultants can make director ranks in 6 to 8 years. The firm has 14 offices in the United States, Europe, and Asia.

The Inside Scoop

"We're extremely collaborative. We're very team oriented at the top level, and that has a ripple-down effect."

Key Facts

- Director/consultant ratio of 4:1.
- Flat organizational structure, with consultants working in small cross-functional teams.
- *Consulting Magazine* ranked PRTM in the "Top Ten Consulting Firms to Work For" in 2002 and 2003.

Key Financial Stats

Not available

Personnel Highlights

Number of employees: 350

1-year growth rate: not available

Roland Berger Strategy Consultants GmbH

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Phone: 212-651-9660

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Roland Berger, which was founded in Germany in 1967, is a strategy firm with 32 offices in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. The firm is doing things right, with strong growth, a reputation as a leading strategy firm, and 78 percent of its clients returning. The firm offers services in corporate strategy and organization, information management, operations strategy, marketing and sales, and restructuring and corporate finance. Until 1998, it was part of Deutsche Bank, limiting the work it could do with financial service organizations, now a growth sector for the firm.

New hires don't need to be explicit about the work they want to do and will get support from management in finding their way (whether they want it or not). The firm does not have deadlines for applicants and asks candidates for junior consultant or consultant to contact the firm 4 to 9 months before finishing their studies. It invites applications through its online application form.

Key Facts

- Roland Berger, the firm's founder, was born in 1937 and remained active in the firm as global managing partner and chairman of the executive committee until July 2003, when he moved to the supervisory board.
- The firm provides business advice in nearly 20 languages and understands the nuances among European cultures.

Key Financial Stats

Not available

Personnel Highlights

Number of employees: 1,630

1-year growth rate: −3 percent

Mini-Profiles

The following mini-profiles provide information about boutique and specialized firms in the United States and a number of larger players that primarily have a strong presence abroad.

Cambridge Associates

www.cambridgeassociates.com

Cambridge Associates provides investment and financial research, consulting, and advisory services, and represents three-quarters of U.S. higher education endowment assets. It has offices in Boston, Washington, D.C., Menlo Park, London, and Singapore.

Ciber

www.ciber.com

Ciber, a system integrator with more than 7,000 employees, has been growing. In 2003, it bought Memphis-based computer consultancy SCB Computer Technology. From 2001 to 2003, it saw revenues rise from \$558 million to \$692 million. Kennedy Information expects it to hit \$900 million in 2005. Ciber's government sector work has been particularly strong. Its clients include General Motors, Daimler-Chrysler, and the state of Texas. Based in Greenwood Village, Colorado, Ciber has ten offices in Europe.

FMI

www.fminet.com

FMI serves the construction and design industry with strategy development and implementation. The firm has offices in Denver, Tampa, and Raleigh, North Carolina, and employs 150 professionals.

HP Services

www.hp.com/hps

HP may be best known for printers, computers, servers, and networking hardware, but services made the company around \$12 billion in 2003 and includes 65,000 professionals. HP competes with other technology consulting firms such as IBM to design, build, integrate, and manage IT infrastructure.

Huron Consulting Group

www.huronconsultinggroup.com

Founded in spring 2002 by some 250 former Andersen consultants, Huron offers financial, operational, and economic consulting services. The firm, which has grown fast and has been considering an IPO, has seven U.S. offices. Its ten largest clients accounted for nearly a third of its 2003 revenues.

Keane Consulting Group

www.kcg.keane.com

Keane Consulting Group is the management consulting arm of Keane, a \$1 billion IT services firm serving the Global 2000. The firm, which offers services

from business operations strategy to supply chain management, is strongest in insurance and financial services, and manufacturing and distribution.

LogicaCMG Consulting

www.logicacmg.com

LogicaCMG Consulting is the management consulting arm of LogicaCMG, a large European-headquartered systems integrator. It provides management and IT consulting, systems development and integration, and outsourcing. LogicaCMG was formed in December 2002 when Logica merged with CMG; it employs 20,000 people across 34 countries.

Marketbridge

www.market-bridge.com

Founded as Oxford Associates in 1991, Marketbridge consults on sales processes. It helps organizations design, build, integrate, and manage multichannel sales applications, targeting the Fortune 500. Its CEO, Tim Furrey, is co-author of *The Channel Advantage*.

Mercer

www.mercer.com

Mercer, parent company of Mercer Management Consulting profiled in the “Major Players” section, also offers HR consulting, investment consulting, organizational consulting, economic consulting, and identity and brand strategy consulting. Mercer, which is owned by public firm Marsh & McLennan Companies (ticker: MMC), has more than 16,000 employees and \$2.7 billion in revenue in 2003.

Right Management Consultants

www.right.com

Founded in 1980, Right Management Consultants provides career transition and organizational consulting. After an acquisition blitz—Right bought Coutts Consulting in 2002 after making eight acquisitions in 2001 and four in 2000—Manpower acquired it in 2003. Right operates as a wholly owned subsidiary.

SBI Group

www.sbigroup.com

The SBI Group offers interactive consulting through its *sbi.razorfish* division and enterprise business consulting through *sbi.enteris*. The firm's 900 employees across 16 North American and European offices provide integrated marketing, enterprise management, and supplier and customer collaboration.

SDG

www.sdg.com

SDG (originally Strategic Decisions Group) was acquired by Navigant in 1999 and separated just 19 months later in a management buyout. The firm's 140 employees work primarily with Fortune 500 companies to increase shareholder value. SDG consults on issues such as realignment and prioritization of businesses, entering new businesses, divestiture, and applying new technologies. Check out the firm's book, *Solving the Corporate Value Enigma: A System to Unlock Shareholder Value*, to get a lead on its thinking.

Towers Perrin

www.towersperrin.com

Towers Perrin, an 8,000-person firm, includes Tillinghast-Towers Perrin for insurance industry and risk management consulting, Towers Perrin Reinsurance for reinsurance consulting, and Towers Perrin for human resources and management consulting. The firm was founded in 1934 under the name Towers, Perrin, Foster & Crosby and started out specializing in reinsurance, pension, and employee benefits. The company changed its name to Towers Perrin in 1987. It operates out of 78 offices in 24 countries.

Unisys

www.unisys.com

Unisys, a 131-year-old company with origins in the typewriter business, took its current name when Sperry and Burroughs merged in 1986. It may be better known for its mainframe computers than for its consulting services, but like HP and IBM Global Services, it has enterprise transformation, infrastructure, outsourcing, and security services.

ZS Associates

www.zsassociates.com

Established in 1983 by two professors from Northwestern, ZS Associates focuses on sales and marketing management consulting. The firm has six North American offices, four in Europe, and one in Tokyo, and employs 500 professionals.

On the Job

- What Exactly Does a Consultant Do?
- Associate
- Senior Consultant
- Senior Manager

What Exactly Does a Consultant Do?

Consultants are hired advisors to business, usually big business. In this role they tackle a variety of issues, all of which ultimately boil down to a few central themes. Consultants define problems, develop methodologies for solving problems, collect data that will help solve problems, and—you guessed it—solve problems. Although the precise focus of the work varies from firm to firm, consultants tend to work on issues that will have a major impact on a client's organization, such as how to streamline manufacturing processes to save money, open a new distribution channel over the Web, or reorganize divisions to save money and increase productivity. More often than not, consultants work in teams that report directly to the client's CEO or other top management.

Typical Projects

The standard consulting fare is similar across firms. A given firm might specialize in a particular type of project, such as reengineering or systems work, but based on our interviews with many people at different firms, the following sample projects are fairly representative of what you're likely to encounter. Remember, the actual work you do will depend on the approach and strategy of your firm, and possibly the unit you join.

Operations and Strategy

A large high-tech company asks a consulting firm to help it determine the best location for a new plant. The consultant examines the qualitative and quantitative costs and benefits of locating in different countries, makes

recommendations to the client's management team, and negotiates on the client's behalf to acquire a particular site.

Acquisition Study

A medical device manufacturer sees an opportunity to increase its value by expanding its product line. It hires a consulting firm to help it confidentially evaluate several targets for acquisition and determine a fair market price. After extensive market research and a thorough valuation of the opportunity, the client authorizes the consulting firm to approach management of the target company and initiate discussions about a potential acquisition.

E-Commerce Study

A large consumer products company wants to step up its Web presence. Specifically, it wants to know how it can use the Internet to market toiletries to consumers. It engages a strategy-consulting firm to probe its target audience to find out its habits, concerns, and desires related to the Internet and personal-care products. The project team interviews people and observes them browsing the Internet, noting which sites they visit and bookmark, among other things. It also draws up questions related to personal-care products and Internet usage, to be asked of consumers in a series of focus groups run by a separate market research firm. When the data is in, the team argues that e-commerce is not in the foreseeable future for the client's personal-care business, but that the Web can be used as an effective brand-building channel. For example, the company can create a portal dedicated to household and personal hygiene issues relating (but not limited) to its products; people can go there for quick, seemingly objective advice to help them run more comfortable and efficient households.

Operations and Strategy, Part II

A regional bank wants to become more competitive in the home mortgage market. It hires a consulting firm to analyze the competition, identify other

banks' best practices, and conduct a review of the bank's own operations. Based on its findings, the consultant recommends and subsequently works with bank staff to implement changes to the review process for loan applications. It then installs new systems for evaluating and tracking the loan portfolio and trains employees in their use.

