



Consumer Awareness Guide

Using Recruitment Agencies

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Recruitment & Human Resources

Introduction

At Avenue Scotland, we take great pride in the honest, professional service we provide. We have been in business since 1994 and have built a strong, loyal client base on our simple philosophy of providing “the right person for the right job.”

To do this requires experienced recruitment consultants who understand your business requirements and are willing to go that extra mile to ensure both our clients and our candidates are totally satisfied.

We feel that there is a great deal of misinformation about recruitment agencies and want our clients to be properly informed before making decisions about how you go about recruiting your next member of staff.

Because of this we offer the following Consumer Awareness Guide on the recruitment industry.

Within this report we will share with you

- 5 popular misconceptions about using a recruitment agency
- 9 killer questions to ask any recruitment agency
- 7 insider secrets to ensure you get the most out of your recruitment agency

In doing so we hope that we can arm you with the tools and confidence to make the right decision about which recruitment partner you will use to ensure you get the right person for the right job.





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5 Popular Misconceptions About Recruitment Agencies

Whilst there are a number of misconceptions about recruitment agencies we have selected the 5 most popular that we face on a regular basis.

Misconception #1 - Recruitment Agencies Rely On Their Candidates Database

Yes it is true that a good agency must have a strong database to draw candidates from but using the candidate database is only one tool used to source the right candidate for any position.

There is also a difference between a recruitment agency who has a large database of CVs and a strong database of candidates that it has individually interviewed, screened and continues to communicate with on a regular basis.

The actual methodology used will be dependent on the job specification, the person specification and the particular needs of the company, however a good agency will use trade press, networking, national and local press, job centres, websites as well as using a few head hunting techniques to ensure they get the right candidate for your company.

In truth, good recruitment agencies will be looking for potential recruits for your company even when you are not recruiting.

Misconception #2 - Candidates Generated At Random From Database

This misconception has come as a result of a number of poor agencies who have under qualified and untrained consultants who play a numbers game to reach their targets.

If an agency supplies any more than 7 CVs for a position and does not provide independent profiles with their justification for proposing the candidates, proceed with extreme caution.



If you have been subjected to such an agency you have been extremely unfortunate but you should not let one bad experience prevent you from reaping the huge benefits that a professional recruitment agency will offer.

Before you allow an agency to present candidates refer to our 9 killer questions to ask any recruitment agency.

Misconception #3 - Recruitment Agencies Do Little Work For Their Fees

Most people are surprised at the sheer volume of work that goes on behind the scenes within a recruitment agency to meet the demands of their clients.

Recruiting the right person for the right job can be one of the most stressful elements of running a business. With so many employment law and HR issues to take into consideration, the recruitment process is increasingly becoming a minefield for many companies. A good recruitment agency will be able to assume responsibility for many of the HR issues and advise upon any matters that may arise.

As most businesses will testify, carrying out the recruitment and selection process by yourself can be long and arduous with no guarantees that your efforts will be successful. The end result for most is employing the “best of the bad bunch” to achieve short term wins at the expense of long term growth. A good recruitment agency will use all their skills and resources to concentrate on the critical success factors in the process, allowing you to pick the best candidate from an outstanding array of talent.

As those with a database of customers will fully appreciate, keeping the information up to date can be a full time role. However when you multiply that database by a factor of two with clients and candidates, the task is infinitely greater.

As part of the service, recruitment agencies are required to keep fully abreast of the recruitment market, which means that they need to be aware of skills gaps and demographic patterns as well as being able to advise clients on the average wage levels for every role in every industry.



In addition to sourcing potential candidates, recruitment agencies are on hand to advise on best practice for interviewing and selection, can take responsibility for negotiating salary packages and will communicate with the candidate throughout their notice period to ensure that they are fully prepared for their start date.

Most good agencies will also offer a payroll service for temporary workers to relieve the burden from the client however very few have a full Human Resources support function to support both their client needs and those of their candidates.

Agencies that offer full Human Resources support function can offer huge benefits to clients not only during the recruitment and selection process where you can be assured that the best practices are being used in the process and they can provide valuable advice and assistance on any HR issue.

Misconception #4 - Recruitment Agencies Want Money Upfront

Very few recruitment agencies will ask for any fees to be paid prior to the successful placement of the right candidate. That means, if you are so inclined, you can employ the services of a recruitment agency for absolutely free just to see what is available in the market. If there is an outstanding candidate from those presented then you can continue further down the selection process. If not, nothing ventured, nothing gained.

