

ROBERT WALTERS WHITEPAPER

MANAGING YOUR BRAND THROUGHOUT THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

insight
series

ROBERT WALTERS

INTRODUCTION

Clear communication of the employer brand through all interactions with both existing and potential employees is key to shaping the overall perception of an organisation, which can ultimately impact its success and direction. In particular, the experience of candidates before, during and after the recruitment process can play a significant part in forming common held opinions of a business.

With the best talent always extremely sought-after regardless of market conditions, employers that ensure a high-quality experience for candidates applying for jobs also stand the best chance of securing the most skilled professionals available.

This whitepaper, the first in our Insight Series, explores how employers can do this effectively by examining each aspect of the recruitment process in detail. Throughout, we scrutinise what job-seekers value in a recruitment process and a potential employer.

Specifically, we consider:

- How to attract strong candidates, including where they search for suitable job opportunities and how they research potential employers
- How best to approach the hiring process, including the benefits of using a specialist recruitment consultancy, line management involvement and responding to applications
- Candidate expectations surrounding the job interview process
- The impact of specific factors on a job seeker's ultimate decision to accept or decline a job offer
- The length of the hiring process
- Employers' awareness of the employer brand concept and the importance they attach to this
- Key learnings and recommendations on how employers should manage and present their brand throughout the recruitment process.

METHODOLOGY

This whitepaper is based on research conducted by Robert Walters in September 2012. The statistics quoted throughout are based on the survey responses of 1,306 job seekers and 250 hiring managers.

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APPEALING TO JOB SEEKERS

As part of our job seeker survey, we asked respondents about various aspects of their approach to searching for new opportunities. These findings provide employers with a valuable insight into how they can make themselves appeal to job seekers.

Targeting employers

When asked whether they target specific organisations when applying for new roles, only 16% of job seekers say that they do. The remaining 84% claim they are open in their job search. With this in mind, the strength of an employer’s brand and the job on offer, along with how both of these are presented, are crucial in attracting potential candidates to the role on offer.

Chart 1.0

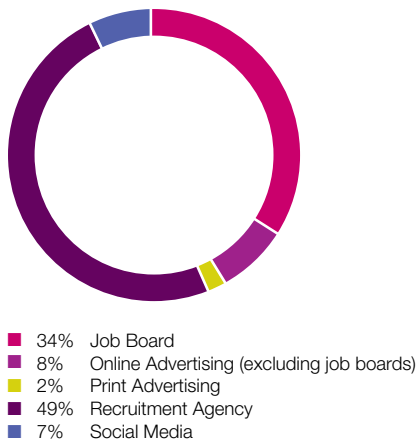
Sources used to research company

Company website	84%
Press articles	54%
Speaking to existing employees	46%
Visiting a review site (e.g. glassdoor.com)	30%

When deciding whether to apply for a role, most professionals regard the company website as the primary source of information (Chart 1.0). Press articles and the views of existing employees are also crucial in shaping opinion, while employee review websites (e.g. glassdoor.com) – in their infancy relatively speaking – are likely to become an increasingly popular information resource for job seekers. In addition, individual survey respondents alluded to ‘knowing the company by reputation to be one I would be proud to work for’ and ‘word of mouth and reputation’ as key factors behind their decision to apply for a role.

Chart 2.0

Most useful sources of jobs



Job advertisements

Where a job advertisement is placed and how it is presented plays a vital role in attracting candidates to jobs. Recruitment consultancies are still regarded as the most useful source of vacancies by professionals seeking new roles, while job boards are also a widely-used port-of-call (Chart 2.0).

When viewing job advertisements, the description of the role has the biggest influence on a candidate’s decision whether to apply (Table 1.0). However, the salary and benefits, company description, quality of grammar/language and presentation of the advert are also considered important. In addition, job seekers are more attracted to adverts when the company is named than when it is not, while the overall employer brand is – unsurprisingly – also considered particularly important.

Table 1.0

Factors influencing job seekers when viewing job adverts

	Strong Influence	Some Influence
Description of job	86%	13%
Salary and benefits	69%	29%
Description of company	44%	48%
Prior knowledge of employer and its brand	41%	43%
That employer is named in advert	41%	42%
Quality of grammar/language	33%	47%
Publication/website where advert appears	12%	45%
Presentation of advert (spacing, logos etc)	6%	38%

APPROACHING THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

We surveyed employers and job seekers specifically about their opinions on using a recruitment consultancy, line management involvement in the hiring process and response to initial applications. Each of these factors can have a significant impact on the overall candidate experience throughout the recruitment process.

