

Guide

6 questions to ask your new recruitment agency

Executive summary

The world of recruitment has changed significantly over the 20 years since Allen Associates first started trading. Back then, Google was little more than an idea (it launched in 1998), job boards were still in their infancy, and LinkedIn was struggling to find its way in the face of then market leader, Plaxo (remember that?).

Today, the way in which Employers find great Candidates and how the latter find great places to work has changed beyond recognition. But the one constant amid all this change, is the need for recruitment agencies to match one party to the other.

Contrary to what many might assume, demand for the services of recruitment agencies is on the up. In fact, the recruitment industry's leading membership organisation, the Recruitment and Employment Confederation, reported that while 40% of vacancies filled in 2016 were done so by recruitment agencies, this figure will rise to 56% before the end of this year.

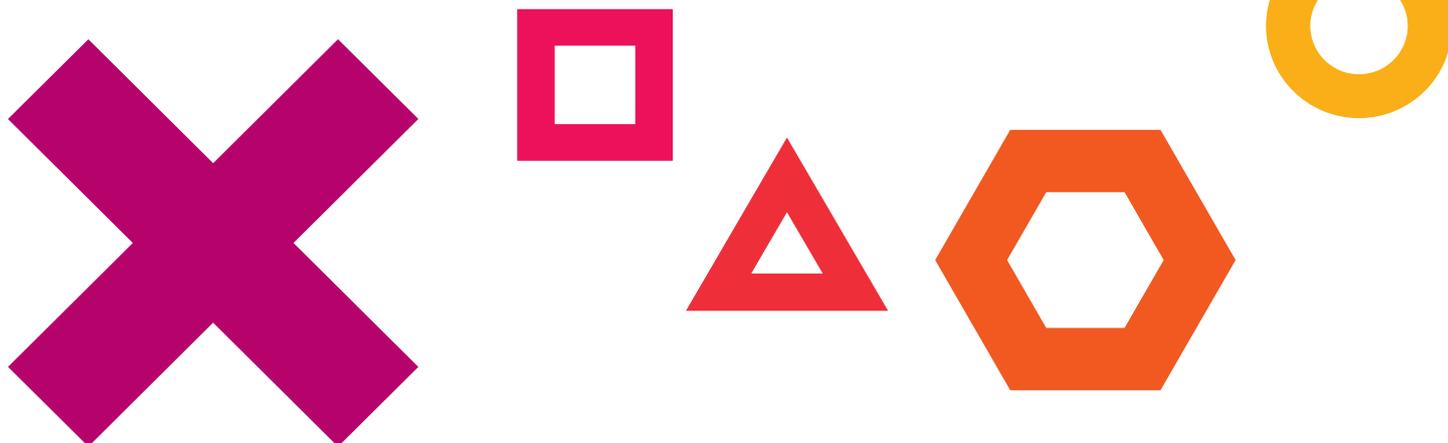
This has seen growth in the recruitment sector reach levels not seen before. Indeed, roll back the clock to 2012 and there were just over 12,000 recruitment agency businesses registered in the UK. Fast-forward to today,

and that figure stands at over 35,000 – a staggering three-fold increase in six years.

But this presents a significant challenge for Employers looking to engage with an agency – how to choose the one that is right for them? That's what this Guide will seek to address.

For the past 20 years we have competed alongside a plethora of other recruitment firms. While we would love to say that we have won each battle to become the recruiter of choice for every role we have contended, it would be remiss of us to do so (although our success rate is second to none in Oxfordshire). What we have done is gain an in-depth understanding and appreciation of the thought processes that Employers go through when considering their options.

This Guide will take you through those key steps needed to ensure that you can make an informed decision over what recruitment agency will be the right one for you and your business.



Question 1: How do you find candidates for your clients?

As an employer, once you have decided to use a recruitment agency to fill a vacancy, it is then down to that agency to find suitable Candidates for the role. The question is how do they do that and more important, what do they do that you don't so to ensure you secure the best talent for the role you are recruiting for? In other words, what value do they add to the hiring process?