Project Cycle

A typical project (or engagement) for a consulting firm can last from a month to several years. During that time, the work usually goes through several phases. Depending on the type of study, a typical project starts with defining the problem and its expected outcomes and developing a work plan for the project. It continues with each team member collecting the information necessary to analyze a particular question. Finally, the team draws on the information collected and provides recommendations for action. Increasingly, consultants are also getting involved in nuts-and-bolts implementation work, which may be done either as a follow-up project or as part of the original project. In other words, they roll up their sleeves and do the actual work they recommended to the client.

Team Structure

A consulting project is generally handled by a team, which can vary in size from two people (or in some cases, one consultant plus members from the client organization) to hundreds. The size of a project team will depend on the nature of the work and the philosophy of the firm. Many strategy-oriented firms staff teams with five or six people from different levels. In contrast, IT projects may have dozens of people working on developing and implementing a new software system. As you might imagine, the bulk of the programming and design work for such projects is handled by junior employees, who bill out at

lower rates. You may be able to get a feel for how a firm staffs its projects by comparing its revenues with the number of professionals—a high revenue per consultant generally indicates a high percentage of senior-level staff.

Client Interactions

A critical part of any consultant's work is his or her interactions with the client. More and more these days, consulting firms are attempting to integrate client staff into project teams, though different firms have different ways of doing so. Many firms rely on client staff to be key resources, while others use client staff as active participants in project definition and research. Particularly in the case of reengineering projects, the consultant often trains client staff members in new ways of thinking about their business.

Key Jobs

As each firm has its favorite buzzwords, it also has unique terminology for its rank and file. While the titles might vary from firm to firm, the roles can basically be divided up as follows: analyst (also called research associate or staff consultant at some firms), consultant (or senior consultant), manager, and partner or VP. In addition, consulting firms hire a cadre of highly capable nonprofessional staff into administrative and support positions. (This is not a bad place to be if you've got skills in PowerPoint and you like to create slides.)

Administrative Assistant

Most consulting firms have a fairly large pool of college-educated administrative assistants and support staff on board so that the consultants can keep focused on tasks that justify their \$200-plus per hour billing rates. In addition to performing standard support functions, many have specific roles (recruiting,

office administration, or website maintenance, for example). Most firms also have a group of graphic designers on staff to prepare materials for presentations.

Analyst/Research Associate/Staff Consultant

This is the position at the bottom of the professional pyramid. The vast bulk of analysts are young, talented, and hungry college graduates. Many firms structure this position to last for 2 to 3 years, after which the analyst is expected to move on—perhaps to graduate school or another employer. (Some firms do allow people to progress up the management ladder without leaving the firm.) The work itself—as well as the hours—can be quite demanding. It often includes field research, data analysis, customer and competitor interviews, and client meetings. In IT, analysts might do heavy-duty programming.

Associate/Consultant/Senior Consultant

This is the typical port of entry for newly minted MBAs (and increasingly for non-MBA graduate students as well). Senior consultants often perform research and analysis, formulate recommendations, and present findings to the client. Oh, and at many firms, they have to implement those great ideas, too. Although this is usually a tenure-track position, a fair number of consultants will leave the business after 2 or 3 years to pursue entrepreneurial or industry positions.

Manager

After a few years, a senior consultant will move up to manager. As the title implies, this usually means leading a team of consultants and analysts toward project completion. Some firms may hire MBAs with significant work experience directly into the manager position, particularly in their IT practices. In addition to having more-rigorous responsibilities for managing the project team, the manager will typically be a primary point person for client interactions.

Partner or VP

Congratulations! You've forded the River Jordan of consulting and arrived at the Promised Land. Note that some firms further subdivide partners into junior and senior grade. And, if you aspire to it, there's always that chairman or CEO position. As a partner, one of your big responsibilities will be to sell new work. Fortunately, as with other big-ticket sales jobs, the pay can be quite rewarding.

A Week in the Life of a Consultant

Monday. Beginning at 8 a.m., I start looking at articles on one of my firm's high-tech client's competitors. Spend a few hours reading and documenting the articles. Around 10:30 a.m., spend some time on the phone setting up interviews with our client's customers. I also develop an interview guide to use when I talk to them. The articles help me come up with specific questions for this guide. In particular, I'm interested in the level of service our client provides. In the afternoon, get together with other team members to discuss what we want to learn from the interviews—they have some ideas that will be useful for my guide. Leave the office around 6 p.m.

Tuesday. Take a 7 a.m. flight to Atlanta, where I conduct the interviews I set up the day before. As I talk to different customers, I adjust my questions. As the conversations go on, it becomes increasingly clear that unlike its competitors, the client is not providing a key aspect of service to its customers. Get to my hotel around 6 p.m., order room service, and eat a hamburger while slouched over my laptop, typing up interview notes. I then try to summarize on one page the most important things I learned. Finish around 9:30 p.m.

Wednesday. Spend the day at the client's office in a suburb of Atlanta. In the morning, meet with members of the client team to discuss where we are in our analysis and to come up with a presentation. We talk about what I learned from

customers, and the client team shares some of the modeling they've done on their internal numbers. We involve my manager by conference call as we discuss the implications of this information and the recommendations we plan to make at the Thursday presentation. Then we work on the content of the presentation: We're going to give it to the client leader tomorrow. Our graphics department does the typing and graphs, and the client team edits them. Around 8 p.m., I have dinner with my manager, another consultant on the team, and a client team member.

Thursday. In the morning, we deliver the presentation to a senior manager at the client organization. I present some of the work, the client team members present some, and my manager presents some. The client senior manager is not surprised at what I learned, but asks a lot of follow-up questions about what she should do about it. I'm not ready to answer these questions. We discuss her ideas and then decide to conduct several more interviews before making any decisions. I catch a 6:30 p.m. flight back to Boston with my manager, but we don't get in until 10:45 p.m., because the flight is delayed by thunderstorms.

Friday. Back at the office. Spend the morning in internal meetings about recruiting and training. I also meet with my team to discuss the next steps for the project I've been working on all week. Cut out of the office around 4 p.m.—after all, it's Friday.

Associate

Age: 25

Years in business: 3

Education: BS in economics, Vanderbilt University

Size of company: 1,500 employees

Hours per week: 50, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.; 1 hour for lunch, but that varies depending on the project.

Annual salary: \$55,000 plus bonus

How did you get your job?

I was recruited on my college campus. As is the case with most management consulting firms, this was a highly competitive selection process.

What are your career aspirations?

I definitely want to stay in the business world. I'll probably remain with this firm for a couple more years. After that, I'll consider either staying in consulting or moving into a management position somewhere else in the business world. And at some point, of course, I'll get my MBA.

What kinds of people do well in this business?

You have to be really interested in business. This is not an academic group or a nonprofit, though occasionally we have clients in those areas. Our focus is on large business corporations. You also have to be a team player. If you prefer to work by yourself, this is the wrong job for you. Finally, you must have exceptional analytical skills, and not just in an academic way. In this profession, you need to be able to figure out what your suggestions will mean for the client, which may require a more intuitive analysis.

What do you really like about your job?

I like the fact that I can have a significant impact on a large organization, even at a relatively young age. I also enjoy the challenges posed by the problems themselves—the sheer variety of issues we have to deal with is interesting. And management consulting firms tend to hire top-notch individuals. It's exciting to work with so many bright people.

What do you dislike?

I travel anywhere from 0 to 3 days a week, sometimes more. After a while, it can be extremely draining.

What is the biggest misconception about this job?

Three things come to mind, actually. First is the myth that consultants do everything in a vacuum. We work intensely with our clients in developing recommendations; we don't just sit around in our offices writing up a report that will land on the client's desk when we're through. The second myth is that we don't stick around to see our suggestions implemented. We do provide our clients assistance through the implementation phase. The third misconception is that it's impossible to have an impact as a junior employee. If you can make a compelling and meaningful analysis of a situation, you can have a substantial impact on the outcome of a case. Personally, I have even had the opportunity to manage a client team of 20 people working on the implementation of the recommendations that were made by our team. I don't sit in my office doing spreadsheets all day.

How can someone get a job like yours?

Logistically speaking, the most common way, for an undergraduate at least, is through on-campus recruiting. Prospective applicants can also contact the recruiting department of a firm directly, if they're not on a campus where there

is active recruiting. Once you've got the interview, the things that will actually get you hired are your analytical skills, communication skills, and presence. Demonstrated leadership potential is another quality they look for, so if you've held leadership positions in the past, it will be to your advantage—but you want to show them that you did more than just hold an office. Show your interviewer that you excelled at whatever you were doing. There is no cookie-cutter mold for a management consultant. There are lots of ways to demonstrate that you are a person with drive and potential.

Describe a typical day.