Using a recruitment consultancy

When applying and searching for roles, 65% of job seekers would rather use a recruitment consultancy and 35% prefer to approach an employer direct. Some feedback regarding this preference from individuals surveyed can be found in the box below:

Pro Recruitment Consultancy

- “Recruiters generally sell me better than I could.”
- “I would not have been successful without the help of a recruitment consultant.”
- “A good recruitment consultancy has a varied database and an in-depth understanding about companies and roles.”
- “I have secured more interviews via a consultant than by myself.”
- “A recruitment consultancy provides more honest feedback.”
- “Employers are often flooded by job applications so I don’t think they always have the resources to filter these effectively. However, a recruitment consultancy already has a relationship with the company and is more likely to put forward the most suitable candidates.”
- “Good recruitment consultants are an effective channel to get you in the door of the right employers.”

Pro Employer Direct

- “I prefer to approach a prospective employer directly because I can then manage the relationship myself and only have myself to blame if I fail.”
- “Because companies have to pay consultancies a fee, a direct approach benefits both employers and candidates.”
- “I recently changed jobs and found a direct approach to be much more effective.”

Chart 3.0

Stage of the recruitment process that job seekers believe they should have first contact with the line manager for the role they are applying for



- 3% Phone Interview
- 70% First Interview
- 22% Second Interview
- 1% Third Interview
- 1% Post Interview Social Meeting
- 3% First Day on Job

Chart 4.0

Stage of the recruitment process that line managers first become involved when hiring



- 78% Reviewing applications/CVs
- 1% Phone interview
- 15% First interview phase
- 2% Second interview phase
- 1% After second interview
- 3% Don't know

Line manager involvement in the recruitment process

Seven out of ten job seekers think their first contact with the line manager responsible for the role they are applying for should be at first interview (Chart 3.0). Mirroring this belief, most employers involve the line manager in the process from the outset, with the majority contributing to filtering applications in the first instance (Chart 4.0).

When using a recruitment consultancy, an open and clear dialogue is vital between the line manager and consultant responsible for the role. This ensures both are clear on progress at all stages during the hiring process and, ultimately, that the employer's requirements are met. It also means the consultant will gain a thorough understanding of the organisation and be able to effectively and accurately communicate the company brand.

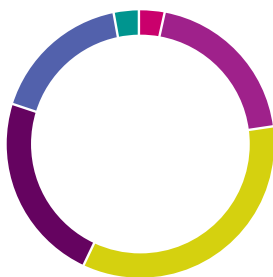
In total, 74% of employers believe clear and direct communication between the line manager and consultant involved to be either important or extremely important. By contrast, only 10% of employers consider this to be either unimportant or extremely unimportant.

65%

Percentage of job seekers who say they would rather use a recruitment consultancy than approach an employer direct

Chart 5.0

Length of time job seekers believe it is reasonable to wait for a response after applying for a role



3%	24 hours	17%	7 – 10 days
20%	1 – 2 days	3%	11 – 14 days
34%	3 – 4 days	0%	More than 14 days
23%	5 – 6 days		

Responding to job applications

Responding quickly to job applications is incredibly important, with candidates likely to regard a slow response as an indicator of either a lack of interest or disorganisation/unprofessionalism on behalf of the employer. When applying for a job, most professionals (57%) expect a response within three to six days and only a fifth expect to wait more than a week (Chart 5.0).

Failure to inform unsuccessful candidates that their application is not being taken further can also be detrimental to an employer's reputation. Of those surveyed, 89% of professionals have applied for a job and not received a response on at least one occasion in their career – either through an employer directly or a recruitment consultancy. As our survey also reveals that 88% of professionals discuss their experiences of the recruitment process, it is clear how a lack of response to a job application can negatively impact an employer's brand.



