

Recruitment Guide

Top tips for successful recruitment in 2022

Written by Paul Withers



Top tips for successful recruitment in 2022

Introduction

How you bring new people into your business is an important task, but we seem to make it hard work sometimes. Often there is conflict internally as to who has responsibility for recruiting, which can result in it drifting along with the hope that it will somehow sort itself out. This is not particularly strategic and unlikely to produce effective results.

The reality is that everyone needs to take some ownership for recruiting. From the CEO down, getting the right people into your business and then keeping hold of them is core to commercial success.

If HR are the nominated guardians of recruitment, then hiring managers need to do their bit to support the process and ensure that decisions are made quickly, and that candidate engagement is always respected.

For this to work, those responsible for recruitment need to ensure that robust and relevant processes are in place and importantly that they have the capability and back up to challenge those that do not follow them.

What can we do better?

It is sadly no secret that the recruitment industry (both in-house and agency) has got a poor reputation for service and perceived value for money. Recruiting companies often cite high fees, poor communication and badly screened CVs as some of the common complaints, whereas candidates routinely experience lack of information and poor if any feedback regarding their applications.

When we look at external recruiters, I think it's important to note that those managing recruitment assignments, don't set out to do a bad job. However, the way that recruitment relationships are structured, mean that it is difficult to avoid.

I strongly believe that these issues are predominately the result of the contingency recruitment model, where multiple agencies are engaged, but only one can be successful.

This may have been an appropriate model in 1997, but times have moved on and so my first big tip is to look at **how you can move away from this ineffective way of working** and importantly to show you the benefits of doing so.

1) Ditch the multi-agency contingency model

It is widely agreed that agencies working to a multi-agency contingency model, probably have a c20-25% fill rate which means they have to register four/five vacancies to create one placement. You quickly see how this then becomes a numbers game and why so many recruitment agencies are heavily KPI driven.

If enough CVs are sent, then one may just get the job. In this instance, it is all about the volume of activity rather than a focus on quality. The reason that this model still exists is a combination of how employers choose to buy, and recruitment companies choose to sell, their recruitment services.

The good news is that there is a solution and it's an easy one!

Spend some time vetting your recruitment partners and choose one and let them deliver similarly to that of any other professional services firm. You wouldn't expect four accountants to have an attempt at your accounts and pay the one who prepares them in the way you most prefer.

The Advantages

You can work in Partnership.

If you have an exclusive arrangement, then you can change the way that you work with your recruitment partner.

The reason that I promote an exclusive model is that I don't want to sit opposite you trying to sell you our candidates, rather I want to sit next to you and work with you to find you the best possible candidate for your role.

If you have four agencies working on a position, they are all going to be selling you the benefits of each of their candidates and quite rightly so.

The problem for you, however, is that no one is going to be mentioning any of the areas where they may not be so strong.

When you work exclusively with a Recruiter, you can have a more rounded conversation regarding the pros and cons of each candidate under consideration.

From a candidate perspective, all applications get the same representation which will also improve the overall candidate experience

Competitive fee arrangements

We have touched on the issue of fill rates above. It is widely agreed that 20-25% is an average fill rate when working on a multi-agency basis. Some specialists will be better than this, some will be worse.

This means that if you pay a recruitment fee under this arrangement then you are in effect paying for not just your assignment, but also all of the work they have undertaken where they have not been successful.

One of the key complaints about the recruitment industry is rates of 25-30% for experienced hire recruitment.

When you look at the maths though, you can see why these levels are so high and that is because most of the time Recruiters are working on assignments where no revenue is going to be created.

When working exclusively, a strong Recruiter would expect fill rates to rise to 90%+.

If a Recruiter is going to fill the vast majority of assignments that they work on, it means that they can work at a much more competitive level and importantly spend the required amount of time to manage their assignments correctly.

