



Championship material

One of the most important but least popular jobs a sales manager must do is recruit effective salespeople. It amazes me how sales managers try to achieve this. It's often left to a junior member of staff to carry out the initial screening and then the final interview is fitted in some time when there is space in the diary! Sales managers claim they never have time to recruit people properly, but they always seem to find time to repeat the exercise six months later.

A properly planned recruitment campaign can save a company both time and money. There are eight steps to a well-planned recruitment exercise, and I will try to deal with each one in detail.

1 DEFINE

You know what you want – a salesperson to cover the North London area selling widgets. Easy? No – not really. There are many other areas to consider when you are actually defining what the job in question is all about, the successful candidate and how they will have to sell.

Is it a quick, emotive sale, with little or no technical involvement? Is your company selling FMCG-type products, where the ability to build-up and maintain long-

term personal relationships is vital? Maybe your team sells a technical product and the ability to deal with technical people over a long-term selling cycle is vital. These different functions require different salespeople with different temperaments. Good psychometric testing can help you better define the person who is most likely to be best suited for each different sales role.

Where is the person now, and what are they looking for? Are they seeking a management opportunity? Are they frustrated and looking for a change? Are they keen to have a sales career? This is all vital data when you arrive at the next step - compiling the advertisement.

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2 ATTRACT

What is the current level of unemployment in your area? Perhaps it is quite low. Now ask yourself what the level of unemployment of quality people is. *Nil* in most regions! This introduces yet another question: "Why should someone good work for you?"

It seems a foregone conclusion that the salesperson you want is currently employed elsewhere, so you must

determine why they should leave their present job – one that they enjoy – to join you.

It is also an accepted fact that the most important person in an individual's thoughts is themselves, followed very closely by their family. Next come their friends, their job and the company they work for turning up in fourth place.

“ You have about three seconds to catch the salesperson's eye and get him to read your advertisement ”

If you have a look at an average situations vacant advertisement, however, you will find that most of them start with the company name, followed closely by details of the job and the technical qualifications required. If you are lucky, the advertiser then starts to describe the ideal person and the benefits of them joining the company. It's no wonder the level and quality of response from many job advertisements leaves a great deal to be desired.

Having determined that the potential applicant is currently employed elsewhere, the average sales professional still scans their local and national press 'just to see what the market is doing.' This is where you have about three seconds to catch their eye and get them to read your advertisement.

The effectiveness of your advertisement depends:

- 50 per cent on the headline
- 30 per cent on the body copy
- 20 per cent on the medium and presentations

So, how can you write a good recruitment advertisement, which will catch a good salesperson's eye?

The headline is the bait:

- Career in technical sales
- Trainee sales executive
- Senior sales manager (director designate)

The first paragraph is the hook that makes the reader continue. It must describe how they see themselves. All it takes is one or two simple questions:

- 'Are you an experienced technician looking to step up into sales?'
- 'Are you looking for a new career in sales?'

- 'Are you an experienced salesperson looking for your first step into management?'

Next comes the part where an advertisement must generate a desire to know more. State something like:

'SM is the fastest-growing publisher of consumer magazines in the UK and is looking for an experienced publishing salesperson to cover the South East.'

In paragraph three, you must screen out those who will not meet your requirements:

- 'Must have a proven success rate in publishing sales'
- 'Must have the ability to sell at board level'
- 'Must have basic computing skills'
- 'Must be based in the South East of England'

The fourth paragraph of a good advertisement must offer reassurance:

- 'Comprehensive in-house training'
- 'Continual support and technical back up on territory'
- 'Opportunity to move into management'
- 'Good salary, bonus and benefits'

In the last paragraph, you need to suggest the action to be taken, making it easy to respond:

'Telephone Tuesday 11th between 10.30am and 6.30pm or Wednesday 12th between 8.30am and 4.00pm. Ask for David Brown, National Sales Manager.'

The vital contact information – the company's full title, address, telephone number and e-mail details can, of course, appear at the foot of the advertisement. Remember, the fewer the number of words and the shorter the sentences, the easier your advertisement will be to read. It pays to pay for the white space! >>

The ten-day cycle

The following schedule has been proven to work well, if you can plan your time effectively:

- **DAY 1 – Thursday** Advertisement appears – telephone screening
- **DAY 2 – Friday**
- **DAY 4 – Tuesday** Initial screening interviews
- **DAY 5 – Wednesday**
- **DAY 9 – Tuesday** Final interviews
- **DAY 10 – Wednesday**
- **EVENING OF DAY 10** – A verbal job offer is given, subject to satisfactory references

When planning a recruitment campaign, it is vital to fix the date of the first interviews at the outset, and work backwards. This way, you ensure that any other members of staff who are involved will be available. There is nothing worse than getting to the final interview stage only to discover that your sales director has just started a three-week trip overseas!

An ideal ad...

A CAREER IN MEDICAL SALES

Are you competitive, goal-orientated, with a technical or para-medical background?