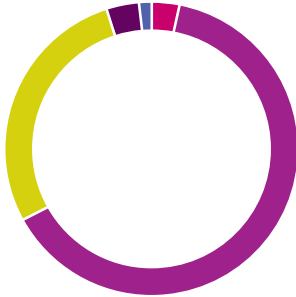
74%

Percentage of employers who believe direct communication between line manager and recruiter throughout the recruitment process is either important or extremely important

JOB INTERVIEW EXPECTATIONS

Chart 6.0

Number of interview stages job seekers think is reasonable for an employer to undertake



- 3% One
- 64% Two
- 28% Three
- 4% Four
- 1% Five or more

Interviews are one of the most important parts of the recruitment process and are crucial in shaping a candidate's opinion of the employer and role. We investigated job seekers' preferences and expectations regarding this part of the recruitment process in our survey.

Number of job interviews

Most job seekers (64%) think they should have to undertake two interviews before receiving a job offer, with 28% believing three interviews are reasonable (Chart 6.0). In line with these findings, the survey reveals that the average number of job interviews undertaken by professionals applying for both temporary and permanent vacancies is 2.2 per role. At the same time, 61% of employers say they typically conduct two interviews for each job opening, while 25% say they normally carry out three.

People who should be involved in the interview process

Professionals agree that meeting the line manager for the role they are applying for is critical during the job interview process, with 98% believing this to be either important or very important. However, job seekers also believe

that it is important to meet other members of the team (69%), potential direct reports (61%), the line manager's manager (72%) and other business heads (68%) when interviewing for a role.

Factors affecting the interview itself

During the interview stages, a number of factors have an impact on a candidate's perception of both the role and the company concerned (Table 2.0). Our survey reveals that both job seekers and employers generally agree on how influential each of these is, with receiving/providing enough information about the role regarded especially important by both.

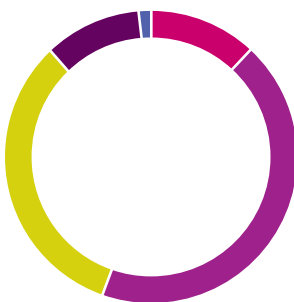
Table 2.0

Influence of specific factors during the interview process

	Job seekers		Employers	
	Strong Influence	Some Influence	Strong Influence	Some Influence
Receiving/providing enough information about role	81%	18%	79%	19%
The opportunity to ask questions	61%	34%	79%	18%
The opportunity to explain experience properly	57%	36%	86%	13%
Welcome experience on arrival	50%	45%	50%	44%
Perception of employer brand	48%	44%	52%	40%
Appropriate setting for interview	36%	49%	44%	49%

Chart 7.0

Length of time job seekers believe it should take to receive feedback following an interview



- 12% Within 24 hours
- 43% 1 - 2 days
- 33% 3 - 4 days
- 11% 5 - 7 days
- 1% 8 - 14 days
- 0% More than 14 days

Providing feedback after interview

Providing feedback within a quick timeframe is very important to candidates (Chart 7.0). The majority of professionals (88%) expect to be updated on their interview performance within four days of it taking place. Few believe receiving feedback after five or more days is acceptable and none of our respondents believe it should take 14 days. A surprisingly high 60% of job seekers have taken part in an interview and received no feedback whatsoever after either applying to an employer direct or through a recruitment consultancy. As our survey also reveals that 88% of candidates discuss their experiences of the recruitment process with friends, either a delay in or complete lack of feedback can clearly have an impact on a company's employer brand.



2.2

The average number of interviews undertaken by job seekers for each role

60%

Percentage of professionals who have been to a job interview and not received any feedback (after either applying to an employer direct or through a recruitment consultancy)

MAKING A DECISION

Candidates consider a number of factors when deciding whether to accept a formal job offer. When taking into account the job itself, the type of work is widely considered to be the most important (Table 3.0), while job security, company culture and employer brand are also key considerations for professionals seeking new roles. Most interestingly, both salary and benefits package and work/life balance are far more important to job seekers than employers believe them to be.

Table 3.0
Importance of factors about the role when deciding whether to accept a job offer, according to both job seekers and employers

	Job seekers		Employers	
	Very Important	Important	Very Important	Important
Type of Work	71%	27%	68%	31%
Salary and benefits	66%	33%	38%	57%
Work/life balance	52%	41%	27%	60%
Career progression	52%	38%	44%	48%
Job Security	49%	41%	25%	53%
Company culture	49%	45%	55%	39%
Employer brand	20%	57%	31%	55%

Certain elements of the recruitment process also have a critical impact on a candidate's decision (Table 4.0). According to our survey, the personalities of the interviewers is considered the most important factor. This presents an obvious challenge to hiring organisations – in order not to turn professionals off the role or company, employers need to ensure that the personalities of the interviewers are compatible with that of the candidate.