- 7:00 Get to the office. I'm working on a project for a retail client, a children's clothing company. Status check on my team's deliverable, in this case a presentation to the client's board of directors. Quiet time. What needs to be done to finish the presentation? I do this every day to plan my day.
- 7:30 Try to chase down people on the client team to get some answers to questions I've come up with. Hope they get back to me by the end of the day. Want to find out what they're planning in terms of color coordinates for the next season. I let them know what I've learned about what competitors might be doing.
- 8:00 Personal e-mail time. My friends outside the company know that this is the best time to call me to chat.
- 9:00 Back to work. Review market data. This means crunching through our database of customer survey responses. We go beyond just reporting what the client's best customers are like demographically. Find out what their shopping habits are. We also look for even more detailed information—for example, whether they are more concerned with price or quality, and whether they want a range of clothing for all ages of children or just for the under-7 crowd that is already the client's main focus.
- 12:00 Lunch with friends.
- 1:00 Attend a case team meeting. The case is modular—meaning that we all work on different pieces—so we need to share information. One woman is working on pricing, and I'm working on trends, so I tell her about an article that says that discount children's clothing is becoming more popular.

- 2:30 Before ending the meeting, we make sure via a conference call that people outside the office know what's going on.
- 3:00 More e-mail.
- 3:20 Look at the masses of marketing materials and articles to figure out trends. Should the client focus more on babies? If you want the client to narrow its customer base and still make more money, you have to do your research to show how this will happen. Spend some time doing research: current and projected birthrate in the United States, average amount people spend on their own children's clothing versus those of friends and relatives, and potential competition from retailers ranging from discount stores to neighborhood boutiques.
- 6:00 Calls from clients start to come in. Spend about half an hour talking with each person.
- 8:00 Go home.

Senior Consultant

Age: 27

Years in business: 2

Education: BS in finance and marketing, Duke University; MBA, Harvard University

Hours per week: 55 to 75; at the worst, 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., depending on travel

Size of company: 100 employees

Annual salary: \$110,000 plus bonus

How did you get your job?

I got my job through on-campus recruiting. I knew from a previous internship at a large management consulting firm that I wanted to work for a smaller company. So I did research on about 20 different firms, then interviewed at about ten of them that came to our campus. I worked my way up to senior consultant, a step below the case manager on a case team. It's my job to help define the objectives of our analyses and the deliverables. I do a lot of coordinating and communicating with both the clients and the rest of the team, and I delegate responsibilities to analysts and less senior consultants.

What are your career aspirations?

I got into consulting because I wanted to stay on a fast-paced learning curve after I finished business school. Someday I hope to use what I have learned to start my own business, perhaps in low-tech manufacturing or in software or Internet services.

What kinds of people do well in this business?

You must have strong analytical skills. Quantitative skills are an especially big asset, as there is less of a need in consulting for purely qualitative analysis. You must like to learn and to work hard and be able to think fast. Above all, though, you need interpersonal skills—especially with clients—because in the end, this is a sales job. You have to be able to sell your ideas to clients, or all of the work that you did in formulating the ideas means nothing.

What do you really like about your job?

I like the challenge of solving a complex problem for people who have not been able to solve it for themselves. There is a lot of adrenaline—and stress—involved when you begin facing a problem that you don't necessarily know how to solve at the outset. Then, when you find the answer, it's extremely satisfying. I also enjoy the customer interaction a lot. Another thing I like about my firm specifically is that because it's small I was able to take on authority and responsibility more quickly than I could have at a larger firm.

What do you dislike?

The traveling gets old. My wife thinks so, too.

What is the biggest misconception about this job?

Many people think it's more glamorous than it is. When you're a young guy who shows up at a client firm as a consultant, wearing an expensive suit, people are either going to think, "What a stud," or "This jerk thinks he knows everything." Neither of these perceptions is really fair. When you get right down to it, consulting involves hard work and personal inconvenience. Despite what you may know about the established knowledge management principles that exist at some firms, most of the time these principles aren't effective when applied to an actual case. The individual consultants have to put in a lot of

hours, do a lot of research, and spend a lot of time in a place they'd rather not be to come up with a proposal that will work—which isn't very glamorous.

How can someone get a job like yours?

Go to Harvard Business School. No, seriously, just get an MBA. That's the best way—the firms will come looking for you. Even if you don't have an MBA or any desire to obtain one, you can still get a job in consulting by going after the firms yourself. Consulting firms are hiring higher percentages of PhDs and JDs than ever before. Anyone who has had good academic results and who prepares well for the case interviews should stand a good chance of landing a job.

Describe a typical day.

- 8:00 First thing in the morning at home, check my e-mail and voice mail. After I hear my messages, I begin to plan my day.
- 9:00 Arrive at the office and begin to focus on producing deliverables for various clients. I often spend 10 to 12 hours a day working on these.
- 10:30 The case team meets to discuss progress and objectives for our most important project.
- 12:00 Never spend more than a half-hour having lunch. Today I have Chinese takeout.
- 12:30 Back in my office, working on a deliverable. In this case, it's a fairly in-depth marketing analysis. Frequently, I'm interrupted by phone calls. Send e-mail and voice mail to clients and case managers, answering their questions.
- 4:00 Talk with a client on the phone to do some preliminary data-gathering before my trip to his site next week. When I'm through with this, I get back to work on the deliverables I've been working on since the morning.
- 6:00 Calling it quits for today, but before I leave, spend some time thinking about deadlines and project goals. Send a few more e-mails out to some analysts on the team, delegating some number-crunching tasks to them.

Senior Manager

Age: 45

Years in business: 5

Education: MBA

Hours per week: 50 plus 8 hours of travel

Annual salary/bonus: \$125,000 (base)

What do you do?

I'm a project manager. I make sure that we deliver on the promises we made when the services were sold. I manage a group of people to get a system running or otherwise achieve a business benefit like reducing inventory, improving customer service, or shrinking the time it takes to figure out what a factory should be making.

How did you get your job?

Networking. I knew a retired partner of the firm and asked for a referral. He put me in touch with a partner and I e-mailed my resume. It went through the recruiting team, and a hiring manager called me. What you have to understand is that in a huge organization there are many tiny businesses inside the organization, and you work on virtual teams. I interviewed with the people in the city where I'd be working, went to California for another interview, and had a phone interview with a guy in Boston. It's not common to be hired in at the level of senior manager, so it requires approval at a certain level. The funny thing is that I realized the day before my phone interview that I used to work with the guy in Boston. When you've been in a field for 5, 10, or 15 years, it's not the same as when you're just getting out of college.

What are your career aspirations?

Partner. You have your own little business you run with a profit and loss statement. The difference between partner and senior manager is that as partner you have to worry about making money. You have to make sure your business holds together financially.

“ ”

All firms are different, and the products are different. If someone tells me they're going to work as a consultant, that really doesn't tell me anything at all.

What kind of person does really well at this job?

Someone who has good people skills, listens and communicates well, and can do the normal supervisory stuff like letting people know if they're doing a good job. You have to listen to what the clients are explaining. In general, consulting requires someone who values information and stimulation, someone who enjoys being on the leading edge of a new concept. It's information overload. You have to be able to sift through to the important stuff. It also takes a lot of self-confidence.

What do you really like about your job?

There are always more things to know and learn. You're solving important business problems. The key difference between consulting and industry is that in industry you only get really important problems to solve every couple of years, maybe only several times in your career. In consulting, every problem is important.

What do you dislike?

You lose control of your time. Your client or boss can call and tell you to be in a different city tomorrow. It's very hard to plan the kind of vacation where you reserve a condo 6 months ahead. Every weekend, you have a long list of things to do, and you never get enough time to do them.

What is the biggest misconception about this job?

To consider all consulting the same way. All firms are different, and the products are different. If someone tells me they're going to work as a consultant, that really doesn't tell me anything at all. When I first got into the field, I was asked what kind of consulting I wanted to do, and I had no idea. I didn't know how important that question was. That's the most important question: What kind of consulting do you want to do?

How does someone get a job like yours?

Contact people who work in consulting. You can go to career fairs and look on the Internet for where to send your resume. But the best way is to identify where you want to work, and find someone who works there. You don't have to know them. It can be a friend of a friend.

Describe a typical day.

- 7:00 Arrive at my cubicle at the client's office and check e-mail and voice mail. In terms of infrastructure, I have the same set-up as the client's employees: a cubicle, e-mail, and voice mail. I may be here 6 to 9 months, so I have two sets of e-mail and voice mail to check—here and at my office at the consulting firm.
- 8:00 Look at my calendar and plan my day. Today, I decide to postpone a group meeting on one topic, so we can work on a presentation we're making. Our client is a large corporation made up of many different groups. We were hired by one particular group, but there's very little they can achieve as just one group acting alone. We help them recruit allies from other groups in the company. Our presentation is designed to help them gain larger visibility in the company. The presentation is divided into different sections. I work alone on my part, which is to identify industry best practices. I look at an internal database and find three different resources that have relevant information, and put that into a couple of PowerPoint slides.
- 12:00 Go to the company cafeteria for lunch and then take a walk outside because it's a nice day.

- 1:00 Return to work on the presentation.
- 3:00 Meet with the project team. Consulting company members are seated on the project team with client company members. Each of us presents our piece. We decide what holes we have to work on and where changes are needed.
- 4:00 Make the changes necessary in my part.
- 5:00 Meet with my consulting firm boss. He's also located on site at the client's office. We discuss whether we're doing all the right things to meet the client's expectations. A team member is leaving to join the competition, and we discuss how to best replace him. You do the same networking thing as when you look for a job: You tell everybody you know that you're looking for someone. First we look internally, then for subcontractors. Getting a new hire from outside probably won't happen fast enough.
- 6:00 Go to dinner. Sometimes it's business, but tonight I'm alone. Afterward, I check my e-mail and voice mail again. The e-mail has information about new business wins, training that is available, and requests for people to work on projects. I get requests from firm members all over the world asking questions in my area of expertise, and I want to tell them what I know. In a firm of this size, you have a lot of resources at your disposal. If I need to talk to somebody in Australia, there isn't very much of a window when we'll both be awake. With e-mail, I can answer a request before I go to sleep, and he'll have the information he needs when he gets up. It keeps things moving faster.