Commitment and ability to deliver

Moving on from a better fee arrangement, we can look at the level of commitment from both sides. If a recruiting client is showing commitment in terms of exclusivity and/or a retainer, then it makes sense that a Recruiter can allocate much more time to the delivery of the assignment.

We have all seen the number of poorly written adverts littering the online job boards, some no more than a straight cut and paste from a generic job spec.

The reason for this is not because the consultants want to do a bad job, it simply comes down to time.

To cover all the vacancies, they are working on they do not have the time to spend creating quality advert copy and identifying which candidates are the best fit for the role and organisation.

Once you spend some time vetting your Recruitment Partners, you will be able to ascertain where their core skills lie.

Are they skilled Recruitment Practitioners? Or are they highly skilled Recruitment Sales Professionals?

This is a key point because a lot of firms will send out very polished and capable sales professionals to win business, however, the delivery of your assignment is left to someone who wasn't even in recruitment the month before.

I don't make this point flippantly as of course, we all have to start somewhere, but more to highlight the fact many people who work in Recruitment are hired for their sales ability as opposed to their recruitment experience.

The ability to cold call 100 times a day is not the same skill that you need to deliver a well-rounded recruitment service.

I have spent the majority of my time recruiting within the HR sector, which includes strong experience in recruiting internal recruitment/talent roles. One of the key factors that we look for when taking people from an agency background into an in-house role is the ability to manage stakeholders and ensure that each vacancy is filled in the most effective manner possible.

If a hiring manager sends through a role that you don't fancy, you don't have the option of ignoring it to concentrate on an easier fill. This is a challenge for many in a contingency agency environment as the key focus of their role is often on outbound telesales activity rather than delivering a quality client and candidate experience.

When you are choosing your supplier, you want those who will protect your brand and ensure a positive candidate experience. As soon as you introduce multiple agencies into the mix, you make this much more difficult to achieve.

Ultimately, we are talking about exclusivity and/or retained arrangements. It comes down to commitment and if both sides are fully committed to the process then it makes sense that time and quality of hire will improve.

Traditionally this approach was reserved for senior executive hire, however, the principle is valid for all levels. If a hire is not important to your business, then you probably should not be making it

An experienced recruitment partner will be able to write good quality advert copy that resonates strongly with your target audience. They will be able to put together a clear recruitment timetable and will have the time to identify the best candidates for your vacancy by providing quality and well-rounded shortlists.

They can manage the offer and feedback process and through closer communication with candidates ensure a seamless transition into your business.

Now that we have covered off how to choose your recruitment partner, we can look at how we can drive efficiency through the rest of the process

2) Consider how you take your job to market

Ultimately you want to ensure that the person responsible for managing your recruitment assignment is well informed and able to communicate this effectively to your target audience.

This means that they need to be well briefed by the hiring manager, able to write engaging advert copy and have the ability to make a credible direct approach to target candidates.

If your person is an internal recruiter, then they need to be experienced enough to make all of this happen otherwise the investment in them can become a false economy.

If you decide to use an external supplier, then you need to look at how you engage with them to ensure that you get the most out of your arrangement.

When we consider this, we need to look at the question – *“In current conditions, what is the actual skill of recruitment?”*

It is not just finding people, as this has never been easier. LinkedIn has pretty much eradicated the competitive advantage of big agencies that have for many years dined out on the size of their database. There are more ways to advertise your job than ever, as are there CV databases full of candidates.

The real skill, therefore, is the ability to understand the role and the ability to engage with relevant candidates and present the opportunity in an appropriate manner.

Whether you are using an internal resource or an external partner, you need to make sure they are well briefed so that they in turn can ensure a first-rate candidate experience.

The channels of communication need to be open and information communicated in a timely manner. Candidate experience is often under-estimated, but in a competitive market, it can make a big impact on securing your preferred options.

Now that you have got your Recruiter lined up, we can move on to the recruitment timetable.

3) How do you manage your recruitment timetable?