The perceived culture/values of the organisation is also regarded as very influential. While not deemed quite as important, the speed of response, overall length of and general ease of the recruitment process all have a strong bearing on whether professionals accept a job offer.

Table 4.0
Influence of specific factors in the recruitment process when deciding whether to accept a job offer

	Strong Influence	Some Influence
Personalities of interviewers	70%	26%
Culture/values of organisation	63%	32%
Speed of response during recruitment process	25%	59%
Length of recruitment process	18%	56%
Ease of recruitment process	17%	57%



LENGTH AND IMPACT OF RECRUITMENT PROCESS

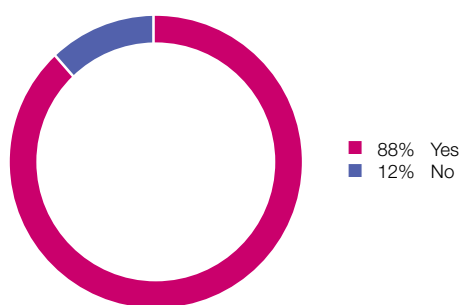
How long it takes

The speed of the full hiring process (from application to offer stage) has a significant impact on a candidate's experience. According to our survey results, 78% of job seekers believe a full recruitment process (from application to offer stage) should take less than four weeks (Table 5.0). By comparison, only 26% of hiring processes are actually this short in practise. At the same time, while only 1% of employees believe the recruitment process should take longer than three months, 24% take this long in practise. Clearly, a recruitment process that lasts either a longer or shorter length of time outlined in these expectations is going to affect a professional's perception of an employer and its brand and – ultimately – his or her decision to accept a job offer.

Table 5.0
Length of recruitment process

	Length of time job seekers believe a full recruitment process should take	Length of time recruitment process takes on average according to employers
Up to 2 weeks	29%	5%
3 – 4 weeks	49%	21%
1 – 2 months	21%	46%
3 – 4 months	1%	22%
5+ months	0%	2%
Don't know	N/A	4%

Chart 8.0
Would you discuss experiences of hiring processes at specific employers with friends and/or colleagues?



Impact of experiences of recruitment process

A lengthy recruitment process would put many professionals (72%) off working for an organisation (Chart 8.0). An overwhelming majority (88%) also say they would discuss their experiences of recruitment processes – be they good or bad – with friends and/or colleagues. As a result, a job seeker's overall experience when applying for jobs can have a significant impact on the perception of an employer in the marketplace and, beyond that, have a major affect on its brand.



EMPLOYER BRAND

As part of our survey, we asked companies about their understanding of the employer brand concept and their overall approach to this. In total, 82% of all employers are familiar with what an employer brand is and what this means. Only 4% say they are unfamiliar with the concept, while 14% are unsure.

Measurement and promotion of employer brand

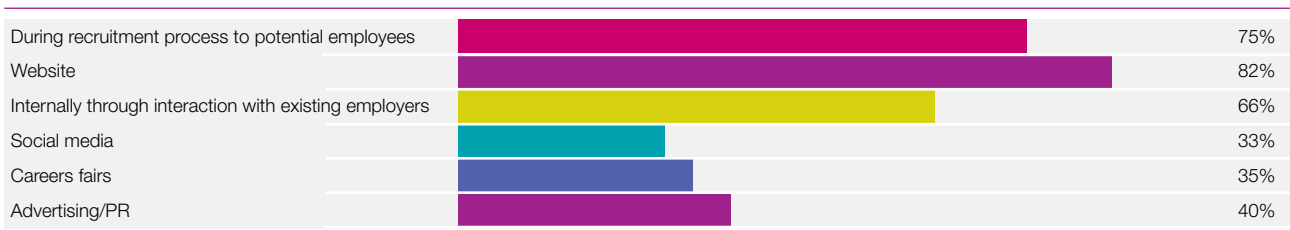
Of the hiring managers who responded to our survey, only 31% say their organisation measures the external perception of their employer brand. At the same time, 38% said they definitely did not measure this, while 31% did not know one way or the other.