The Workplace

- Lifestyle
- Hours and Travel
- Diversity
- Vacation
- Compensation
- Career Path
- Insider Scoop

Lifestyle

The consulting lifestyle is known for being arduous. It is also relatively fast-paced, with consultants jetting around the country to client sites and working from deadline to deadline to gather lots of data to provide a client with a solid recommendation for action. As a consultant, you can expect to eat out a lot, almost never get home early, and rack up plenty of frequent flyer miles. Major partying (and doing laundry, paying bills, shopping, and socializing) will usually have to wait until the weekend. Beware: It can be a difficult way to live. “I do not find it to be a sustainable lifestyle,” says one insider. “There are people who I’m sure can sustain it, but, all in all, it’s hard. It’s the hours, but even more than that, it’s the intensity; it’s the travel. Even when you aren’t at work, you still know you could be getting that voice mail at night.”

When choosing a firm, make sure you like the people. The demands of the consulting lifestyle are such that unless you get along well with the people you’re working with, they can be hard to take. One of the reasons why firms put so much stress on “fit” is because when you work long hours, often under the pressure of deadlines, collegial relationships (and working with team players) can make or break a case—and a consultant.

Hours and Travel

On average, most consultants work 55 to 60 hours in a typical week. However, as everyone you speak to will tell you, there is no typical week. Before a presentation or a deadline, you may need to put in 80, 90, or even 100 hours, possibly including an all-nighter or two. In contrast, the time between projects, or during liberally staffed projects, may be relatively slow. Even so, consulting is not a nine-to-five job. Hours vary somewhat by firm, by office, and by practice, so you'll want to ask about hours before accepting an offer.

Consultants travel often and for days at a time. Although firms vary in their emphasis on the need to be at the client site, the primary factors affecting the amount of travel are the location of the client and the type of project. On average, a new undergrad or MBA hire can expect to be on the road at least 2 days a week. During a project, however, it is not uncommon to spend 4 days at the client site, week after week.

Diversity

Consulting firms look a lot like the Ivy League schools where they recruit. There's not a lot of diversity, though like the brochures of those Ivy League schools, the recruiting material tells a different story. Nevertheless, firms are increasingly trying to diversify their ranks. When you apply to a firm, you might want to ask about its diversity recruiting efforts and its success in retaining minority talent. Some minority and female professionals may be discouraged by the dearth of minorities and women in the manager-level ranks and above. Make sure you're comfortable at the firm and that there's room for you to rise; it's worth inquiring about minorities and women in management positions, introducing yourself to them, and discussing your career goals and how supportive the firm will be as you move toward them.

Vacation

Most firms offer new employees about 3 weeks of vacation per year, though it might be hard to take much of that time off mid-project. Project breaks provide a good opportunity to get away, and one big perk is that you'll have enough frequent flier miles to travel anywhere in the world (provided you want to get on a plane again). Also, even if you don't take a formal vacation, most firms discourage a nine-to-five mentality. As a result, insiders report that you can often take a day or two off after a particularly grueling period.

Compensation

The major consulting firms are among the best-paying employers for new graduates. They are also known for offering excellent perks and benefits, such as annual off-site meetings at posh resorts and reimbursements of school expenses. Compensation in the industry rose dramatically through the 1990s, but it leveled off after 2001. At strategy firms, salaries were flat in 2002 and 2003, and began to rise about 3 to 5 percent in 2004. That should continue in 2004. Expect compensation for strategy to outpace that for operations, management, and HR. Long term, the trend is for compensation from base salary to shrink with variable pay, such as bonuses, increasing.

Salaries and bonus packages at the top firms are generally in close range of each other, since these firms usually compete for the same pool of candidates. At the margins, there are slight differences in compensation: Lesser-known firms may offer slightly higher salaries or bonuses to attract top candidates, and some organizations have different ways of splitting up the bonus pie (for instance, linking a portion of the bonus to the firm's annual performance). To get more specific information on compensation practices, check out WetFeet's individual company Insider Guides.

MBAs

In 2004 and 2005, we estimate MBAs hired into elite firms will start somewhere in the range of \$100,000 to \$130,000. There's less of an emphasis on signing bonuses than in the past; these can run up to \$30,000. Although consultants often have higher base salaries than investment bankers, bankers stand to make lots more—as much as 100 percent of their base—in their year-end bonuses.

That's why some junior partners on Wall Street make more money than senior partners at consulting firms.

Undergrads

In the 2004 to 2005 recruiting season, we estimate the elite firms will offer starting salaries in the range of \$50,000 to \$65,000. Again, signing bonuses are not across the board the way they once were, and can range up to \$10,000. Undergrads joining a large IT services firm will likely be in the \$35,000 to \$55,000 range to start.

Career Path

Undergraduates

Undergraduates generally join a consulting firm as analysts, although their titles vary. Traditionally, the analyst program lasts 2 to 3 years, after which you're encouraged to go to business school. However, this system has been changing over the past several years. Firms have increasingly begun to promote analysts into positions they hire MBAs into or else into an interim role between the undergraduate and MBA position. If you choose to go to business school, many firms will pay your tuition, provided you return to the firm when you're done.

MBAs

Consulting firms hire MBAs and other postgraduates right out of school or from industry. Most new MBA hires will come into a firm as associates; after 2 or 3 years they'll move to the next level, where they'll manage case teams. After managing projects for a couple of years, consultants may be promoted to principal, whereupon the focus shifts to more intensive client work and the selling of services. Finally, after 6 to 8 years with a firm, a consultant might be promoted to partner. The benefits of partnership are big increases in salary and responsibility. The key function of partners at most firms is to cultivate clients and sell them new business.

Advanced-Degree Candidates

Consulting firms often tap nontraditional candidate pools, including JDs, PhDs, and MDs. If you are one of these candidates, find out which level you'll come in at—the same level as undergrads, MBAs, or experienced hires. Also, you should ask about the type of support you'll receive once you join the firm. Some organizations offer a mini-MBA training program, while others rely more heavily on mentorship.

Insider Scoop

What Employees Really Like

Love My Job

Most people who work for consulting firms talk about how intellectually stimulating their work is. “The work is just phenomenal,” one insider says. They enjoy the challenge of going into new settings and facing some of the most difficult issues business leaders have to deal with. Although most don’t admit it openly, there’s also a palpable excitement associated with being able to sit down with a CEO of a large firm and tell him or her what to do. Consultants also take pride in seeing the impact their advice has on clients’ businesses.

People Power

The key resource of consulting firms, and some would say the only resource, is their people. All of the top-tier firms fill their offices by skimming the cream of the undergraduate and business school elite. Insiders tell us that working at a consulting firm is very much like being on a team with the best people from school: “People are universally bright, interesting, hardworking, and motivated.” (Sounds a little self-congratulatory, but it seems to be true.) Many insiders also say they enjoy socializing with their colleagues. A common refrain is, “These are people I’d be hanging out with anyway, even if we didn’t work together.”

Learning Environment

One of the thrills for many consultants is the constant learning that comes with the consulting workload. Whether you’re learning about a new company or industry, talking to people in various parts of a client organization, or

brainstorming ways to deal with challenging technical problems, consulting offers a steady diet of new cases and settings. Many consultants believe they wouldn't face such a wide variety of challenges in another profession.

Pay and Perks

Very few consultants would publicly put it at the top of their lists, but most really like the pay and perks of the position. Even if you're not a particularly money-grubbing type, wouldn't you like to be able to afford a nice apartment, a new car, and to be able to pay off all those school loans in a couple of years? Moreover, many firms provide reimbursement of tuition expenses for some of their employees. Beyond that, all of the firms make sure that the extensive travel and the long hours are as painless as possible. Even if you don't relish the idea of staying in Phoenix for the next 3 months, you probably won't mind staying at the Phoenician Hotel.

Future Options

Many people enter consulting with the idea that they'll do it for a couple of years and then move on to something else. "It's hands-down the best job for someone [planning to start] a business or work at a Fortune 500 company. You can get behind the thought processes of key executives," says an insider. Although it may not be wise to give this top billing during your interview, a consulting firm is an excellent training ground, regardless of the type of work you ultimately wish to pursue, and many firms work hard to stay in touch with their alumni networks. Consulting gives people a chance to not only learn about different organizations and industries, but also a long list of contacts with whom they can network when they decide they're ready to move on.

Watch Out!

A Dog's Life

The travel, the hours, and the difficulty of maintaining a personal life top everyone's list of consulting complaints. "There is limited life outside of work," one insider says. It's not that people in other professions don't work long, hard hours, but the consulting lifestyle, which often requires the consultant to be out of town 4 days a week for months at a time, is hard to maintain over the long run, especially for people with families. Some individuals actually thrive on the pace and excitement of the energetic schedule. For many others, a few years are about all they want to put up with.

"I'd rather be . . ."