Like every successful business, the brand and reputation of the recruitment agency is key and will determine the quality of Candidates that they attract. A few recruitment agencies will have their own internal marketing department to market their services and promote their brand. The stronger and more trusted the brand, the more Candidates will sign up with said agency. But that's only part of the Candidate attraction process.

Recruitment agencies will have a customer relationship management (CRM) system in place which will be their first port of call when looking for a Candidate for a specific position. They will get an understanding of the specific skills and experience that you are looking for and their action will be to enter these details into their CRM to see who they already have within their existing Candidate pool that match your specification.

However, sometimes Candidates will have since found work and no longer be looking, so recruitment agencies need to try a few different methods to find the right Candidates:

#1 Job Boards

Recruitment agencies will use job boards to search for suitable Candidates who are currently looking for work and may not be currently registered with them. Candidates will register their details on the key job portals so that they can be found by recruiters easily. This pro-active approach is most effective when performed in conjunction with other search tactics such as those below.

#2 Social Media

We mentioned brand earlier. Recruitment agencies can use social media to give their brand a personality, as well as promoting the current vacancies for which they are recruiting. They may have ongoing social media campaigns, such as 'Job of the Week' or 'STAR Temp of the Month' which will attract a following, as well as allowing people to share and recommend the agency to friends and family. This can help to attract new Candidates to find out more about the roles the agency will have, which in turn increases the potential pool of talent.

#3 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is arguably the most powerful professional networking tool, with more than 530 million users across 200 countries and territories worldwide. More and more recruitment consultants are using LinkedIn to find the perfect Candidate for their clients. Equally, more and more job seekers are updating their professional profiles and are open to new opportunities that come their way. It is the job of the recruiter to identify those people and start the conversation with them about you and the role you have.

#4 Networking

Recruitment isn't just about finding Candidates online. A larger part of the role recruiters perform is face-to-face networking, whether at a job fair, conference or networking event. This enables them to not only develop their own network, it also enables them to come into contact with those people who may not actively be looking for a new role – the so-called 'passive' jobseekers. According to Hubspot, "85% of jobs are filled through networking."

#5 Referrals

An extension of being a proactive networker, recruiters are unquestionably some of the most connected people in business. It is their job to tap into that network to unearth potential Candidates, some of whom they may have successfully placed in the past whilst others could be former colleagues or contacts they have nurtured over the years. Sometimes they will offer a referral or recommend a friend scheme to encourage people to refer Candidates to them.

Question 2: How do you select the candidates you put forward?

Once a recruitment agency has attracted candidates to a role that they are recruiting for, the next step is to shortlist the Candidates and decide which ones to put forward to the client. To enable them to do this effectively, recruitment consultants need to fully understand the type of business and the role they are recruiting for, as well as knowing the type of Candidate that their client is looking for.

It is important for recruitment consultants to understand what products or services the client provides, the culture of the organisation and why this job has become available. For example, has someone left the company? Have they been promoted internally? Or is it a new position? In other words, it is the job of the consultant to find out everything there is to know about the business. Only then can they truly 'sell' your company as an employer of choice and the role as being the right and logical next step in the Candidate's career.

Recruitment consultants should always meet the Candidate face to face. It is the most effective way to truly gauge an individual's personality, determine their suitability and to understand what they are looking for, what they are good at, what their goals are, why they are looking for a new job and what motivates them. This gives recruitment consultants an insight into the Candidate's personality and enables them to make a decision as to whether the culture of the company that they are recruiting for will be a good fit for the Candidate, as well as the client.

Once a consultant has decided that they have a suitable Candidate to put forward for a specific role, it is important to remember to ask that they are happy to be put forward for it. This may seem obvious, but it helps avoid wasting time further down the line.

If you as the Employer decide to interview a Candidate the agency has put forward, that agency will prepare them as much as possible for the interview in a number of ways. For example, they should provide them with a detailed background about the business, who they are being interviewed by and what they are like.

They will also ensure they know what the format of the interview will involve – will they need to prepare a presentation or be expected to carry out a test? Perhaps it will be a panel interview. Whatever the format of the day itself, the agency's role is to support the Candidate and ready them in the best way possible.