When I submit a proposal for an assignment, I map out a transparent recruitment timetable. Clearly, things can change in real-time, however it is good practice to have something to work towards and helps to identify potential dates for interviews and the number of stages that can be communicated to candidates from the start.

If there are likely to be gaps between each stage then, although not ideal, is often unavoidable and so to communicate this from the start helps to maintain candidate engagement.

There is a tendency for employers to think, whether consciously or not, that they are the one with the job and that everyone else can dance to their tune. In a candidate-driven market, this will have a negative impact.

Where many parties are competing for talent, a well thought out and slick process can give a significant advantage in terms of closing candidate offers.

Another key point is to be conscious of the candidate's time. How many times do you really need to see them?

If the candidates need to see multiple people, then try and group these meetings so that they are not having to make duplicated visits.

In my opinion, a reasonably informal first stage to ascertain fit from both sides, followed up by a more formal second stage is often more than adequate.

Depending on the seniority of the role you may need an additional stage for final sign off from a senior stakeholder but any more than this and it is starting to become long-winded.

Neither side wants to rush a decision, but equally, you don't want to start duplicating parts of the process and lose candidate engagement and more importantly, to your competitors.

Once you have started to meet with a few candidates, you should also consider your decision-making process.

4) Don't be afraid to hire!

If someone says to me *"Hi Paul, I am struggling to fill this 45k HR BP role. I've seen 24 people and none of them are right"*, then I have to question what exactly they are looking for.

It's unlikely that out of all of those candidates there were not options in there that could do the job. More likely that they are looking for something that may not exist.

To be clear, I am not advocating a just hire anyone mentality! What I am saying is that, if you meet someone with good experience and the right personality that just misses on some small points, then it is often better to make a hire and put a development plan in place.

The few months it may take one of these candidates to improve in the areas they are not as strong, can easily be lost in trying to find that perfect candidate that may not ever materialise.

If you are going to offer, then get on with it!

The more time that goes by, the more chance there is of a candidate going elsewhere or starting to lose interest. Delays in the sign-off process happen, but it makes sense to do what you can before a final stage interview to get things in place so you can make a speedy decision and keep the candidate fully invested in the opportunity.

If you make sure your Recruiter is well briefed, move your shortlist swiftly through the interview stages and you are not afraid to make an offer then, it is quite a straightforward process!

If you don't, then that is when it becomes much more difficult to predict a successful outcome.

My final point is to ensure that you get the best possible shortlist for the role and that you don't fall into the trap of trying to just recruit a like for like replacement of the person leaving the role.

5) Does your process allow you to hire the best candidates? Are high potential candidates overlooked in your recruitment process?

A common recruitment scenario would see a recruiting company post their job spec onto their website, forward the role to six agencies on their PSL who would post the same job spec onto the same job boards and the resulting applications would be shortlisted based on the exact skill set of the person leaving the role.

Is this method likely to consistently secure the best candidates?

The short answer is No!

This way of recruiting only talks to a small percentage of the market and that is those candidates that are very active in their job search. I don't subscribe to the common misconception that only passive candidates are good candidates.

My point here is simply that you are only talking to a very small part of the market.

This method will only really work when there are talent surplus conditions(rare) OR when you have a super brand that everyone wants to work for OR you just happen to get lucky with a great candidate who has been made redundant and is happy to move into a like for like role.

High Potential Candidates

“High potentials consistently and significantly outperform their peer groups in a variety of settings and circumstances. While achieving these superior levels of performance, they exhibit behaviours that reflect their companies’ culture and values in an exemplary manner. Moreover, they show a strong capacity to grow and succeed throughout their careers within an organization—more quickly and effectively than their peer groups do.”

Definition from Harvard Business Review

These candidates have not been doing the same job for the last three years for a competitor. They are looking for career progression and the opportunity to become high performers in their next role.

The very nature of them being a high potential means that they are going to have less experience when measured in years and not match exactly the profile of the person that is leaving the role.

