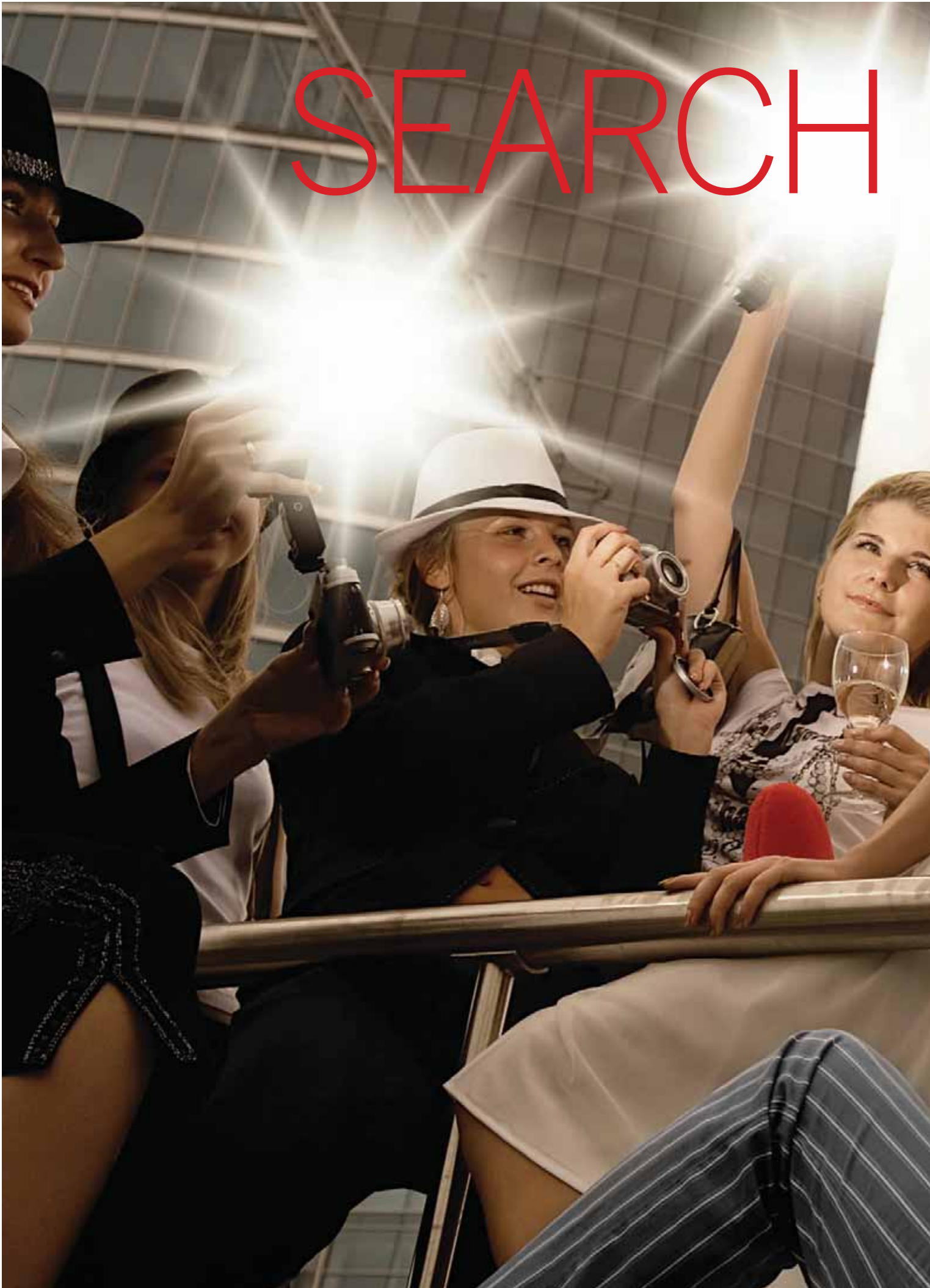


SEARCH



FOR A STAR



In the first in a new series on sales recruiting, **IAIN CHALMERS** reveals some of the factors that will increase your chances of getting your next hire right

Every business has strong sales performers. They are usually the highest revenue producers and have the respect of the whole company. The recurrent issue is: “How can we find another Jane” or “I wish I could have an army of Bobs”.

Before the recession, recruitment was an activity that took a lot of time and was accepted as an ‘ongoing process’. These days it is a much more critical function — you simply cannot afford to get it wrong. It will cause so many tangible and intangible problems that the cost will be huge, although it is often difficult to quantify.