Consultants often express their desire to get into the thick of managing a company and start making management decisions. This may be partly a case of the grass being greener, but after giving advice to so many companies and executives, many consultants are eager to try their hand from the client side. They also complain about not getting the in-depth experience they'd get if they worked at a company. A large number of consultants leave after a few years to start businesses or work in operating companies.

What difference does it make?

Most people who go into consulting as a career say they do valuable, highly meaningful work. However, a common complaint among ex-consultants is that the work didn't seem as meaningful to them as they would have liked. As one says, "I felt like we did a lot of ephemeral strategy stuff for big companies that didn't really amount to much. I really didn't want to be working with conservative, old Fortune 500 companies. I wanted to be making a difference in a smaller setting, with real people."

Control

No matter how good your advice, there's no guarantee that a client will take it. If you like to see your ideas in action—or like to act on your ideas yourself—you may find a consulting gig frustrating. “At the end of the day, when all's said and done, you're telling somebody else what to do, and you don't have control over it,” a consultant says. “You can sometimes feel like your hands are tied when you can't make that decision.”

The Long Haul

By one insider's estimate, only one in ten people who start with a consulting firm is really a consultant at heart. As almost anyone who graduated from business school 3 years ago will tell you, very few classmates remain consultants for long. People leave for a variety of reasons, but most do leave. Therefore, if you're thinking that you'd like to set down roots and have something substantive to show for your work, you'll be better off in another type of organization.

Getting Hired

- The Recruiting Process
- The Interviewer's Checklist
- Interviewing Tips
- Grilling Your Interviewer
- The Case Interview
- Interview Prep
- The Aspiring Consultant
- What Insiders (and Outsiders) Say

The Recruiting Process

There are two main routes into consulting. One goes directly from campus (undergrad and MBA, primarily) into entry-level positions (analyst or consultant). The other leads from industry into midlevel positions in specific practice groups (e.g., aerospace, energy, and financial services), functions (e.g., marketing or supply chain management), or technologies.

Most consulting firms follow a fairly standard recruiting routine for undergrads and graduate students. The typical tryout starts with an on-campus interview or two and finishes up with a half day or full day at the office where you want to work. Interviews can be one-on-one or two-on-one and usually include a basic resume review and a lot of questions designed to determine your fit with the organization. In addition, most interviews include every consulting recruiter's favorite fear-inspiring tool: the case interview.

Firms will be hiring in 2004–05. Recruiting will be competitive. If you're serious about a consulting career, know the firms before you talk to them, develop relationships with as many people at each firm as possible, and make sure you get the details right, from proofreading each correspondence to dressing snappily and appropriately for your interviews. And have your story down: Know why you want to be a consultant as well as why you want to be a consultant at [insert name of firm here].

“You need to think about whether this is the right job for you,” an insider says. “You need to look at the people you meet as you're going through, and decide whether the firms you're interviewing with are places you'd be happy. That usually comes down to the people. If you're not looking at one of the larger,

established brand names, you've got to be clear about their position, where their flow of consulting projects is going to come from. With the established firms, it's probably worth understanding how they've dealt with the last couple of years, how busy people have been, and have the consultants been given sufficient experience."

"You can't go half-hearted," another insider says. "For people who are nontraditional types of hires, especially for humanities majors, find out which companies typically hire people like you. If you're a business person with a stunning GPA, it's not guaranteed that you'll get interviews. If you have a GPA that isn't spectacular, you'll have to think of other ways to get that interview." Expect the bar to be high.

« »

If you have a stunning GPA, it's not guaranteed that you'll get interviews. If you have a GPA that isn't spectacular, you'll have to think of other ways to get that interview.

The Interviewer's Checklist

Each interviewer has a different way of conducting the case interview. Some try to overwhelm you with detail, while others provide very little and wait to see what the candidate will ask about. In the end, however, most interviewers are trying to assess a few simple things:

- How strong are the candidate's analytic abilities? (Does he or she think logically? Can he or she break a problem into component pieces and solve them?)
- How well does the candidate communicate his or her ideas? (Can he or she express ideas in a clear and convincing way? Is the candidate able to clearly explain complex ideas?)
- Does the person have presence and poise? (Does the candidate get flustered by questions? Does he or she seem at ease during the case?)

Although the case interview inspires the most fear among would-be consultants, answers to the above questions are not all that interviewers are looking for. Most pay close attention to a candidate's experience and background. According to insiders, in addition to the qualities they look for in the case interview, most consulting interviewers are looking for the following:

- High energy and enthusiasm
- Team orientation
- Integrity
- Excitement about consulting
- Knowledge about what makes the interviewing firm different
- Success on the airplane test—do you want to sit next to this person on a long overseas flight?
- Interpersonal skills
- Industry experience

Interviewing Tips

Although the top management consulting firms hire hundreds of people every year, thousands and thousands of people compete for those positions. There's no surefire way to guarantee an offer, and there are few, if any, back doors into the organizations. In most cases, your best bet will be to go through the standard on-campus recruiting program and bid lots of points to get on those schedules. Beyond that, however, insiders tell us that there are a number of ways you can improve your chances in the interview process. Here are a few of their suggestions about how to prepare for your interviews:

1. Though most candidates focus on the case question, many blow their chances before they even hear one. Be ready to offer specific examples of how your background and experience have provided you with excellent preparation for a career in consulting.
2. Be ready to give a good answer to the question, "Why do you want to go into consulting?" Of course, there is no single right answer to this question, but there are wrong answers. The worst is to say something you don't really believe. Even if you do happen to slip it by the interviewer, you'll pay the price later.
3. Keep a high energy level. Recruiters get tired of asking the same questions, so it's up to you to inject some excitement into the interview. At the end of a long day in the cubicle, chances are good they'll remember more about your enthusiasm than about the bullet points on your resume.
4. There's no way around the case interview. To get an offer from a consulting firm, you'll need to nail not only one, but as many as eight or ten different

case questions during your three rounds of interviews. To do your best, insiders recommend that you attend any informational sessions about the case interview, do some case interview drills with a friend, sign up for mock interviews (if possible), and, of course, buy copies of *Ace Your Case: Consulting Interviews*, *Ace Your Case II: Fifteen More Consulting Cases*, *Ace Your Case III: Practice Makes Perfect*, and *Ace Your Case IV: The Latest and Greatest*, WetFeet's best-selling management consulting case interview prep guides.

5. Know what distinguishes the firm you're interviewing with from its competitors, and be able to explain why you want to work for them. Everybody knows that most people who want to go into consulting will interview with all the firms. However, you still need to demonstrate that you have enough interest in a particular employer to have done your homework.
6. The jokes about consulting have an underlying reality. The Fuqua School of Business Consulting Club (www.duke.edu/web/fuquacc/jokes.htm) offers a number of Top Ten lists, from "Top Ten Things You Shouldn't Say at a Consulting Interview" (Number one: "Call it what you want, it still means firing people.") to "Top Things You'll Never Hear from a Consultant" (Number one: "Everything looks okay to me.").

Grilling Your Interviewer

The following are good generic questions that will fit most consulting interviews. However, you'll want to think of additional ones that specifically apply to the company you're interviewing with. We've grouped our questions according to our sense of their relative risk—use “Well Done” questions with extreme caution.

Rare

- Why did you decide to go into consulting?
- Tell me about a project you worked on and your individual role in the process.
- Can you give me an example of a project that didn't go as well as you had hoped, and tell me what you learned from the experience?
- What have you done for fun lately?
- What are the differences between your offices in [city or country name] and [city or country name]?
- What do you like most about consulting?
- What don't you like about consulting?
- What kinds of people do well at your firm?

Medium

- What measures is your firm taking to increase workplace diversity?
- What is the turnover rate at your firm, and how does that compare with the rest of the industry?
- What things do you like or dislike about your firm?
- If you could work for any one of your competitors, which one would it be and why?

- What are your firm's strategies for building its brand? What are the pros and cons of that strategy?
- How much responsibility will I have on a project team?
- If I were a prospective client, why would I hire you over your competitors?
- What's the difference between a good analyst and a mediocre one?
- As the consulting market changes, what is your firm doing to maintain a strong position?

Well Done

- In what areas are your competitors better than you, and what are you doing to catch up?
- Tell me a couple of reasons why I wouldn't want to come work for you.
- Is there an Ivy League bias at your firm?
- How's morale at your firm? How does it compare to morale at firms where you have friends? How does it compare to morale a few years ago?
- Do consultants really add value to the companies they advise?
- How can someone just out of school really presume to give advice to a client who has been in the industry for his or her whole career?
- What steps do you take to make sure that your recommendations don't just sit on the client's bookshelf?
- How many female and minority partners are there at your firm?

The Case Interview

In essence, the case interview is nothing more than a simplified business problem designed to serve as a platform for the interviewee to show off his or her problem-solving abilities. It's also something like fraternity hazing. Anyone sitting on the other side of the table has been through it and survived, and, as a result, believes it to be a legitimate means of separating the wheat from the chaff. So, like it or not, you've got to be able to crack the case when it's given to you.

The Set-Up

The case question usually starts off as a brief description of a typical client problem: "I'm a steel manufacturer, and my revenue is going down." This may be a simplified version of a project from the consultant's own background, or it may be something made up to draw on—or differ from—things on your own resume. In any case, the interviewer will typically provide a package of background information about the company, the industry, and the problem. The recruiter will end with, "What would you do now?"