They are rarely attracted or identified by the above methods. These people represent a very interesting part of the market and so rather than spending six months rejecting everyone that is not a direct match for the person leaving the role, it makes a lot of sense to start engaging with these high potentials and using the time saved to fill in any skill gaps and develop your future high performers.

What can I do to attract a more rounded candidate pool?

You need to create your strategy with the express focus of maximising your quality of hire. If you simply follow the process mentioned above, then all you will do is spend your time working through the inbound response and rule people out.

What you want to be doing is spending your time attracting good quality candidates into your process and communicating clearly why it represents a great opportunity for them.

There are several areas where you can make a significant difference in which candidates you attract. If you want to start talking to the upper quartile of your market, then you need to inject some excitement into the process.

Write better advertising copy

Only the most active candidates are going to be interested in an advert that simply contains a cut and paste from a list of duties on the job spec.

Spend some time writing interesting adverts, that show people what is in it for them and that resonate with your target audience.

This takes time to perfect, but there is training available or you get a specialist to do it for you.

Either way at least if you get into this mindset of trying, it will be better than most of the competing adverts out there.

Engage with candidates and initiate discussion

Don't just send candidates to a faceless "apply here" button. Let them hear from the hiring manager, someone in HR or a well-briefed external consultant about the potential of the opportunity on offer to them.

It is easy enough for the hiring manager to make a quick video or write a personal intro outlining the opportunity and future prospects of the role. This extra information will help candidates make an informed decision about their application.

People drive profit and so getting the right people into your business and keeping hold of them is core to commercial success. With this in mind, you can't rush or cut corners with recruitment.

Of course, you can use technology to help drive efficiency, however, your recruiter needs to identify and engage with top candidates as soon as they can.

Good quality candidates will have options and so if you don't get in there and speak to them, then quite simply you gift competitive advantage to those that do!

Promote the opportunity and don't select on remuneration

Start understanding the potential of candidates, rather than selecting on the number of years of experience and current salary. By engaging with them more thoroughly through the process, you allow yourself the opportunity to select from a wider pool of candidates.

Whoever is managing your recruitment assignment, whether internal or external, need to have the capability to quickly understand a candidate's drivers and communicate clearly what makes this a genuine career development opportunity. This is not just the short-term salary increase, but the longer-term opportunities for their future development.

In reality, to get the best shortlist you want to approach every assignment from scratch and not just receive a list of candidates that happen to be registered on a recruiter database.

That is not to say the best candidate won't be active, as I mentioned earlier, I am a great believer that the best candidate could be interested in the role for several reasons.

This is why you need to allow your recruiter, whether internal or external, the time to write good advert copy, explore referrals and direct approach to ensure that you are engaging all of the people they need to, to create the best shortlist possible.

You will then be able to start interviewing safe in the knowledge that you have followed the most relevant strategy to get the best people into your business!

About me



I am a graduate in Industrial Relations and Human Resource Management, joining the recruitment industry in 2000 securing a graduate position with a London based firm specialising in the IT and Professional Service sectors.

After several years in London, I relocated back to East Anglia and keen to use the skills gained in my academic study I took up a position as an HR Recruitment Consultant with a leading international specialist recruitment business based in Cambridge.

In February 2010, I started as an independent HR Recruitment Specialist and focus my activities across the UK and Central Europe.

I coordinate things at [The HR Guys](#), a pan European consulting company that helps businesses avoid costly mistakes by hiring great people into their HR teams.

We believe that the pursuit of ambitious business goals and treating your people with courtesy and respect are not mutually exclusive to each other.

In fact, they are both key to commercial success.

We believe that HR has a pivotal role in helping organisations to achieve this and in turn making their communities a better place to live.

We want to work with people that share this vision and help them to hire great people into their HR teams.

If we share similar values and you would like to speak with us then you can always [book a call here](#).

Thank you for reading

Paul