If you are fortunate to establish a strong relationship with a good recruitment agency, you may benefit from the consultant suggesting potential star candidates that may be perfect for your company even though the need has not arisen.

Misconception #5 - All Recruitment Agencies Offer Same Level of Service

Unfortunately one of the biggest problems in the recruitment sector is that almost anyone can start up in business as a recruitment agency without any qualifications or experience. In the past this has led to a lot of bad press which has tarnished the reputation of the industry as a whole.



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Quite simply, there can often be a gulf of difference in service levels between recruitment agencies and we hope that this document will assist you to identify which agency will meet the needs of your company.

A reputable agency should offer the same professionalism of service as you would expect from your lawyer or accountant. Do not accept anything less.

To achieve this level of professionalism, agencies need to invest in comprehensive training and development of their staff and each and every client relationship. It is equally important that they invest in each and every registered candidate for both temporary and permanent positions to ensure they are providing the very best service for clients and candidates alike.





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9 Killer Questions To Ask Any Recruitment Agency

Choosing the right recruitment agency for your company can be extremely difficult with so many companies making similar claims but how can you weed out those that do not meet your requirements. Here are the 9 killer questions to ask any agency before you employ their services.

Question #1 - How will you prepare the job specification?

Preparation of the job specification is the most critical element of the whole process. A misunderstanding or assumption in this area can have a huge impact on the quality of the candidates and their level of match with your company.

You need to be confident that the agency will understand the roles and responsibilities of the position as well as you do. How else can they put forward candidates that you will be happy with?

Successful candidates need to fit into the culture of the company quickly. To understand your culture, a good agency will insist on a face to face meeting with you and may ask to walk the line to see the environment and the people the successful candidate will be working alongside.

Agencies who assume they know the position already because they have experience in the industry should be well avoided. The roles and responsibilities of an operator, an administrator or a manager can be vastly different within companies never mind within sectors.

Agencies that do not spend sufficient time preparing the job specification and fully understanding the responsibilities are also unlikely to spend the time ensuring that the candidates meet your requirements. These types of agencies will continue to throw CVs and candidates at you until they get lucky.





Question #2 - What are your fees?

It may sound obvious but with so many different levels of fees between agencies for so many different levels of service you need to know what you will be paying.

There are 2 forms of fees that are available in the market - fixed rate fees and fees calculated as a percentage of the salary.

Both fees will vary with the level of position that is trying to be filled and possibly with the closeness of the relationships. This is simply because there is more work that needs to go into finding, for example, a suitable Senior Manager than a receptionist, however, where you have been working closely with a recruitment provider in a partnership approach, it will be easier for the partner to understand the requirements of the position and be able to source potential candidates more readily. This therefore shortens the process and therefore the fees.

But be clear on what fees will be paid from the very outset and remember the cheapest option is rarely the best value for money.

Question #3 - How will the candidates be sourced?

The likely response will be that the methods used to source the candidates will depend on the number of positions and complexity of the role.

Most good agencies will have an extensive and up to date database with which they begin their search however the key question that they should be able to answer is what their actions will be if they cannot find anyone suitable on their database.



Question #4 - What experience does the consultant and company have of your industry?

When an agency and in particular the consultant in question has specific experience within an industry it can often mean a better level of service, a better level of candidate and a shorter timescale to fill the post.

However it is vital that the consultant and the agency can demonstrate a good track record and a strong understanding of the recruitment process and in particular the importance of selection techniques and matching.

Question #5 - What is your track record and recruitment philosophy?

A good agency will be able to clearly demonstrate their track record, possibly with customer testimonials, certainly with client lists and reference companies. Ask if it is OK to take up references with previous clients. If they are as good as they say they are then they will not be afraid to offer this peace of mind.

It is also worthwhile asking the agency for their philosophy on recruitment. A good agency will place a fine balance on meeting the needs of both its clients and its candidates. You do not want an agency that is sending any old candidate for every vacancy going. The types of agencies that do not have good relationships with their candidates are generally very poor at meeting the needs of their clients.

Question #5 - How much contact do they have with the CVs supplied?

Some agencies adopt what can only be described as a “mud throwing” approach to the process where they know that the more CVs they throw at a particular vacancy, the greater likelihood is that one will stick.