The Process

As the applicant works through the answer, the recruiter will continue to provide more details about the case and ask a variety of questions to probe the candidate's thought process. During the course of the discussion, the interviewer might ask the applicant to explain the reasoning behind a particular approach. In other cases, the interviewer might play devil's advocate and challenge the candidate's assertions, or role-play as an unruly and uncooperative client.

What It Means

Although a few firms have bucked the trend by placing considerably less emphasis on the case interview (“Let’s face it. Eighty percent of the students at the top schools won’t have any problem with the analytics of the job,” says one MBA assigned to a recruiting role.), most continue to view the case interview as the primary means of determining a candidate’s aptitude for the work. The key is not to get the “right” answer, since usually there is no one right answer. Rather, the interviewer is hoping to get some insight into how the applicant thinks and solves problems. For better or worse, many recruiters also see the case question as the Rosetta stone to a person’s character, intelligence, sense of humor, background, personal habits, and virtually anything else you want to throw in.

How to Answer

Case interview success doesn’t require the ability to shoot from the hip and solve a highly complex problem in the course of 5 minutes. Rather, it primarily depends on your thought process and presentation.

Interview Prep

The best way to prepare for a consulting interview is to go through a few practice sessions with a friend or a mock interviewer. This will give you invaluable experience in spinning out a quick, cogent, and poised response to a case question and make the unavoidable encounter with one in the interview room that much easier.

Tips for Sailing Through the Case Interview

1. Listen carefully to the material presented. Take notes if you want to, and be sure to ask questions if you are unsure about details.
2. Take your time. Nobody is expected to have a brilliant solution to a complex problem on the tip of his or her tongue. If you need a minute or two to collect your thoughts and work through your answer, say so.
3. Offer a general statement—or framework—up front to serve as an outline for your answer. Although the framework can be something as elaborate as a 3C (customer, company, competition) model, it need not be anything more than something like: “If you’re asking about declining profits, then I’d want to check into factors affecting cost and factors affecting revenue. On the cost side . . .” As you proceed with your answer, draw on the outline of your framework.
4. Try to focus first on what you think are the key issues in the case. Many interviewers will be checking to see if you operate by the 80/20 rule, which means that you should first address the broader issues that will get you 80 percent of the way to a good solution.

5. Orient your answer toward action. Remember, the goal of a consulting gig is to provide the client with actionable recommendations.
6. Don't be afraid to think out loud. The interviewer is looking as much for evidence of a logical thought process as for a brilliant solution to the case problem.
7. Be conscious of resources. A lot of consulting work is figuring out how you're going to collect the information you need to answer a question—without costing the client a fortune. It's probably not a good idea to suggest interviewing dozens of CEOs to see how they have dealt with similar issues, because setting up those interviews would be a nightmare.
8. Present your answer with conviction. A consultant's success depends largely on his or her ability to convince clients to embark on difficult courses of action. How you present yourself plays a big role in this.
9. Have fun with the case! Consulting is really like a steady succession of case interview questions. If you are going to do well in consulting, you need to enjoy the intellectual challenge of analyzing tough problems and coming up with good answers.

A Few Open-Ended Samples

To give you a little more wood for the fire, we have provided a few case questions—without answers. In preparing for your interviews, you might try working with a friend to come up with good answers for these questions.

1. A medical device manufacturer is developing a host of new technologies, but must decide where to dedicate its limited financial resources. How would you evaluate the market opportunity for different lines of products?

2. A telecom company provides software for e-mail service on local area networks. Should it expand to provide broader Internet services?
3. A pharmaceutical company has a proprietary drug that is about to lose its patent protection. That means generic substitutes for the product will soon become available at a fraction of the original drug's cost. How would you adjust the price of the product in response?
4. A large car company is considering setting up a new subassembly plant for engine production. Where should it locate the plant? What information do you need to know? How would you get it?
5. Why would the buying cycle for paper products be cyclical? Can you think of other industries with similar patterns?
6. How much money would American Airlines save if, on the LaGuardia-Logan shuttle, it split each can of soda it served between two passengers?
7. A restaurant-owning company is renovating its bathrooms. Should it install hand dryers or paper towel dispensers? What's the cost/benefit for each option? Would your recommendation be affected by how long the restaurant stays in business? Would it be affected by what other restaurants are doing?

The Aspiring Consultant

Is Consulting Really for You?

No question about it, an offer from a consulting firm is enough to make any red-blooded MBA (or college grad or PhD or whatever) start salivating. But before you start licking your chops, you ought to figure out whether consulting is really right for you. To that end, why not take our test?



The Consulting Aptitude Test

Can you see yourself saying—or wanting to say—any of the following things?

- | | Yes! | No Way! |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. “I’ve got tickets to the concert of the year tonight, but I really don’t mind missing it so I can finish off these slides for tomorrow’s presentation.” | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. “I just loved those business school case studies!” | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. “Just yesterday, I sat down with the CEO of a \$10-billion-a-year utility company and was telling him that he ought to . . .” | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. “Hello? Is this the Phoenix Ritz-Carlton? Put me in room 224 for another week. See you tomorrow!” | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. “I really don’t mind seeing myself in a Dilbert cartoon.” | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. “I can’t think of anything worse than having to sell breakfast cereal day in and day out!” | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |



The Consulting Aptitude Test . . . continued

| | Yes! | No Way! |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 7. "I don't have to get public credit for my individual contribution to a project." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. "I want to be able to pay off my student loans in a hurry." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. "I love working in teams." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. "I love working with bright, highly educated, ambitious people." (Translation: "I have no patience working with people who aren't just like me.") | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. "I don't need a job in which the product is something I can touch and feel." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. "I don't take it personally when one of my ideas gets shot down." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. "I can hardly wait to get acquainted with the new Xerox machine." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. "God, I love it when we can save a corporation \$20 million with a little bit of creative thinking!" | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. "I thrive in situations where there's a lot of ambiguity." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Scoring the survey. That's right, you guessed it: The more of these quotes you could imagine leaving your lips, the more you want to be a consultant. If very few of these things sit well with you, you really ought to think about going into sales, teaching, politics, or something else. And remember, there's no shame in that. What a boring place the world would be if everyone were a consultant.

What Kind of Firm Do You Want to Work For?

Let's face it. Most consulting firms look a lot alike. They also compete intensely with each other for top candidates. As a result, they all offer excellent pay and perks. Beyond that, however, there are reasons why you might prefer one to another. By encouraging you to think about your personal preferences, the following worksheet should help you identify the type of firm in which you'd fit best.



Consulting Firm Appeal Test

1. What are the three or four industries in which you are most interested?

2. In which part of the country or world do you want to work?

3. Where will you not work?



Consulting Firm Appeal Test . . . continued

4. In which of the following types of environments would you feel most comfortable? _____

Large

Lots of structure

Strong culture

Work mostly with other consultants

Formal

Work on strategic issues

Work on multiple projects at once

Work in lots of different industries

Follow a defined career path

Prefer to facilitate groups

Prefer to have an office

Small

Lack of structure

Weak culture

Work mostly with client staff

Informal

Work on operational issues

Work on one project at a time

Focus on a specific industry

Create your own path

Prefer to analyze and present findings

Don't mind working out of a suitcase

5. Divide 100 points among the following attributes in order of their importance to you:

____ Reputation

____ Location

____ Pay

____ Training programs

____ Fit with people

____ Size of firm

____ Work focus

____ Industry and practice focus

____ Travel requirements

____ Attention to work/life balance

____ Attitude

____ Other: _____

Interpreting the survey. Made your choices, read the report, and still don't know which firm is best for you? Don't fret. Use this survey to ask the firms—and yourself—the right questions during the interviewing process. That will help you get to the bottom line: Is consulting, and this firm in particular, the right place for me?

What Insiders (and Outsiders) Say

People go into consulting for lots of reasons. After extensive research of the industry and interviews with a number of people who have gone into consulting, as well as those who have decided not to, our impression is that consulting is a great career for a few people, a good short-term job for some, and a bad place for many others.

Best Reasons for Going into Consulting

- Good way to learn about lots of industries without committing for life
- Lots of bright, hardworking young people like those you know from school
- Good pay, benefits, and perks
- Chance to see the world, even if the tour of duty requires months in Pittsburgh
- Can't decide what else to do with your life
- Virtually a no-lose career option

- Ego—telling CEOs what to do makes you feel important
- Belief that consultants make business and the world a better place
- Debt: You can't afford to turn down the excellent offer they made you
- Want to make a transition from one industry to another
- Strong contact network will help you throughout your career

Best Reasons for Not Going into Consulting

- Having a real life—weekends and evenings free to spend with your significant other, friends, and family
- Want a career, not just an adventure
- Don't want people to get laid off because of your recommendations
- Prefer being on the line and having profit-and-loss responsibility
- Prefer small companies
- Would rather work with one organization and learn specialized skills
- Annoyed by unstructured work with endless course corrections
- Dislike the consulting culture and self-important people
- Don't believe consultants add much value
- Didn't get any callbacks

So, You Might Not Want to Be a Consultant?

If you're thinking that you really aren't cut out to be a consultant, or if you're exploring other options, you might find the next section helpful. We've tried to compare a career in consulting with a couple of other popular options for students coming out of undergraduate and graduate programs.