According to our survey, employers promote their employer brand via a number of channels (Chart 9.0). While the company website is the most common method, three quarters of hiring managers say they view their recruitment process as a key platform for doing this. This, combined with the fact that only 11% of employers class their hiring processes as 'excellent', highlights a potential area for improvement for a number of organisations.

In addition, social media, careers fairs and advertising/PR are commonly used channels, while two-thirds also promote their brand internally. As we outlined on page 1, job seekers are hungry for information about the organisation when applying for roles and search a variety of sources – from company websites and press articles to employee review websites – to obtain it. Employers should therefore consider how and where they promote their brand, as well as where their employer brand is being discussed by individuals external to the organisation, and the impact of this on potential employees.

Chart 9.0

Channels used to promote employer brand by organisations surveyed



KEY FINDINGS

Our research highlights a number of preferences among job seekers when applying for roles, providing useful best practice information for hiring managers about how they can conduct their recruitment processes and showing the impact that hiring procedures ultimately have on an organisation's employer brand. Based on these results, we have extracted seven key findings.

Key Finding #1

The quality of job advertisements has a significant impact on whether candidates will apply for a role.

Our survey reveals that online advertising platforms (such as job boards) are seen as the most useful source of roles by 42% of candidates. The content of job advertisements also has a significant impact on how job seekers perceive an employer and the vacancy in question. Specifically, the majority of respondents say that the description of the role (99%), salary and benefits (98%), description of the company (92%), that the employer is named (83%) and the quality of grammar/language used (80%) influence their decision to submit a formal application.

Key Finding #2

The overall speed and length of the recruitment process has a significant impact on a job seeker's impression of an employer.

In our survey, the majority of job seekers claim that the speed of response during (84%), length (74%) and ease (74%) of the recruitment process influence their decision to accept a role. Similarly – when asked whether a lengthy hiring procedure would put them off an organisation, 72% said it would. These results clearly demonstrate how the overall speed and length of the recruitment process can impact the perception of an organisation and its employer brand. Overall, 78% of job seekers believe a full recruitment process should take less than a month to complete and 99% think it should take less than two months.

Key Finding #3

Experiences during the interview process have a significant impact on a candidate's impression of an employer.

Job interviews play a significant part in shaping a candidate's opinion of an organisation and can therefore ultimately impact the employer brand. In particular, the overwhelming majority of job seekers say the personalities of the interviewers (96%), receiving enough information about the role during the interview (99%), the opportunity to ask questions (95%) and explain their experience properly (93%) and an appropriate welcome on arrival (95%) have at least some impact on whether they accept a job offer. In total, 67% of candidates believe they should have to undergo a maximum of two job interviews before receiving a job offer, while 95% think they should have to attend three interviews or less.

Key Finding #4

The opinions of existing employees have a notable impact on how job seekers view potential employers.

Many job seekers regard an organisation's existing employees as key advisors on a prospective employer – our survey reveals that 46% of candidates speak to staff when researching a company at the start of the recruitment process. However, the growing popularity of staff review websites (30% of job seekers use sites such as glassdoor.com) and social networking sites, such as LinkedIn, means that job seekers do not need extensive personal networks to gain access to this information and reputations can grow quickly. With 66% of organisations actively promoting their employer brand to their existing employees, most seem to be aware of the importance of this issue.

Key Finding #5

Job seekers expect feedback at all stages of the recruitment process.

Because they have taken the time to apply and/or interview for a role and are likely to have developed an interest in the job, candidates expect feedback from employers. To illustrate this point, our survey reveals that 97% expect a response to an initial job application within 10 days. Similarly, 99% expect feedback on their performance at an interview within seven days of it taking place; 88% expect this to take four days or less. However, 89% of job seekers claim to have applied for a job and not received a response and 60% have attended an interview and not received feedback (after either applying direct to an employer or through a recruitment consultancy).

89%

Percentage of professionals who have applied for a job and not received a response (after either applying to an employer direct or through a recruitment consultancy)

Key Finding #6

Job seekers tell people about their experiences during the recruitment process.