The solution is all about reducing the risks of a bad hire. A number of simple steps using a combination of common sense, experience and psychometric assessment will reduce the chances of getting it wrong significantly. In this series of articles we are going to look at how you as a sales professional can increase the chances of getting it right:

BENCHMARK — you don’t know what you’re looking for unless you benchmark it

RECRUIT — make sure all candidates are assessed against the benchmark

MANAGE — how, and how not, to manage your new employee

DEVELOP — make the most of their strengths.

So how do you identify what makes some salespeople great? We are going to look at:

- Eight steps to increase hiring success rate
- Identifying strong, consistent and poor performers
- How to read someone like a book.

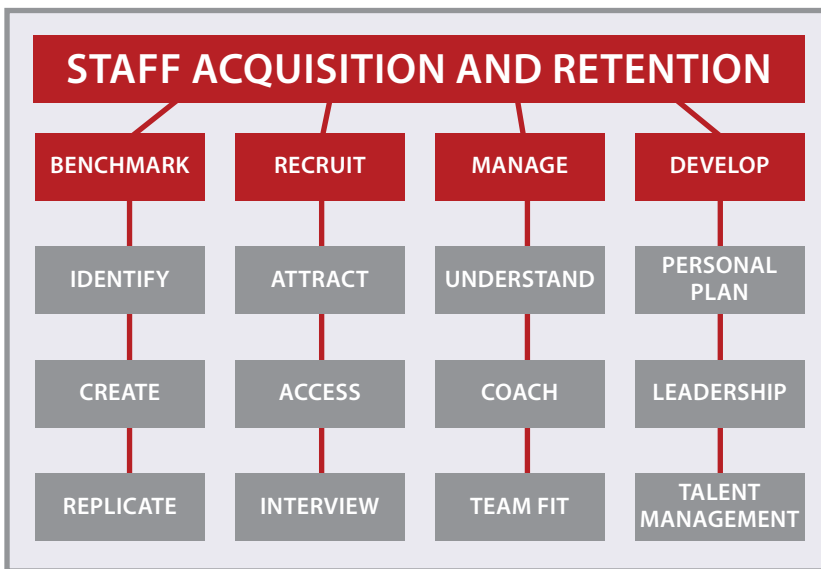
EIGHT STEPS TO INCREASE HIRING SUCCESS RATE

A properly planned recruitment campaign can save a company both time and money. There are eight steps to a well-planned recruitment exercise:

1 DEFINE

You know what you want — say, a salesperson to cover the North London area selling widgets. Easy? No, not really. There are many other issues to consider when you are defining the job in question, 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? Or do you



sell a technical product, where the ability to deal with technical people over a long-term selling cycle is key?

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 important data when you arrive at the next step — compiling the advertisement.

2 ATTRACT

Ask yourself, “Why should someone good work for me?” 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 may enjoy — to join you.

It is also accepted that the most important person in an individual’s thoughts is invariably themselves, followed very closely by their family and then their friends. Their job and the company they work for turn up in fourth place.

If you have a look at an average job advert you will find that most 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 joining the company. It’s no wonder the level and quality of response from many job advertisements leaves a great deal to be desired.

The reports from a psychometric benchmark report can provide the ideal wording to attract the natural strengths of an individual. People naturally look for adverts that are suited to them. A benchmark will help you do this.

Having determined that the potential applicant is currently employed elsewhere, success then depends on them scanning the job boards and local 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 is determined:

- 50% on the headline
- 30% on the body copy
- 20% on the medium.

So, how can you write a good recruitment advertisement that will catch a good salesperson’s eye? The headline is the bait:

- Career in technical sales
- Trainee sales executive
- Senior sales manager.

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?”

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

X 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 record of success in publishing sales”
- “Must have the ability to sell at board level”
- “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 on Tuesday 11 December between 10.30am and 6.30pm or Wednesday 12 December 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 email 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.

Asking for a telephone response is vital. Research has indicated that 20% of salespeople will not bother to respond to an advertisement if they cannot speak to the sales manager or sales director in person. Let applicants talk to the decision-maker — after all, isn’t that what they are trained to do?

We’ll look at steps 3–8 in part two of this series, in the November/December edition of *Winning Edge*.

HOW TO IDENTIFY YOUR STRONG, CONSISTENT AND POOR PERFORMERS

STRONG PERFORMERS — Typical characteristics of a strong performer are usually quite specific. They are ambitious, driven, competitive, quick thinking and good with clients. But they are also usually difficult to manage, rarely complete their paperwork and you fight tooth and nail to keep them. They can sometimes be difficult to fit into a team environment, preferring to work alone.

CONSISTENT PERFORMERS — Typical characteristics of a consistent performer are less specific. They can be a mix of good ‘hunters’ and good ‘farmers’. Typically, they are competitive, but without that ‘killer instinct’ and natural sales ability that the strong performers have.