Investment Banking Versus Consulting

For students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, two of the most prominent job opportunities are consulting and investment banking. In many

ways, the jobs are similar. Both consultants and investment bankers serve as advisors to industry. As a result, there is a strong focus on client service, with the expectation that you will respond to client demands immediately and effectively (personal needs take a backseat). Likewise, both professions require strong analytical abilities, attention to detail, intelligence, and an interest in business issues and the business world.

On another level, however, investment banking and consulting are quite different, and, as a result, attract different types of people. In broad terms, investment bankers' advice focuses on financial issues; consultants deal with a much wider variety of business issues. Investment bankers help clients raise capital, prepare for IPOs, structure deals with other companies, and underwrite debt and equity offerings. The work requires a high level of comfort with numbers and the finance-related fields of accounting, tax, and law.

By contrast, consultants look at a whole range of business issues, from top-level corporate strategy, to marketing programs, to redesigning a firm's back-office operations, to setting up a new MIS (management information system) structure. Although consultants also need to be comfortable with numbers and frequently come into contact with finance issues, they typically spend a lot more time working with client staff to actually implement recommendations they've made. Consequently, they need to enjoy working with a wider range of people and, depending on the firm and its approach, be willing to do more hand-holding with client staff.




Investment Banking Versus Consulting

| Investment Banking | Consulting |
|---|---|
| Live and work in NYC, Tokyo, or London | Live in any of a number of cities and work in Peoria, Boise, Tampa, or wherever the client is located |
| Work 70- to 90-hour weeks with spikes times up to 80 hours, weekends usually free | Work 60-hour weeks, with crunch times exceeding 100 hours; work almost every weekend |
| Fast-paced, deal-oriented work | Long-term, project-oriented work |
| Balance 15 deals at once, all in different stages of completion | Work on one or two projects at once, complete them, and then take on others |
| Get paid less salary but get big bonuses—with even bigger rewards for sticking around for a few years | Get paid more at the start, bonuses not as significant |
| Compensation based on performance, wide variance among individuals, wide swings from year to year | Compensation more equal among people at same level, steady growth, relatively stable from year to year |
| Focus on numbers, finance, deals | Focus on general business problems, strategy, operations, marketing |
| Deal primarily with CFOs, CEOs, lawyers | Deal extensively with CEOs and top management, but lots of contact with middle managers and lower-level employees |
| More opportunity to shine individually | Stronger teamwork orientation |
| Final product: A contract or prospectus | Final product: A series of presentations and recommendations, often followed by implementation work |


Industry Versus Consulting

Although many graduates of top universities and MBA programs choose careers in the more glamorous consulting and investment banking industries, most still find work elsewhere. Given the seductive pull of the glitzy presentations given by the consulting firms and banks, chances are good that even if you're thinking about a career in industry, you may be tempted by the consulting world. To help you understand more about the different tracks, here's a summary of representative differences between the two options:

|  Industry Versus Consulting | |
|---|--|
| Industry | Consulting |
| Work primarily with the same group of people | Project teams, colleagues, and clients change every few months |
| More direct involvement with a product | Arm's-length involvement with client's products |
| Make management decisions | Suggest management decisions |
| Deal with a wide range of people and have a direct impact on their daily lives | Deal mostly with senior and mid-level managers; have a large impact on regular people, but from a distance |
| Challenges revolve around getting things done, motivating people, dealing with personnel issues, making operating decisions | Challenges revolve around tackling and understanding complex problems and teaching clients to deal with them |
| Satisfaction from making product change | Satisfaction from affecting organization and competitiveness |
| Learn from a mentor with years of industry or functional experience | Learn from a mentor who is closer in age to you and who has consulting experience |
| With a good education and ambition, you might really stand out | With the most extraordinary accomplishments, you'll just be equal to everybody else |
| Your reputation and connections develop over months and years | Have to make quick impressions, then move on |
| Compensation packages generally lower, but you might get stock options | Compensation and perks more attractive |

Technology Versus Consulting

Technology companies have often enticed graduates to sign on with them, dangling stock options, special perks, and the entrepreneurial challenges of working for a technology company or start-up. Many of the same differences noted under “Industry Versus Consulting” are relevant here, as are the following:

|  Technology Versus Consulting | | |
|--|-------------------------------|---|
| | Technology | Consulting |
| Compensation: | Salary and stock options | Salary and bonus |
| Perks: | Free sodas, great hardware | The Ritz-Carlton |
| Travel: | Every day in cyberspace, baby | Weekly—have your frequent flyer card ready |
| Typical dress: | (Almost) anything goes | Gap ads to Brooks Brothers suits |
| Company parties: | Usually at the office | Biannually in Aspen, Tahiti, or the Caribbean |
| Competition: | Plenty and brutal | For the best intellectual property |
| Outlook: | The future of business | The future of business needs paid advisors |
| Typical workspace: | Messy | Virtual and at the client |
| Biggest pain: | Technology | Clients |

For Your Reference

- Consulting-Speak
- General Consulting Information
- WetFeet Resources
- Consulting Firm Websites

Consulting-Speak

To help prepare you for both your interviews and a possible career in the field, we've asked our insiders to give us the most up-to-date consulting jargon.

Beware: Unauthorized use of these terms has been known to seriously offend every known species of consultant.

2x2. Pronounced “two by two,” this is a favorite consulting tool used to analyze a number of items along two dimensions. It's basically a graph with X and Y axes that cross in the middle, creating four different sectors. Don't be surprised if you're asked to produce one of these during your interview.

Benchmark. Here's another standard-issue item from the consulting toolbox. Benchmarks are levels of performance or output against which you can evaluate the performance of something else. A benchmark study is an analysis of the performance of a number of companies along specified dimensions. For example, a software firm might hire a consulting firm to do a benchmark study on how much other firms are spending on customer service.

BHAG. Big Hairy Audacious Goal. This buzzword comes from the book *Built to Last* (see next entry).

Built to Last. A book written by James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras, in which they destroy the myth that the core product is more important than the vision the company espouses. The term now enjoys widespread usage as describing a company with a strong culture based on a core ideology or identity. More loosely, it refers to those firms that want to be around for many decades or centuries, not just a few years.

Business design. Here's a consultant's definition: "For a company, it's not about growing your top line, it's about growing your bottom line." (The bottom line is profit. The top line is sales.) "Business design is about what you do, how you gear up the troops. It has everything to do with whom you hire and what they do. It's your channel, your product, how you execute your offering."

Case interview. In a case interview, your interviewer will give you a set of facts and ask you a question to analyze how you structure a problem, think it through, and ultimately come up with a solution. Case questions can be numerical, as in, "How many dimes are currently in circulation?," or business-related, as in, "Suppose a client asked you to figure out why his business is experiencing an unusual decline in sales and a severe cash flow problem." They could also just be wacky, such as, "If Dannon, Yoplait, and Colombo yogurts came to life, what kind of people would they be?"

Change management. Here's a \$5 buzzword that sounds like it's making things clear, when really it's just muddying up an already fuzzy concept. Most firms use this term to refer to a specific type of consulting work dedicated to such things as helping a company restructure its organization and cope with the human problems that accompany such an effort.

Convergence. Consulting services in telecommunications (cable, wireless, wireline, and Internet), computers, and media—or "converging" industries. The thinking is that the Internet, the telephone, the TV, the PDA, and the PC will someday all become one.

Core competencies. Things a company does best.

Customer relationship management (CRM). Communication technology that helps companies manage customer information.

Deliverable. The product or solution you give (deliver) to the client. If you promise an analysis of shipping costs, for instance, that's your deliverable. Deliverables typically come with dates (when you will deliver).

Engagement/project/study/case/job. These are all different ways in which the firms refer to a specific project. Interviewers often note which term you use—just to see whether you've read the company literature. Using the wrong word is not an automatic ding, but you'll impress your interviewer if you get it right.

Enterprise resource planning (ERP). An IT solution to streamline operations by connecting all parts of a business electronically—including HR, billing, and inventory. A popular consulting project during the '90s, ERP spurred double-digit annual growth for firms.

Framework. Basically, a framework is any kind of structure you can use to look at a problem. It can be as simple as, "The company's problems stem from both internal and external factors." Or it can be something more MBA-ish, like Porter's Five Forces. Consultants love frameworks, and the more you use them (up to a point), the more analytical you'll sound.

Growth. From 1997–98 to around 2000, most firms shifted their focus from reengineering—which often meant downsizing—to growth. Growth involved taking a small private start-up from, say, 25 or 30 employees to more than 500 and going public.

Implementation. These days, nobody admits to doing just pure strategy work. The reason? Too many consulting firms were criticized for leaving behind a big stack of slides that never resulted in any action by the client. As a result, all of the firms talk about how they work with clients to make sure that their expensive analyses and recommendations are actually implemented.

On the beach. In consulting, this refers to any period of time during which you aren't staffed to a project. Although you won't necessarily see any sunshine here, you also won't have to be any place in particular, so there's a chance you'll be able to leave the office early, do your laundry, pay your bills, and maybe even see your honey.

Operations. Operations refers to all of the day-to-day tasks associated with the running of a company. In a manufacturing company, this includes the buying and processing of raw materials as well as the sale and distribution of the final products. Many consulting firms do a big business providing operations advice. At the simplest level, this just means that they help clients run their businesses better.