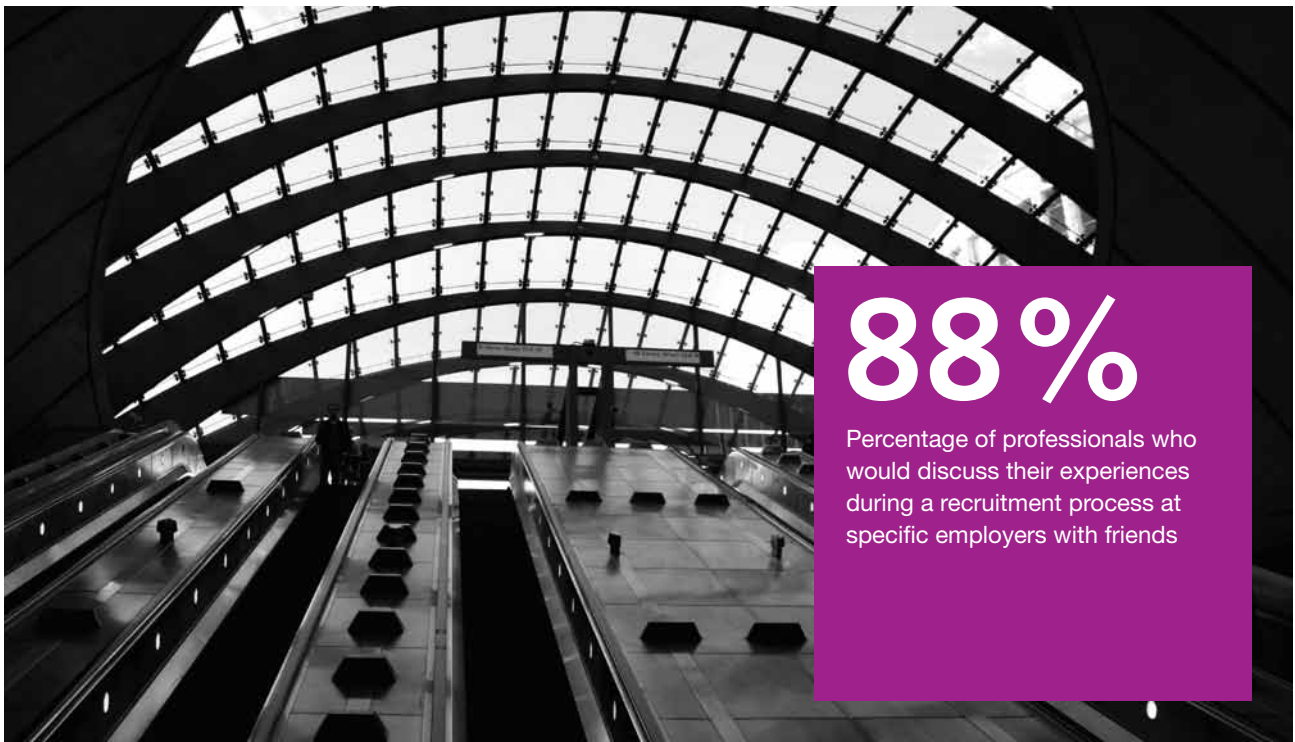
Our survey reveals that 88% of job seekers discuss their experiences during a hiring process – be it with their friends, colleagues and acquaintances or online. This clearly shows how employers' interactions with candidates – from communication, organisation and speed of the recruitment process to their experiences when being interviewed – can impact their brand.

Key Finding #7

Job seekers value the contribution of recruitment consultancies when searching for and applying for roles.

Our survey reveals that most job seekers regard recruitment consultancies as a key part of the recruitment process, recognising that they can provide access to positions not advertised elsewhere and appreciating the strength of their relationships with employers. In total, 49% of job seekers say they regard recruitment consultancies as the most useful source of vacancies, making them the most important resource of roles for candidates. Similarly, 65% of job seekers prefer to apply for roles through a recruitment consultancy than an employer directly.

With only 11% of organisations surveyed rating their hiring processes as 'excellent', many also seemingly require guidance in managing their recruitment procedures.



88%

Percentage of professionals who would discuss their experiences during a recruitment process at specific employers with friends

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the seven key findings highlighted on pages 9 and 10, we have outlined a number of recommendations to help employers improve the candidate experience and promote a better representation of their employer brand during the recruitment process.

Key considerations when writing job advertisements

To attract the best quality candidates, employers need to ensure they produce job advertisements that are professionally presented, well-written (i.e. without grammar or spelling errors) and provide an accurate and interesting description of the role. Professionals prefer advertisements where the company is named, meaning employers that do so are likely to attract a greater number of applications from high-quality candidates. An indication of the salary/benefits on offer also helps in this respect, while also having the added benefit of managing applicants' expectations and avoiding disappointment and frustration further down the line.

