

WHAT DO YOUR CLIENTS THINK?

IMPROVING SERVICES TO YOUR CLIENTS

A series of recent interviews with major users of recruitment services have highlighted a number of areas where recruiters need to focus their attention. According to those interviewed, clients would like to see improvements in the level of training of recruitment staff – particularly in the area of legislative changes, greater consistency and reliability in service delivery, and a greater recognition of the need for preservation of the client's brand.

Over the past few months Fathom has conducted interviews with many companies, to inquire as to their views on recruitment services. Two themes have emerged from these - the first is the ongoing need for consistent and professional recruitment services; the second is the expectation that the recruiter properly represents the client's brand and image in the market place.

The interviews were conducted with businesses as part of the on-going development of the RCSA Service Delivery Standard. Those interviewed included recruitment managers from banks, government agencies, manufacturers and a number of medium sized businesses. The purpose of the interviews was to identify what a client looks for in a recruiter, and to explore improvements they believe the industry should address.

PROFESSIONAL RECRUITMENT SERVICES

The first theme to have emerged from the interviews is that professionalism and skill in recruiting people is a top priority for those who use recruitment services. While this is only as expected, it is interesting to explore exactly what this means, and in particular, where recruiters need to improve.

One of the most important aspects of recruitment professionalism expected by clients is honesty and integrity in the

relationship. Clients expect high ethical behaviour which is based on respect for both the client and the candidates.

Clients also said that they rely on the techniques and knowledge of matching job requirements to a candidate's capabilities through selection, interviews, reference checking and where required, through psychological and other testing.

These skills and the resources to undertake them are not often available inside a client business, and recruitment agencies are relied upon as the "experts" in this field.

Similarly they are seen as experts in employment law and related legislation such as Occupation Health & Safety. While most organisations do have their own internal sources of this information, they nonetheless will often look to recruitment agencies for advice and updates in these areas.

Training in basic recruitment skills and a good understanding of the current regulatory environment was one of the first areas where interviewees felt there could be improvements in the industry. One company representative commented that "Across the industry generally I would say that we would like to see more training and better updates, particularly on legislative changes. We rely on our recruitment suppliers for their skills in finding the right people, and for their knowledge and processes in making it happen properly".

Clients expect that their agent will do what they say they will do, but unfortunately their expectations are not always met. This point was raised a number of times as an area which often disappoints clients. There were numerous examples given where the recruiter promised action by a certain date but they failed to deliver. From a client's perspective this is one of the most frustrating issues because it removes their overall control of the recruitment process, and places their own deadlines and commitments at risk. Another interviewee said, "Even with preferred suppliers, timeframes can slip, and this can really make it hard on us as we usually have

agreed deadlines with the line manager. But if we get notice of a change in a deadline then we can deal with that.”

Many of the clients interviewed have preferred supplier agreements (PSA) in place, although most still use non-panel recruiters for certain types of skills or difficult jobs. All said that it took a long time to get the relationship working properly – perhaps 2 to 3 years, but once the teething problems were resolved it was definitely worth it. The PSA enabled processes to be developed that were supportive of the client’s requirements and reflected client’s preferred manner of with candidates and the market.

Clients also expect that the recruiter have a good understanding of the culture and direction of their business, and that they have the skills necessary to find the right people for a good organisational fit.

Most clients agreed that generally the professionalism and standard of recruitment services received was quite good, and in some cases excellent, however there are some areas where agencies need to remain vigilant and improve their offerings. Particular areas of improvement include staff training, and a greater commitment to deliver what has been agreed by being more careful to do what they say they will do.

PRESERVATION OF THE CLIENT BRAND

The second theme emerging from the interviews is not as self-evident as the first and is perhaps a little more difficult to deal with. All interviewees were firmly of the view that the recruitment agent represents the client’s brand and image in the market place. The recruiter represents the client’s brand in advertising, in all candidate contact, and in presenting the client to the candidates. At all times the agent needs to respect the client’s brand in all actions and behaviours in the market.

This can mean special processes are required specifically to meet the needs of a single client, which can be difficult to achieve for a recruiter with a multitude of clients to work.

The clients highlighted that this is a key driver behind establishing panel arrangements – as it allows the establishment of a strong client-recruiter relationship where the client can work with the recruiter to establish clear and consistent procedures for managing recruitment on their behalf.

However, even being a panel member does not mean achieving this is easy. One of the interviewees said that “we see recruiters as an extension of (the bank); they represent us in the market. ... But a big issue for us is lack of consistency across consultants and across states.”

Most panel arrangements require quarterly review of performance with reference to defined performance measures, or key performance measures (KPIs). The interviewees are aware of the difficulties that this can sometimes present to recruiters. Many recruiters do not have systems established which can readily extract the necessary data, necessitating laborious manual work-arounds. This raises concerns around consistency, accuracy and timeliness.

However, of greater concern to those interviewed is that there are some elements of the agreed processes which are not measured as they are not directly relevant to the recruitment service to the client, yet they still impact the representation of the client into the market. Sharyn Gowans, Holden, said “we often get complaints from candidates that they have not received feedback from the recruiter. Now, the agreement we have with the recruiter stipulates that they should give timely feedback, but clearly they don’t always do this. Unfortunately this failure impacts our reputation in the market.”

Brand preservation is such a significant issue that some businesses are considering taking recruiting back in-house, and in fact there are many high profile companies which have already done this. According to the clients interviewed who have already made this change or are considering it, by resuming control over recruitment they can better

manage the quality of the process. Lowering recruitment costs is another important factor, and this is supported by emerging technology which is making candidate database management and selection processes easier to use.

The shift to in-house recruitment has already significantly impacted a number of recruiters. Recruiters who manage the clients brand by maintaining high quality of service and consistency of delivery, and can demonstrate this through regular and comprehensive performance reporting, will be influencing some of the drivers of this trend.

CONCLUSION

Overall the interviews have highlighted that major users of recruiting services are satisfied with the level and quality of service they receive, and the integrity of the business supplying them. However, many of those interviewed highlighted common areas which need more attention: maintaining training in changes in regulations and legislation is important; enhancing processes for consistency and reliability is required.

Over the coming months Fathom will continue these interviews to maintain an on-going link into how clients view recruitment services, and where the industry is moving.

Dianne Gibert is the Operations Director of Fathom Consulting Group, based in Melbourne. Fathom has developed the Service Excellence concept and is leading the development of IP to support the application of Customer Service Standards in Australian service businesses. Fathom developed and is managing the RCSA Service Delivery Standard on behalf of the RCSA.

For more information please view the Fathom website at www.fathomconsulting.com.au, or

email directly to
di.gibert@fathomconsulting.com.au.