

Hitting a bulls eye with recruitment

Recruitment agencies grapple with finding the right people for the right jobs as a vibrant economy and low unemployment rates throw up a multitude of choices for jobseekers. **SUSHEELA MENON** reports.



LOW AVERAGE EMPLOYEE TENURE IN

companies has started putting immense pressure on recruiters to attract the right kind of talent for their clients. A buoyant economy has given rise to a number of jobs, and this has triggered job-hopping amongst employees. Recruitment agencies correctly cite talent attraction as one of the major challenges in the months to come.

Mark Sparrow, country manager of Hudson, says that according to a company report (Q4 2007), more than 36% of employees have an average tenure of two years or less. He also says that the gap in salary expectations between employers and employees is widening, and that the demand for higher salaries is partly driven by the fact that many candidates, who are bilingual also, have the option of working in Hong Kong or China. "Employers in Singapore are increasingly likely to find that candidates are asking for salaries higher than they are willing to offer," he says, adding that 81% of employers in the media,

PR and advertising sector say that candidates are asking for more than 10% above what they are prepared to pay. "This is not a traditionally high-paying business but it is currently buoyant and candidates are trying to raise salary levels." He also says that as this sector involves demanding hours and work environments, candidates want to be rewarded, but companies may not want to make counter offers to retain existing employees. "It is likely that they will begin to focus on long-term retention strategies rather than individual counter offers."

Sparrow warns of the threat of commoditisation that has risen because of the many recruitment companies entering the market very quickly. He feels that recruitment is inclining towards "a game of speed and price" rather than good consultation or quality of delivery. As many other reputed companies, Hudson believes in studying every client's business thoroughly before finding the right approach to assist the client.

Finding alternatives

Ochiai Masaharu, managing director, JAC, says that employers must be educated to accept a mature workforce to supplement the limited local talent pool, and also to welcome foreign talent as alternatives. He also says that educating employers to adopt a more work-life balance approach towards employees might be the key to staff retention.

C K Goh Rosa, country manager of Manpower, says that it is important to continue to educate the industry on hiring mature workforce. "The matured workforce must be repackaged and reshipped as a sustainable source of employment pool to seek the acceptance of a job market whose prime average gets younger and younger with the rise of the economy," she says, adding that she sees the placement of the older workforce as a huge challenge.



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In-house recruitment and RPO

Centralisation of recruitment functions has started to gain approval, as companies begin to realise that there is a strong need to have proper coordination across various divisions, and this has created increased demand for internal recruiters. "We are seeing agency recruiters moving into in-house recruitment roles as there was a lack of supply in this area," Mark Ellwood, managing director of Robert Walters says.

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Another trend that is beginning to gain popularity in Singapore is Recruitment Process Outsourcing (RPO), which is similar to business process outsourcing or BPO. RPO exists when an employer outsources all or part of the staffing process to an external service provider. "As RPO usually seems more attractive to MNCs, the challenge is to convince and cater a specific solution to smaller companies," GMP Recruitment Services' chief executive officer, Annie Yap, says.

She also says that to stand out in the market, branding is very important. "In today's competitive environment, developing an employer brand will help to attract the best talent in the market." She adds that companies must be "proactive" in creative a good branding strategy.

Global workforce

As globalisation continues to assert itself, recruiters feel that the emergence of a global marketplace will necessitate the development of an international workforce - which will lead to an increase in global talent mobility. "With many developing economies such as China and India becoming popular relocation destinations today, HR professionals and employers can expect increased relocating activities to go along with expanding foreign trade investments," Dharendra Shantilal, senior vice-president (Asia-Pacific) of Kelly Services, says.

Innovation

Recruitment agencies are rolling up their sleeves to fight aggressive competition in the market, especially

by continuous creation of novel products and strategies. Yap stresses the need for her company to be flexible and sees a major challenge in continuing to be "the trendsetter in terms of providing innovative HR solutions to customers". Shantilal says that constant innovation and awareness of the latest trends is needed to meet the challenges of increased competition at regional and global levels to continue to attract the best talents in the marketplace and meet the evolving business needs of clients. Adecco Personnel's country manager, Lynne Ng, mirrors Shantilal's opinion by stating that her company will continue to bring out creative sourcing methodologies to augment traditional approaches. She also says that Adecco will continue to depend on its understanding of the workforce and client businesses to create opportunities to connect skill and jobs "in the most effective manner".

Internal strength

Besides focusing on products, recruitment agencies are also looking at their internal teams. "As a recruitment firm, we have to work hard to hire and retain the best consultants in the market to ensure we can deliver the best level of service to both our candidates and clients," Ellwood says, adding that his company plans to concentrate on setting up of specialised divisions to meet its clients' recruitment needs. Robert Walters hires market specialists as consultants and its reward structure is built "on a foundation of client service and candidate care". Branding is also something that recruitment agencies make use of when dealing with heavy competition in the market. A few have come up with fresher images of themselves, whereas some attribute their success to well-established brand names.

Technology is another factor most agencies are relying on. There is shortage of talent on a global and local scale, and this creates a need to search for the best talents in the market. Ellwood says that this means the company has to have a strong database that is regularly updated so that it enables them to react to clients' needs quickly and efficiently.

As competition heats up and finding new talent becomes harder, recruitment agencies seem to have a lot to fight for. With increased efficiency, newer products, improved technologies, and better ideas, the profession seems prepared to win the battle.



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