Making your recruitment process as efficient as possible

With the very best professionals usually receiving two or more job offers, delays throughout the recruitment process can cause candidates to assume an organisation is disorganised and/or unprofessional, disinterested in them or is not fully committed to hiring for the role. However, employers can take certain steps to avoid delays occurring and ensure that candidates are as engaged as possible throughout the process. In particular, they should strive to:

- Ensure budgetary sign-off is granted for the role before advertising it
- Identify who exactly needs to be involved in all parts of the process from the outset, including reviewing of CVs/ applications and at each interview stage
- Diarise time for each of these stages in the relevant stakeholder's diary in advance
- Make decisions quickly and decisively throughout the process.

Feeding back to applicants

Employers should always feedback to candidates/recruiters promptly after an interview about the interviewee's performance and inform of the next step. Similarly, they should frequently update candidates/recruiters when delays are unavoidable. At the same time, unsuccessful applicants should be contacted and provided with reasons why they will not be progressing at all stages. Individuals who do not receive this feedback generally develop feelings of frustration, which – as our survey proves – they are likely discuss with friends and colleagues. Conversely, employers that take the time to explain a rejection will provide job seekers with a far more positive representation of their brand.

Key considerations when conducting job interviews

Employers should ensure that all staff members involved in the interview process are trained on specific techniques (such as how to 'sell' both the organisation/role and questions to ask) so that they deliver a consistent and positive message about the organisation. The personality of the interviewer also needs to accurately reflect this message and in effect 'mirror' those of the candidate they are looking to attract. The key is not to 'mis-sell' any aspect of the job on offer – it is preferable for a candidate to decide they are unsuitable and withdraw during the recruitment process than accept a job offer and resign within the first six months.

During the interview process, it is also important to remember that a candidate will have to juggle any meetings with their existing job and personal commitments. Without any guarantees of success, many will become frustrated with the process if asked to attend what they consider to be an unreasonable number of interviews. This will especially be the case if, in their opinion, interviews arranged on separate days could have been scheduled one after another on the same visit. Strong organisation and diary management throughout the process can therefore make a significant difference to a candidate's experience.

Promoting a consistent employer brand to existing employees

To ensure staff behaviour accurately reflects the message of the business, organisations need to ensure their employees understand the overall employer brand and consistently act in accordance with it. Listening to and engaging with staff is critical to ensuring this is the case. As an example, employers should routinely conduct and analyse employee engagement surveys, arrange focus groups and interview staff to gain an insight into the extent to which employees understand the employer brand and help identify initiatives that can be implemented to improve their knowledge where necessary.

During the recruitment process, it is also vital that all staff members who have contact with job seekers (from HR administrators to senior directors) articulate an accurate representation of working for the business that is consistently 'on brand'. Unprofessional or negative comments of any nature, however unintentional, during phone conversations, emails or interviews reflect poorly on the organisation and can ultimately impact a candidate's decision whether to accept a job offer.

Working with a recruitment consultancy

When working with a recruitment consultancy, there are a number of key action points that employers should follow to ensure that the relationship is as productive as possible and – ultimately – secure the best possible candidate for the role in the most time-efficient manner. These include:

- Providing the recruitment consultant with a clear and detailed job specification so that they can give an accurate representation of the role and company to candidates
- Full commitment of hiring managers to the recruitment process, including provision of information regarding the job, review of CVs and feedback for interviews
- Flexibility from line managers throughout the process to help understand both the business area and company culture
- Regular debriefing meetings between the recruitment consultancy and hiring managers and/or HR. These enable all parties to raise any issues or highlight any achievements or learnings from the recruitment process and allow actions for improvement as and when required.

ABOUT THE ROBERT WALTERS INSIGHT SERIES

This whitepaper is the first in the Robert Walters Insight Series. The Insight Series is a range of thought-leading whitepapers aimed at assisting employers in their recruitment strategies and helping them to address key talent management issues. To register your interest in future topics, email contact@robertwalters.com.



CONTACT US

To discuss this whitepaper, request other titles in the Insight Series or talk about your recruitment needs in more detail, please either email contact@robertwalters.com, contact your Robert Walters recruitment consultant or get in touch with one of our offices below:

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