

## Top tips for recruiting new business staff

I met this agency recently that told me about the "nightmare" they'd had recruiting new business staff in the last few years. They said they'd rather try and do it themselves than use another recruitment consultancy, but that their experience of recruiting direct had not been good either.

This is fairly typical of many of the conversations we've been having recently. Companies need good new business people, but frankly they're in short supply and they and their recruitment agents seem to repeatedly make the same mistakes. We can see a growing trend for companies to want to get on top of this area, become self-sufficient, and look to avoid recruitment consultancy costs.

So with this in mind, I thought I'd set out here 5 of the most practical pointers, which you may find useful if you decide to take the independent route.

### 1. Defining What You Need

One of the most challenging roles to recruit for within a marketing agency (or any services company) is the new business development function, and it really does need some planning. Once you've a list of the functions your new business activity requires, you'll note it's quite a broad brief. You'll find it's very tough to cover all of these through the efforts, experience, personality and skills of just one individual. You need specialists not generalists, and will find that depending on the size of your agency, a combination of a couple, or even several people's particular abilities is necessary. These may contribute a fraction, or all of their time, again depending on the size and complexity of your business.

It's vital you assess what you need first in order to reach out to the market for the perfect fit. For example, the person or people you need must complement the skills and culture already in place; what are the functional requirements of the role? Will they farm existing awareness and relationships, research prospects and complete RFIs, or will they be more of a hunter/prospector? Will they facilitate opportunities for others or act face-to-face, or (not always a good idea) migrate over time between these roles?

Additionally you must determine the 'type' of person you require? A red brick, ambitious and sparky graduate, who may have tons of on-brand appeal for you and can confidently assert their ability, even proven experience to do 100% of the role, will most likely not possess the stamina or commitment to fulfil a prospecting role week-in and week-out. So don't go looking for them to accomplish both this and the 'softer' elements you may have in mind too.

**ADVICE - divide up the role(s) between people you already have and recruit specialists to do the aspects you cannot cover internally.**

## 2. Reaching The Right People

Considering you most likely work in a marketing services company, it certainly surprises us that when we read first party recruitment ads, few marketing and creative agencies put anywhere near enough brainpower into the ad copy? You're not trying to win a platinum pencil, but you do need to write an account of the role that will resonate with the limited number of people ideal for the role. This means you can be specific and use language that is focused, compelling and clear. Recruitment consultants advertise more generically to generate applicants for their own database and cap media costs. If you adopt their style because it looks like the done thing, you'll risk the right people passing over it and confusing them so wrong assumptions are made about the job. Of course social media is free and easy but you should use the online pages of the trade and press media as appropriate to the characteristics of your target market if you want to maximise chances of success.

**ADVICE: you're not trying to generate volume you're trying to attract a handful of perfect match candidates.**

## 3. Assessing The Responses

When considering responses put yourself in the mindset of a prospect you really want to win. How would they view the professionalism of each of the applicants' approaches to you? As many candidates will be professional sales people, if you are at all forgiving at this stage you will live to regret it. Your filter threshold must be set to 100% by all criteria. Remember these are people that you are considering employing to sell your brand - so do not consider anyone whose approach and attention to detail is not consistent with this. E.g. have they observed the conditions of applying? Have they supplied a carefully researched and clearly tailored cover note? Is attention-to-detail spot on? Spelling and grammar should be as important to you as it will be for the majority of your prospective clients.

If you do wish to view recruitment consultancy CVs in parallel to the ones you attract directly, bear in mind these will be from an existing database of candidates. Because the subject here is new business, you should ask yourself why in each case they haven't got a job yet? And if they are still in touch with their rec con after a previous placement, why isn't it working out in the positions they're being placed in?

**ADVICE: put yourself in the mindset of a prospect - don't let anything through you suspect that they wouldn't.**

## 4. Short-listing And Running The Interviews

Often we find that managing responses and short-listing is delegated to a junior (and this is partly due to people wading through too many applicants as the ad has been worded too generically) but is this person really aware of what you are looking for? This point also applies to recruitment consultancies who usually have insufficient understanding of how a marketing agency works, even less regarding the realities of the new business function, and a poor grasp and frame of reference for the culture and brand ethos of a specific marketing agency.

It takes a salesperson to know one and so at interview you need your most able salesperson to assess accurately what's sitting opposite them. You shouldn't take anything at face value. The most important question to ask is about their longevity in roles. If they've been in a series of jobs for a year or less, it's not because they left each time for a better opportunity, but because they've been repeatedly 'managed-out' for underperforming. You should be fair but very firm with them in the interview. Dig around for the cracks. If as a result of your questions designed to get under their skin they display any ego or become defensive about it - don't let up - keep working on that point until you're completely satisfied that they are psychologically balanced enough to represent your business. Remember, however tough you are with them, the nature of the job means this is unlikely to represent their most testing encounter.

**ADVICE: It takes one to know one: take nothing at face value**

## 5. Making An Offer

When making an offer, be as flexible as possible in terms of constructing the deal. Yes you should expect them to accept the package as advertised, but use your intuition to evaluate whether there are further inducements that would fit the character and the motivation of the particular candidate(s) you want to offer the job. But you should define the boundaries and possibilities for negotiation before you interview - or it can get unduly messy - and you can lose an excellent candidate to another employer biting at their heels. It is commonly accepted (and for good reasons) that the new business function is incentivised rather differently to other functions in the agency. We have advised a number of clients on exactly how the remuneration stage should be managed. It's not just about the right base salary or even team bonuses, but rather the pegging of appropriate rewards to the specific milestones that that individual achieves. Each year these should be reassessed in the light of current conditions.

**ADVICE: recognise that new business people must be incentivised differently to other employees**

## About Us

At Blossom we feel well qualified to offer these pointers. We are the talent and training arm of the Intelligent New Business Group, which is the largest and most successful new business support services group in the UK. The Blossom Programme combines everything you will need to establish a first class new business operation for your agency.

- We're new business experts - we've advised the boards of over 200 marketing and creative agencies of all sizes and service category on new business best practice
- Over the last 14 years we've interviewed literally thousands of new business candidates
- We've recruited hundreds of new business professionals into the marketing services industry
- We are widely respected as a centre of excellence for training new business professionals at all levels

**ADVICE: it's time to bloom. If you want to succeed at recruiting, training, motivating and retaining the very best new business professionals, why not call me for a chat on 020 7833 5262, or email me, [james.cudd@timetobloom.co.uk](mailto:james.cudd@timetobloom.co.uk).**