Are you looking for an opportunity – a change of direction?

We are an international healthcare company selling highly regarded products, including market leaders, to the medical profession.

To maintain our plans for growth and progress we need four good people to join our medical sales team in LONDON, NORTH LANCASHIRE and AVON.

Are you:

- Educated to at least 'A' level or equivalent?
- Currently employed in a scientific, para-medical or selling situation?
- Holding a current clean driving licence?
- Resident in London, North Lancashire or Avon?

Our offer to you:

- Comprehensive 'in-house' training
- Continual support and technical back-up on territory
- A stimulating work environment
- A good salary, bonus schemes, pension and insurance benefits and a company car

Interested?

Phone John Smith, Sales Manager, on 01234 000000 between 9.30am and 5.00pm (reverse the charges) on 29th or 30th January.

Asking for a telephone response is vital. Research has indicated that 20 per cent of salespeople will not bother to respond to an advertisement if they cannot speak to the sales manager or sales director in person. After all, isn't that what they are trained to do? Let applicants talk to the decision maker! I've actually seen a sales recruitment advertisement with the magic words 'no phone calls accepted'. I wonder how many top-grade salespeople applied?

If you are a sales manager or sales director, are you now thinking: 'I don't have the time to take telephone calls'? You really do need to plan your time in order to accept these calls, as it is the most important job you could possibly have to do at that moment.

3 SCREEN

Have a ten-minute chat with the applicant, briefly explaining what the vacancy is, probing the caller's relevant career and technical capability, and listening carefully. If you like what you hear, invite them in for an initial 'scenting' interview within four or five days. However, make sure your receptionist knows how to handle the incoming calls and is prepared to telephone any applicants back immediately if you are on another call. Don't wait for the applicant to call you back – they may not be able to.

4 TEST WITH AN INITIAL INTERVIEW

This is where you finally meet with the applicant and talk through what they have told you on the telephone, explaining in reasonable detail what the job entails and what is expected of the successful applicant. At the same time, check any technical requirements you deem important, and get the applicant to sit any psychometric or occupational test you may use.

5 INTERVIEW A SECOND TIME

Most recruitment decisions are made on initial impressions, backed up by a review of the applicant's track record. The funny thing is, we never fire anyone for these reasons!

A salesperson is usually lost as a result of three things:

- Their lack of ability to learn and to adapt quickly.
- Their temperament is not suited to selling – for example, they can't take the pressure.
- They display unacceptable character traits, such as a lack of maturity, or they are untrustworthy.

Testing can identify the first two traits, but only an in-depth interview can identify those hidden character traits that can cause you many problems at a later date. I would list the following as the major character traits to investigate, and these sample probing questions can help to investigate such areas:

- **Attitude and belief**

"Tell me about a time when you had to stay positive to get a project completed, despite obstacles."

- **Self-motivation**

"Can you describe a situation where you felt you went above and beyond the call of duty?"

- **Stability and persistence**

"How do you respond when others around you are not pulling their weight?"

- **Maturity and judgement**

"Sometimes we make mistakes. Can you give me an example of such a situation and tell me how you handled it?"

Think of these three areas – ability, temperament and character – as the three legs of a stool. If one leg is far shorter than the others, the stool is very unstable. If one leg is missing completely, it will fall over!

You should not automatically accept the first answer to any question you are given. That will be the prepared answer. Probe tactfully, yet deeply, for recurring patterns of behaviour. An applicant's behaviour over the past five to seven years is a very good indicator of how they will behave and what they are likely to achieve while working for you.

6 VERIFY

It would seem that most sales managers tend to trust what applicants tell them and, provided it sounds reasonable, very rarely verify facts or dates.

If it's relevant, check up. Some recent research by the Risk Advisory Group, conducted on 900 CVs reviewed during a given quarter, showed discrepancies in over 50 per cent of them. There was a 20 per cent increase in lies or inaccuracies about previous employment and an 86 per cent rise in false information about academic qualifications!

7&8 DECIDE AND OFFER

A decision, subject to satisfactory references and verbal offer, should be made on the evening of the final interviews. The longer you leave it, the more opportunities this quality person has of being offered a job with another company – possibly even one of your competitors. You train your salespeople to close for an order, so why not close the applicant for a decision? If the answer is 'no', you still have an opportunity to go back to the others on your shortlist if they meet your requirements.

Time scales

It amazes me when I hear sales managers tell me it can take six to eight weeks to make a recruitment decision, and then wonder why the best applicants have already taken other jobs. Research has shown that the top applicants start to disappear ten to 14 days after the advertisement was published.

The ten-day cycle featured earlier looks good, and it is not just a theory – it really works! If you plan your recruitment campaign properly, then use psychometric and occupational testing to dig below the façade, and interview for character traits in depth, you won't have to find time in another six months to repeat the exercise. ■

Check if your advert will work!

The author will assess your recruitment advert FREE of charge. See contact details below.



SPECIAL OFFER!



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