This is quite simply the technique of a poor agency. You should ask how many CVs you will be presented for the vacancy and how they will be presented by the agency.



Any consultant worth their salt will have discussed the vacancy with each of the candidates they have presented and should be able to give full and frank reasons based on your objectives as to why they have selected this candidate and on what grounds, both in terms of personality and skill sets, make them the right person for the position.

Question #6 - Will written profiles be provided for each candidate?

If we were to make one recommendation to any company using an agency we would ensure that you insist on a full written profile to be provided on each candidate presented for the post with an insight into their personality and the reasons why they would fit into the team.

If they do not offer to give written profiles on each candidate explaining these reasons then it may be a sign that they cannot justify the presentation.

This demonstrates that the consultant fully understands the job specification and also provides useful information on each candidate prior to the interview stage.

This element of the process alone can save you hours of wasted time in organising and conducting interviews to find for example that a candidate's personality is not suited to the culture of company.

A good recruitment company aims to minimise the pain and your workload not increase it.

Question #7 - Are all temporary candidates reference checked?

Temporary workers were previously seen as only applicable to cover holidays and sickness however more and more small to medium sized businesses are recognising the enormous benefits that this form of personnel offer. Accessing expert services on a contract or temporary basis need not be through expensive consultants. Their invaluable skills can also be gained through temporary employees on a contract or fixed term basis.



As the recruitment agency assumes responsibility for the payroll, this allows companies to concentrate on the day to day management issues without the employment law, overhead costs and payment hassles that come with permanent employees.

However the key factor in temporary employment is ensuring that all candidates are reference checked and the agency should be able to provide you with full details of when the references were taken up and with whom as well as letting you of other temporary contracts the employee has completed under their management.

Question #8 - What contact do they have with the client and candidate through the process?

One of the biggest frustrations is selecting the candidate that you feel is the right person for the job and then when it comes to their start date they do not turn up. With notices periods of 1-3 months being common place, this can set you back months in achieving your objectives.

Ask what the process the recruitment company adopts once the person has been appointed. When and how often do they speak to the candidate during their notice period?

You need to be 100% confident that the person you choose starts on the date agreed and it is the recruitment agencies job to make sure this happens. Much of this will be achieved by the agency's relationship with their candidate database. Where there is a close relationship there is less likely to be an occasion where candidates fail to start.

Question #9 - What guarantees do they provide?

One of the biggest benefits from using a recruitment agency is the level of guarantees they offer. Most agencies will offer a guarantee that no fee will be charged if they do not find a suitable person for your company. The better agencies will offer further guarantees that protect you even if you employ someone and decide that the person is not what you thought they were or is not fitting in.

The better the guarantee the more confident the agency is in their ability to satisfy your needs.



7 insider secrets to ensure you get the most out of your recruitment agency

Secret #1 - Make them Walk The Line

Preparing the job specification is the most important task in the recruitment process and it is vital that the consultant understands exactly what is required. There is no better way to understand the job than to see exactly what is required, where they will be working, who they will be answering to and who they will be working with on a daily basis.

This will allow the consultant to fully understand the position and ask any pertinent questions, however, most importantly, it will allow the consultant to experience the culture and the atmosphere of the workplace. The right candidate must be competent but also fit in with the team.

A good recruitment consultant will insist on walking the line and it is an investment that will pay dividends. If your agency does not at least ask to walk the line then you have to consider whether they really understand the role or if they have your best interests at heart.

Secret #2 - Get Close To The Consultant

When you are working with any professional service supplier, be it your accountant or your recruitment agency, it is vital that you have a close working relationship with a consultant that you feel comfortable with and can communicate easily with.

It is extremely profitable to get to know the consultant before the recruitment process actually begins as this will dramatically reduce the length of time that the recruitment process will take.

It is also vital that you continue to build a close relationship with your recruitment consultant, treating them as a partner within your company as opposed to simply a supplier. By maintaining ongoing communications you can keep the consultant up to speed



with developments in the company and the changing roles within it. They will then be fully aware of your requirements before the recruitment process actually begins.

Secret #3 - Agree Full Job Specification AND Character Specification

The recruitment process should never start before the full job specification is agreed and as discussed in secret #1, there are techniques the consultant should insist on using to develop this accurately.

However a critical element of the process is finding someone that will fit in with the existing team. To do this requires the development of a person specification which will look at what the personality of the ideal candidate should be, what they like, what motivates them, how they interact with people, what objectives they have themselves in both their personal and their work lives.

