

the most important recruit

Hiring the best possible talent can be a difficult task. While many HR professionals turn to recruitment agencies to take over the selection process, the search for a suitable recruiter can often prove just as difficult. Recruitment consultants from the top agencies in Singapore share their tips



If hiring can be outsourced, why not do so? There is a wide range of reasons to head down that path, in both good times and bad. Recruitment agencies are helpful to employers who do not want to be distracted from core business components which need their immediate attention.

In a corporate world where processes are only made possible by multitasking, recruiters can also provide a range of added services to ease the transition. From staffing and payroll management to consulting and training, these agencies tout themselves as one-stop centres, leaving HR with more time to focus on developing and growing the business.

Recruitment agencies appeal to clients and candidates alike because they are

experienced at delivering all of the appropriate services – interviewing, reference checking and matching candidates to employers. Their focus on career placements means they have comprehensive databases which carry current information on top talents in the country and beyond.

Companies find a further advantage in recruitment agencies when they have to fill a specialist position. One-of-a-kind candidates are usually needed for such roles, and a recruiter with deep knowledge about the industry and function will serve HR's needs most effectively. Certain recruiters have access to a full spectrum of candidates in given functions and industries, giving the employer a head start in the whittling-down process.

But before you pick up the phone and contact the recruitment agency with the most attractive advertising, or the one that your competitors are also using, there are some important guidelines to follow. Most agents warn against making hasty decisions. Rather, they encourage their customers to make a thorough assessment of their needs before going through with the process.

If certain steps are overlooked, a company will miss out on the benefits of finding a suitable candidate. A poor match could be detrimental in financial terms as well. According to Karin Clarke, Operations Director, Randstad, the cost in lost time, recruitment, training, specialist knowledge, productivity and other factors can be up to 150% of the annual salary for that role.

Check them out

The task of selecting a recruitment agency may be as meticulous as that of searching for an appropriate candidate yourself. Josh Goh, Manager, Corporate Services, GMP says looking for a suitable recruitment firm is like buying a computer. “Similar to determining a model to purchase, employers should first determine their staffing needs – from whether the positions they that need filled are temporary or permanent to whether the company requires an industry specialist or generalist to work on the searches.”

The upside is that once you make a connection with a right recruiter, you will be able to use that agent or organisation again for future hiring. The extra legwork pays off especially when you consider the financial and non-financial returns a suitable candidate will bring in the long run, Goh says.

First and foremost, HR needs to do its research to find a consultant and agency which

specialises in its particular industry sector. “Any who have tried sourcing a specialist candidate by simply placing a website advertisement will recognise how hit and miss the results are,” says Chris Mead, General Manager, Hays Specialist Recruitment.

The employer’s top priority should be a firm’s ability to deliver, says Joanne Chua, Manager, HR Specialist Division, Robert Walters. She reminds employers that running a professional recruitment firm with talented consultants comes at a cost. “Using the cheapest recruitment firm will not necessarily give you the selection of talent in the shortlist,” she says.

On that note, she also cites a company’s financial stability as a critical factor. A strong balance sheet denotes a company whose guarantee periods of candidates will remain valid, unlike those who will not be able to sustain their business profitably in the long run. “You might not be able to seek redress (or) claim a refund if they close down,” she says.

“Know what you’re getting for your money,” urges Gina McLellan, Country Manager, Hudson. “In many instances, recruiters are profiling candidates to their clients without performing a face-to-face interview or thorough reference checking.”

Philippe Capsie, Country Manager, Manpower Singapore, agrees that service delivery is a priority alongside the agency’s reputation. Employers should assess both the company and the recruiter in terms of length of service to the industry, previous accounts and types of roles played. A recruitment company’s track record depends on their credibility and integrity. And a detailed evaluation of their experiences will ensure a sound relationship with the employer, he says.

There’s no better endorsement than a recommendation from another client. Clarke recommends employers seek suggestions on which consultants to contact from trusted friends who have had positive and successful experiences with them.

Goh adds that it may also be helpful to find out about the firm’s approach and processes. Find out who will be liaising personally with the hiring manager, and the key executives who will be involved. Although it sounds like a great deal of effort when the aim of getting a recruiter is to minimise your workload, an initial understanding of who you’re working with is crucial, he says.

Although it is tempting to engage a recruitment consultant who assures quick



solutions, that can actually end in more problems. Those in the know say there are many that promise the world and don't deliver. A consultant should take the time to become acquainted with your business and receive a detailed briefing on job and candidate requirements before filling positions. "Be wary of those who very quickly send lots of CVs and people your way without getting a quality brief," Clarke advises.

Recruiting in the downturn

The current economic turbulence has certainly caused shifts in staffing needs and priorities, not to mention hiring budgets. But is the financial crisis affecting employers' willingness to engage professional recruitment services?

Consultants say no. Firstly, such a period requires HR to focus its attention on handling manpower issues such as retention, training and development. Goh explains that with resources directed at those aspects, HR has little time to concentrate on staffing and managing its talent database.

Consultants also remind HR that despite the downturn and large-scale retrenchment exercises, companies are still struggling to hire high-end talent or candidates for specialist roles.

They acknowledge some organisations are working hard to save costs, and paring back their recruitment expenses. But they say now may be a better time than ever to engage a consultant.

While the common thinking may be that suitable candidates are in abundance during a recession, Clarke says that isn't always the case. "Quality candidates will always be difficult to find."

While more jobseekers may be available in the market, not all will be right for your business. In the unique circumstances of a downturn, recruitment consultants can offer the expertise to link employers to candidates who will adjust, despite entering in a time of slow growth and less than ideal morale.

Employers should also be aware that candidates who are in stable roles in organisations which face no threat of a shake-up tend not to apply for positions in the current market. McLellan cites this as another reason that recruitment consultants should be included in the hiring process. A consultant will help to tap into the candidate pool in ways that an employer simply is not experienced to do so, she says. **HRM**



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