It is important to remember it's in the recruitment consultants interest to only put forward high quality and good calibre Candidates. This ultimately reflects on the reputation of the agency itself, as well as the individual recruiter. Clients are unlikely to use the recruitment agency again if they are continually selecting Candidates that aren't suitable for the role.

Question 3: How will you know exactly what we need?

For a recruitment agency to know exactly what you need as a client, firstly it is important for you to understand your own recruitment strategy, why are you recruiting for the vacant role and what you really want from that role.

Armed with this information, you can then impart it onto your chosen agency partner. But be mindful of the need to be completely open and helpful too. Recruiting is a two-way process – the more you share, the greater the chances of securing the person who best matches your criteria.

A good recruitment consultant will take the time to build up a good working relationship with their client by agreeing expectations for both sides from the start. Ideally, they should visit you at your business premises. This will enable them to get a feel for the working environment and the culture of the company. This is anything but a tick-box exercise, indeed, this is one of the most important stages of the hiring process. It enables the recruiter to get a real feel for the business, the working environment, culture, and key considerations such as local transport links, parking and other on-site facilities.

You should be allocated a dedicated recruitment consultant so you deal with the same person every time you contact the agency. They will keep in touch with you regularly to gain your feedback on the Candidates they have submitted for your vacancy, where you are in terms of moving the role forward, interview dates, start dates, etc. So, provide your recruitment consultant with as much

detail as possible, including a full job description (not just the job advert), person specification and a timeline of the recruitment process. This will help to build a good rapport which makes the whole process so much easier for everyone.

Don't be afraid to pick up the phone to speak to your recruitment consultant. If they start to send across CVs for Candidates that aren't quite suitable, let them know as soon as possible. If for some reason the vacancy has to be put on hold or there is a change in the role or if the job is pulled, then it is important to make the agency aware of these changes as soon as possible.

It's important for the recruitment agency to fulfil the clients' needs and add value to your business, not just to secure potential repeat business from that client but to sustain the reputation of the agency, allowing for positive recommendations to other Employers.

Once the recruitment process is complete, the agency will want to maintain their relationship with you, meeting you or your HR department on a regular basis to keep in touch with the business and your needs. This will give both parties an advantage if you require the recruitment agency's services again in the future.

Question 4: Why should we choose you over other agencies?

It's the age-old question and one that can flummox most businesses – what makes their recruitment agency different? More important; what can, and will, the agency do for you that differs from what other agencies are proposing?

Some agencies will specialise in recruiting Candidates for specific sectors, while some focus on certain skills sets (such as Finance or Marketing). Other are more generalist in nature. The key is to identify the agency that has the demonstrable experience of recruiting for the type of role that you are looking to fill, whether on a Temporary or Permanent basis.

There are some questions you can think about when researching or speaking to potential agencies:

- Have they previously placed similar roles?
- Do they have reoccurring clients?
- Have you or your colleagues used the agency previously?
- If you have used the agency previously, what was the calibre of the Candidate? Are they still working for your company?
- Can a colleague, friend or family member recommend a particular agency?
- What is the agency's registration and placement process and does this meet your requirements?
- Are there any testimonials or case studies on their website or social media platforms?
- Where are they located?

You should ensure that any agency you use is a registered member of the REC (The Recruitment and Employment Confederation). While this may be subjective, we recommend that all agencies in the UK should be registered with the REC to ensure they are a reputable company. Have a look at what awards the agency has won and whether they are named as a preferred supplier from a governing or membership body.

Think about the other departments that a recruitment agency has that could benefit your business. For example, do they have an internal compliance or safeguarding department to ensure they are providing you with quality Candidates? This is especially important to remember when recruiting for organisations that deal with vulnerable adults or children irrespective of whether the role itself is in the Administration or HR department, for instance.

Do they have a training ethos and do they invest in their people as much (if not more) than you do in yours? Investors in People accreditation provides a great benchmark for people excellence, so ask the agency if this is something they have achieved; after all, an investment in their own people will speak volumes for the quality of the overall service that that agency will provide you with.

Another consideration could be whether the agency gets involved in charity work or gives back to local businesses and communities that they work in? It is also important to look at what the agency fees are and their terms of business (more on that a bit later).