Consistent performers tend to stay longer within organisations as they are doing enough to be successful in their job. This brings another great benefit — social capital. So often in sales teams the top performer is seen as the most important member of the team. But what about Trevor who has been at the company for 15 years? Who does the rest of the team go to when they have a question? Who has the hands-on knowledge of the business? Who solves the disputes and arranges the drinks at the end of the week? Trevor. So tenure is important but is it more important than sales performance?

POOR PERFORMERS — Salespeople are fairly simple to measure as their performance is linked directly to revenue. Poor performers = low revenue generation? Yes, probably. But there are sometimes factors underneath the surface that point to the reason why an individual is not performing. It is important to measure these reasons so you don’t repeat them in the future.

Poor performers may be difficult to get on with, lazy, have low emotional maturity and lack competitive edge. The trick is to be able to measure these areas and identify them at interview stage.

HOW TO READ SOMEONE LIKE A BOOK

Follow these three levels to understand an individual:

LEVEL 1 — how does someone ‘appear’ ie. what’s your first impression of them?

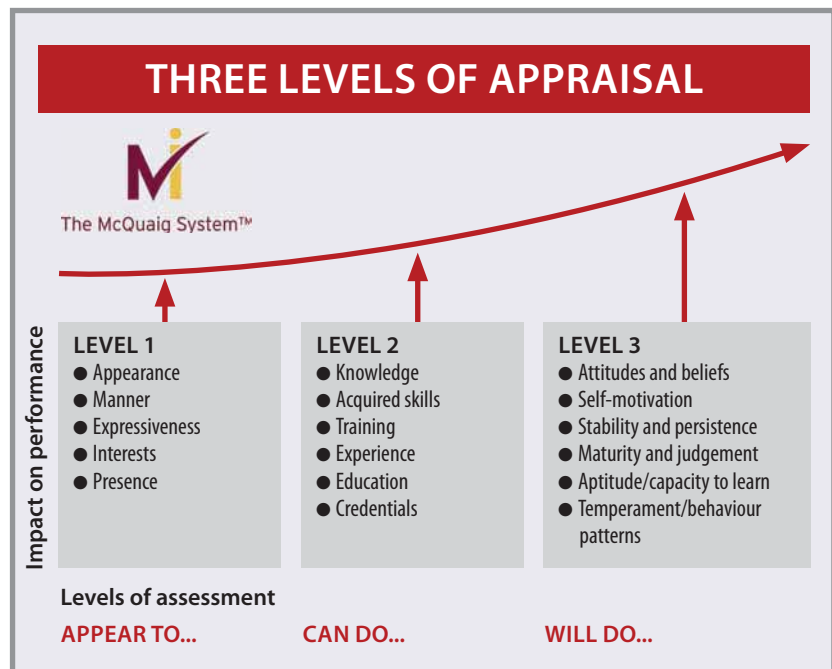
LEVEL 2 — what skills/experience/education do they have, ie. what’s on their CV?

LEVEL 3 — what are their natural strengths/aptitude/ability, ie. what are the hidden factors?

LEVEL 1

Your gut feeling is a difficult emotion to get over. A series of experiments by Princeton psychologists Janine Willis and Alexander Todorov reveal that all it takes is a tenth of a second to form an impression of a stranger from their face. The research study measured attractiveness, likeability, competence, trustworthiness, and aggressiveness. So, in a tenth of a second you are making a judgement on a lot of factors that you would count as important employment qualities.

Your gut feeling is important. In face-to-face sales you want your customers to have a good first impression. But your whole decision shouldn’t hinge on this factor. Fight past the type of suit they are wearing, how strong their handshake is and whether they smile. Important, yes, but these factors won’t tell you if they can sell or not.



LEVEL 2

After gut feeling, interviewers rely upon the CV for most of their decision-making. Does the individual have experience that will make them more suitable?

But is an individual’s previous experience the most important factor when making a decision about hiring someone? No. Sure, some roles require certain experience or qualifications that will provide knockout criteria. But the right person will learn how to be successful in their role — the role won’t define the person.

LEVEL 3

There are hidden traits you will never identify at interview stage without additional assessment and questioning. Psychometric assessment has been helping companies in the UK for decades. The chances are that, when applying for a role, you have either used an assessment tool or completed a questionnaire that seeks to measure your:

- Aptitude/capacity to learn
- Temperament/behaviour patterns
- Character: attitudes and beliefs; self-motivation; stability and persistence; maturity and judgement.

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.

Most organisations hire on levels 1 and 2, and fire on level 3. To increase your chances of getting the next recruit right, follow the mantra — “You don’t know what you’re looking for unless you benchmark it.”

In the next edition we’ll look at easy steps to screen and interview during your next recruitment campaign.

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