Outsourcing. To reduce overhead expenses, lots of companies are turning to outsiders to provide many of the functions and services traditionally done in-house. Popular candidates for outsourcing include accounting services, marketing communications, payroll management, and data processing. Increasingly, public firms are turning to these services because they create stable revenue flows, which their investors like.

Pay-for-performance. Billing based on performance, rather than strictly on hours.

Presentation. In the traditional consulting project, the presentation was the means by which a consulting firm shared all of its insights and recommendations with a client company. The client's top management team would assemble in a boardroom, and a partner or case team manager would spin through dozens of overhead slides displaying all of the analysis his or her firm had completed. Although the standard overhead slideshow is now considered a bit sterile, it's still a popular drill at most firms.

Reengineering. Reengineering lost its cachet in the mid-'90s. In its purest sense, a reengineering project was supposed to involve a complete rethinking of a company's operations from ground zero.

Shareholder value analysis. The goal of many companies is to enhance their value to shareholders, and they engage lots of consulting firms to help them do it. There are all manner of ways, proprietary and not, to analyze shareholder value.

True north. The place you want to get to. If you're heading true north, you're moving in the right direction.

Value chain analysis. An analysis of all of the processes that go into a product, from the gathering of raw materials needed to make the product to the delivery of the final product to the customer. At best, each stage adds value to the product.

Virtual office/hoteling. Sexy terms for an office setup in which nobody has a personal desk or office. Means you could be hanging out with the clerks at Kinko's.

White-space opportunity. A money-making opportunity in an area you aren't set up to make money in. Think of it as an unbridged gap between what you do and what others do, or an untapped source of growth.

General Consulting Information

A general resource for information about the consulting industry is *Consultants News*, published by Kennedy Information. For more information about this and other Kennedy publications, visit ConsultingCentral.com or the Kennedy Information website, www.kennedyinfo.com.

Reading *Fast Company*, *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Business Week*, *Business 2.0*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New York Times* is an easy way to stay up-to-date on the latest events and issues that management consultants address, and will arm you with plenty of information for your interviews. Each of these publications has a corresponding website that's worth a visit.

WetFeet Resources

Visit WetFeet to get help on everything from finding the right firm to acing your case. At www.WetFeet.com, you will find:

- Articles on writing killer cover letters and resumes
- Tips on putting your best foot forward in your interviews
- Guides to specific firms
- An in-depth insider series on how to ace your case interviews
- Plus a wide range of topical information relevant to your job search

Consulting Firm Websites

Consulting firms regularly publish white papers, studies, and articles as a way to market and promote their services and expertise, educate their clients, and share best practices. If you're interested in a specific firm, take some time to explore its website for information relevant to the practice area you're going into—look for a tab called “publications,” “insight,” or “thought leadership.” Or explore what they've published so that you can speak intelligently about their “thought leadership” in your interview. Here's a selective list of URLs for some of the better publications sections of strategy firms' websites.

Accenture:

www.accenture.com/xd/xd.asp?it=enweb&xd=ideas\ideas_home.xml

Notes: Check out *Refractions*, Accenture's innovation and ideas e-mail newsletter.

A.T. Kearney: www.atkearney.com/main.taf?p=5

Notes: *Executive Agenda* is its flagship publication.

Bain: www.bain.com/bainweb/publications/publications_overview.asp

Notes: Includes “Best of Bain.”

BearingPoint: www.bearingpoint.com/library/index.html

Notes: Check out the “Knowledge Repository” organized by industry, solution, and region.

Boston Consulting Group: www.bcg.com/publications/publications_splash.jsp

Notes: Cool searchable database lets you find articles by industry, topic, publication type, and by language.

Booz Allen Hamilton: www.strategy-business.com

Notes: Booz Allen's well-regarded quarterly, *strategy+business*.

Deloitte: www.deloitte.com/dtt/section_home/0,2331,sid%253D16695,00.html

Notes: Check out the research section and sign up for e-mail alerts.

McKinsey & Company: www.mckinsey.com/ideas

Notes: Don't miss the *McKinsey Quarterly*.

Mercer Management Consulting:

www.mercermc.com/defaultFlash.asp?section=Perspectives

Notes: Check out the "Our Books" section.

Monitor Group: www.gbn.com

Notes: Global Business Network, a Monitor company, features excellent future-oriented perspectives on business.

JOB SEARCH GUIDES

Getting Your Ideal Internship

Job Hunting A to Z: Landing the Job You Want

Killer Consulting Resumes

Killer Investment Banking Resumes

Killer Resumes & Cover Letters

Negotiating Your Salary & Perks

Networking Works!

INTERVIEW GUIDES

Ace Your Case: Consulting Interviews

Ace Your Case II: 15 More Consulting Cases

Ace Your Case III: Practice Makes Perfect

Ace Your Case IV: The Latest & Greatest

Ace Your Case V: Even More Practice Cases

Ace Your Interview!

Beat the Street: Investment Banking Interviews

Beat the Street II: Investment Banking Interview Practice Guide

CAREER & INDUSTRY GUIDES

Careers in Accounting

Careers in Advertising & Public Relations

Careers in Asset Management & Retail Brokerage

Careers in Biotech & Pharmaceuticals

Careers in Brand Management

Careers in Consumer Products

Careers in Entertainment & Sports

Careers in Human Resources

Careers in Information Technology

Careers in Investment Banking

Careers in Management Consulting
Careers in Manufacturing
Careers in Marketing & Market Research
Careers in Non-Profits & Government
Careers in Real Estate
Careers in Supply Chain Management
Careers in Venture Capital
Consulting for PhDs, Doctors & Lawyers
Industries & Careers for MBAs
Industries & Careers for Undergraduates

COMPANY GUIDES

Accenture
Bain & Company
Boston Consulting Group
Booz Allen Hamilton
Citigroup's Corporate & Investment Bank
Credit Suisse First Boston
Deloitte Consulting
Goldman Sachs Group
J.P. Morgan Chase & Company
Lehman Brothers
McKinsey & Company
Merrill Lynch
Morgan Stanley
25 Top Consulting Firms
Top 20 Biotechnology & Pharmaceuticals Firms
Top 25 Financial Services Firm

Who We Are

WetFeet is the trusted destination for job seekers to research companies and industries, and manage their careers. WetFeet Insider Guides provide you with inside information for a successful job search. At WetFeet, we do the work for you and present our results in an informative, credible, and entertaining way. Think of us as your own private research company whose primary mission is to assist you in making more informed career decisions.

WetFeet was founded in 1994 by Stanford MBAs Gary Alpert and Steve Pollock. While exploring our next career moves, we needed products like the WetFeet Insider Guides to help us through the research and interviewing game. But they didn't exist. So we started writing. Today, WetFeet serves more than a million job candidates each month by helping them nail their interviews, avoid ill-fated career decisions, and add thousands of dollars to their compensation packages. The quality of our work and knowledge of the job-seeking world have also allowed us to develop an extensive corporate and university membership.

In addition, WetFeet's services include two award-winning websites (WetFeet.com and InternshipPrograms.com), Web-based recruiting technologies, consulting services, and our exclusive research studies, such as the annual WetFeet Student Recruitment Survey. Our team members, who come from diverse backgrounds, share a passion about the job-search process and a commitment to delivering the highest quality products and customer service.

About Our Name

One of the most frequent questions we receive is, "So, what's the story behind your name?" The short story is that the inspiration for our name comes from a popular business school case study about L.L. Bean, the successful mail-order company. Leon Leonwood Bean got his start because he quite simply, and very literally, had a case of wet feet. Every time he went hunting in the Maine woods, his shoes leaked, and he returned with soaked feet. So, one day, he decided to make a better hunting shoe. And he did. And he told his friends, and they lined up to buy their own pairs of Bean boots. And L.L. Bean, the company, was born . . . all because a man who had wet feet decided to make boots.

The lesson we took from the Bean case? Lots of people get wet feet, but entrepreneurs make boots. And that's exactly what we're doing at WetFeet.

Whether you're attracted by the big bucks, the intellectual rigor, the glamour, the work, or a combination of the above, you're not alone: Consulting firms are traditionally among the largest employers of top MBA and college graduates. It's a high-paying, high-profile field that offers students the opportunity to take on a lot of responsibility right out of school and quickly learn a great deal about the business world. But with single-digit growth projected for the industry in 2004 and 2005, expect competition for jobs to be as tough as ever. So you'll need to do your homework to land a job with a top consulting firm.

In this popular WetFeet Insider Guide, you'll explore

- Profiles of 37 top strategy, Big Five, and specialty consulting firms.
- Consulting opportunities beyond McKinsey and BCG.
- Which firm is right for you—based on our exclusive Consulting Firm Appeal Test.
- The latest industry trends.
- Industry rankings of the major firms.
- A week in the life of a typical consultant.
- The typical career paths at the different firms.
- How to prepare for the recruiting process, including the dreaded case interview.
- Key differences between working for a consulting firm vs. an investment bank.

WetFeet has earned a strong reputation among college graduates and career professionals for its series of highly credible, no-holds-barred Insider Guides. WetFeet's investigative writers get behind the annual reports and corporate PR to tell the real story of what it's like to work at specific companies and in different industries. **www.WetFeet.com**