There is no harm in doing your research and speaking to a few agencies before you make a final decision, you will get a feel for their communication style and way of working and can decide if that matches your needs before committing financially.

Question 5: What are your terms of business?

The Terms of Business between the client (you) and the recruitment agency is a legally binding contract, which sets out expectations, including financial arrangements, provisions, requirements, rules, specifications and standards that both parties agree. It is really important that you understand and agree the terms of business before working with an agency. If you need further legal advice to clarify any hidden fees once the position is filled, it is worth checking this with a qualified solicitor.

The REC has a Code of Professional Practice which “requires that a member agency provide a written Terms of Business to a client at the outset of your business relationship,” so this could be a good place to start if you’re unclear.

So, what should you be mindful of when discussing or reviewing Terms of Business?

- Details of fees and payment terms
- Responsibility for checking work seekers identity, references, qualifications, obtaining DBS checks and checks on eligibility to work in the UK
- If relevant, the circumstances in which any refunds or rebates are paid
- If relevant, the procedures to be followed where a temporary worker proves to be unsatisfactory.

Further to receiving the Terms of Business (ToB), you are within your rights to query this with the agency directly before making any further arrangements or signing the ToB. It is also worth mentioning that the ToB may be different for each vacancy and are certainly different for different agencies so never assume just because you have worked with them before that the ToB are the same.

What happens if you don’t check the Terms of Business?

If you don’t fully understand or check your terms of business before signing, the worse-case scenario is that there are no agreed terms in place to protect you if the Candidate doesn’t work out after a few weeks. You should also double check what the terms are if you take someone on as a temporary employee and then go on to employ them a permanent member of staff after a certain amount of time.

Question 6: Who will be working on my account?

Recruitment is a people business. It is all about building effective relationships with both the client and Candidate. However, the recruitment industry has a reputation for high turnover and with employees often leaving to go to competitors. As a result, there is no time for handovers or a transition period between staff. Clients committing significant resources to recruitment are perfectly entitled to know who is working on their account.

Consultants will often work on a specific area, industry, sector or level of experience so agencies will have a good idea about who will work on your account when you first contact them. You are within your rights to ask about their experience, what their success rate is and the average length of time employees stay at that agency before moving on. If a recruitment consultant is removed from your account for any reason, is it because they have left or they have been promoted within the company to the role of manager or director level.

If an agency can get their own recruitment right, they are likely to get it right for you which gives some confidence to the client. Indeed, we mentioned Investors in People earlier and talked about how it serves as a benchmark for training and development – in today's ultra-competitive recruitment landscape such accreditations can not only give one agency an edge over the other in terms of

credibility and prestige, but also in terms of the delivery of services. As Investors in People (IIP) say themselves: "Successful accreditation against the Investors in People Standard is the sign of a great employer, an outperforming place to work and a clear commitment to sustainability."

If you choose to work with a good, reputable agency the chances are that your assigned recruitment consultant won't be looking to leave any time soon. However, things do change and people move on to develop their own careers. But knowing you are working with an agency that takes care of its employees is likely to attract motivated, hardworking and high calibre staff who would use their skills, knowledge and experience to take over an account successfully - without effecting the service that the client receives.

Conclusion

Every business, no matter how large or small, faces its own unique set of challenges when it comes to hiring. Finding the right Candidate for the right role at the right time can be difficult. This is where recruitment agencies come into play and show their true value in supporting the recruitment goals of the organisation. Of course, the greatest challenge in this process is identifying the agency partner that will best meet your needs.

This Guide has served to provide you with an insight into the key steps that Employers need to take when approaching a potential agency. You may already be following some of the points outlined but hopefully we have touched upon one or two that you could adopt and, in doing so, boost your chances of recruitment success.

Allen Associates has partnered with many of Oxfordshire's Employers over the last 20 years, the smaller ones as well as the most exciting fast-growth and large-scale ones. We are one of the largest independent Recruitment Agencies in the area and have recently been awarded Gold status by Investors in People for the second time. The investment we make in our own people reflects the investment we make in ensuring you get the right people for your business. Let us help you with your next hire.

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