Secret #4 - Agree Fee Structure & Payment Terms Before You Begin

Do not proceed down any road before you agree a fee structure and payment terms. These greatly vary between agencies and you do not want to be backed into a corner when the perfect candidate is found. Your best negotiating position is at the outset and if you have multiple vacancies you have more negotiating power.

Secret #5 - Highlight Any Changes or Concerns Immediately

The world we live in changes at an ever increasing pace and things will inevitably change in your organisation that may change the role and the requirement. Opportunities may arise which may demand more skills and teams may change which will affect the character specification.

Timing is a key factor in recruitment and it is essential that you highlight any changes or concerns immediately. Your consultant will be able to advise you on the best way to proceed and take all necessary actions at their end.



Secret #6 - Plan The Interview Carefully

To get the right person for the right job you need to be sure that your interviewing processes are fair, well structured and objective. To do this you need to develop an outline plan of the interview and prepare a list of characteristics that you will score candidates on.

This achieves 3 things. Firstly it gives you a paper trail to support your decision if any candidate has an issue with your choice. Secondly focuses you on what you are really looking for and thirdly it ensures that any decision is made objectively and fairly.

If you are unsure about best practice in interviewing ask your recruitment agency who should be able to advise you and possibly provide training.

Secret #7 - Take Up References

References can be a waste of time and effort if they are not carried out properly. Just think - if you were a candidate, would you provide a reference that was going to say anything bad about yourself? Of course not.

Agencies can provide a valuable service in this area. A good consultant will know how to get a truthful and meaningful reference even from the most biased referee.

If you chose to carry out this part of the process do not rely on written references alone. They are notoriously one dimensional. Pick up the phone and talk to the referee about the candidate or the written reference they have provided.

Referees can provide so much information on candidates by what they will tell you about the person and sometimes what they don't tell you. Make a list of what you want to find out and drop in some questions which relate to answers the candidate provided during interview to ensure they tie up.

References do not always guarantee that candidates are what they seem but they will provide support to your decision making process.



5 biggest problems to DIY recruitment

Using an agency may not always be high on your priority list when looking to recruit a new employee, however we would like to highlight the 5 biggest problems to DIY recruitment.

Problem #1 - The time involved

Because it is your time that is involved it can be difficult to keep an accurate record of how long it physically takes you to complete the process from preparing the job specification through to the successful induction and all the hundreds of stages in between.

We have also found that companies who choose to do the recruitment themselves also take longer to actually start the process.

The key factor to consider is that every hour you spend on recruitment is cost to your business whereas every hour you spend developing your business is an investment. Time is extremely precious and it is better to invest that to incur costs.

Problem #2 - Huge Risk

No matter how much time that you spend and how many adverts you place there is still the chance that you will not find the right person for your company. By doing this yourself you are incurring irretrievable costs with no returns.

Problem #3 - No access to specialist market information

The key focus in recruitment is unquestionably getting the right person for the right job. But to do that you have to know what the average salaries are for the particular position, where these people can be found and what is the likelihood of finding them.



If you do not have access to the required information you could be offering too low a salary that no-one of any interest will apply for the position or too much of a salary that you end up overpaying the person for years to come.

A recruitment company will be able to advise you of the general market conditions, who is recruiting and what is being paid. This valuable information can save you time and money.

Problem #4 - Snapshot of the market

No matter how well you advertise you will only ever get a snapshot of those people who are actively seeking for a new job and actually see your advert. You may be lucky and find the right person from this recruitment campaign but you are always running the risk of getting no-one or even worse the wrong person.

Recruitment agencies deal with candidates every day in life providing you with a big picture view of the marketplace. We build up an enormous database of active candidates as well as an informal network of contacts who may be interested in a new job if the right opportunity comes up.

We also know when and where to advertise and can facilitate short term requirements until the right person is identified and appointed.

Problem #5 - The Halo Effect

The biggest problem in DIY recruitment is what we have called the halo effect. Because of the time, effort and resources that have been put into getting to the interview stage, companies feel compelled to appoint one of the candidates and focus on the candidates' good points. This unfortunately skews the decision making process and companies find after a few weeks they realise that they have made a mistake but cannot do anything about it.

Recruitment is too important to rush or to take shortcuts. Your people are your biggest asset and it is worth the investment to protect the future sustainability of your company.