

The recruitment revolution

The recruitment sector is changing, but it's important to keep sight of the fundamentals, writes Gareth Naughton

The advent of LinkedIn and other social media tools has revolutionised the recruitment process, with the result that some companies are taking it in-house. Are they shooting themselves in the foot, however, by forgoing the expertise of an experienced recruitment agency or consultant who may be better positioned to secure them the best candidate available?

While recruiters have reported an upturn in business in the past year, there is no doubt that the playing field has changed. It is a smaller market and that means tougher competition and clients looking for agencies willing to go the extra mile. Added to that you have the advent of a raft of new ways of accessing potential candidates which cut out the middle man.

Colm Buckley, managing director of The People Group, which is celebrating 25 years in the business this year, believes that this is a persistent issue for the recruitment industry and one which cannot be ignored.

"You won't get many recruitment company owners to admit this but the truth globally - is that many clients have deserted or are deserting the recruitment industry, at the moment and over the last number of years," he said.

"In a lot of businesses, they are cynical about the value that we add to a process, they are sceptical about our ability to deliver anything that they cannot get themselves through LinkedIn or other social media.

"We are very conscious that any decent-sized blue chip in Ireland, and certainly globally, is building very sophisticated systems. They are using LinkedIn themselves, they are hiring internal recruiters who in many instances come from the recruitment industry. All of that is specifically designed to cut out third party recruiters."

It is Buckley's contention that the fundamentals of recruitment - the craft of the

business - are being forgotten as people look to technology to solve their staffing issues, rather than bring in a third party. That technology should be seen as an extremely useful tool, he believes, but it is not the cure-all to solve all recruitment problems.

"LinkedIn for us is, in fact, something that we use as a secondary tool. It is important and there is no doubt that you will find very good people on LinkedIn but we use our own methodology of tried and trusted relationships, of picking up the phone, of getting referrals, word of mouth," he said.

"I could name four or five companies that I have personally placed very senior digital marketers in over the last six months and I found those individuals by word-of-mouth from other candidates that we had dealt with here and built up relationships with over months and years. We are running away with ourselves sometimes with the digital world and media, but they are only tools."

Underpinning the issue is that clients are no longer prepared to pay a fee for a bunch of CVs. They are looking for something more in-depth - the value-add that a recruiter should bring to the table. They are looking for recruiters capable of identifying the right talent and guiding those candidates to the point where they are willing to accept an offer.

"Recruiters need to be real experts at talent identification. There is no doubt that they need to build communities both on and off-line," he said. "Ten years ago a good recruiter would have told you that their network, the people they know and could access, was the most critical thing in them being able to do their jobs above and beyond the competition. There is no doubt about it, integrated social media and digital marketing networks are very important in terms of building your brand and reputation but they are not a panacea for the recruit-



Colm Buckley, managing director of the People Group, Picture: Barry Cronin

Comprehensive executive search is crucial

The higher up the chain you go, the more vital it is that you recruit the right people. Executives and managers operating at the upper echelons can change and mould companies - but also make or break them - so a careful and comprehensive approach to the executive search process is crucial.

Social media tools can help in the screening process, to identify and vet potential candidates but, ultimately, you cannot really examine someone's profile until you are sitting down with them to discuss their career, according to John Hartly, managing director of executive search firm Hartly International.

"One of the important pieces that executive search consultants bring to the process is that we are applying a management consultancy philosophy," said Hartly.

"We are advising our clients on the types of candidate that they should



John Hartly, managing director of executive search firm Hartly International

Finding the right hire can take a long time

be looking at to suit their organisation as opposed to being very regimental about the job spec and looking at all types of candidates that suit it.

"It is about getting them to be more focused and also, when they are looking to hire from outside their sector, that the right types of candidates are coming to the process as opposed to people who would be maybe too far left of field."

Executive search is a complex process that involves looking at a company's competitors, identifying key personnel within those companies who have potential, whittling down that list to find the top candidates and then bringing them to the interview table.

The process can involve an international component. Finding the right hire can take a long time, depending on the significance of the role, but Hartly said the result was that the

client had the benefit of choice.

He argued that companies that hire directly might have access to candidates in the top 30 per cent, but said a skilled headhunter would whittle that pool down to the top 15 per cent, many of whom may not even be actively looking for a new role.

"What a headhunter does is bring real choice to the process by not only uncovering one candidate that is potentially available, but targeting and focusing on a number of people," said Hartly.

"We would profile maybe 100 people for a position and drill that down to eight or nine people. That one candidate on the street [someone who is presently out of work] may make that process and if they do they are being benchmarked against their peers as opposed to being benchmarked against the available talent on the street," he said.

ment process at the end of the day."

Karen O'Flaherty, chief operating officer of Morgan McKinley, said Ireland's recruitment industry had changed with a greater emphasis on specialist consultants with more in-depth knowledge.

"Because our own industry has changed, we have employed a lot of people who would have already worked in particular sectors. They are networked, they understand the industry and the people that they are talking to are more affiliated with them," said O'Flaherty.

"If they are talking to those people and, equally, clients and candidates on a day-to-day basis they [have better knowledge and experience] in where the opportunities are, having the conversations to predict where the hiring might be and being able to match the skill-set with the employer better than anyone else."

Employers are also looking for advice on what is out there on the market if they are planning potential hires, and a skilled recruitment agent should be able to provide the necessary insight, O'Flaherty said. The recruitment agent

acting as the middle man is beneficial to both the employer and jobseeker, she argued, with the former likely to find a candidate who is going to stay put for a period of time and the latter bringing negotiation skills to the table.

"There are a number of employers who would be happy to pay over and above for the right person, others cannot afford to pay certain people, but they are looking for that expertise on how to serve them on benefits when they cannot necessarily afford to pay out on salary. Somebody who is actually very industry-specific and has that day-to-day knowledge can add a lot in that middle ground," she said.

The sector has changed as well because the "quick buck" mentality of the boom is no longer prevalent. The market is too small to sustain it.

"There is a realisation that you have to look after your customer, whether that is the professional or an employer. That has left our industry, thankfully, and people are out to give a good service, knowing that if they don't get a return, in the first instance that the jobseeker or the employer will come back to them," said O'Flaherty.

Working Week

Eithne Scott Lennon is owner of Fitzpatrick's Killiney Castle Hotel and has, since last September, served as chair of Dun Laoghaire Harbour Company. DLHC is the statutory commercial body charged with developing Dun Laoghaire Harbour as a marine tourism gateway to Ireland, maintaining and enhancing its value as a recreational amenity, and promoting investment and commercial development.

What are the main responsibilities of your job?
In my role as DLHC chair, my main responsibility is to see us through the transition of shareholding to the local authority, following the guidelines of the new Ports Policy. The harbour announced an enormously ambitious masterplan in 2011. This will see the harbour grow and develop as a marine, tourism and leisure harbour of international standing. My role will be to guide our board and management through the exciting challenges we face in achieving these goals, with guidance and collaboration. We hope we will find innovative and exciting partners as we progress.

What motivates you in your job?
The challenges I face on a regular basis. During my term as a director on the DLHC board, I have seen enormous changes. Due to the economic situation, there has been the need to



Eithne Scott Lennon, owner, Fitzpatrick's Killiney Castle Hotel

find other sources of proven sustainable revenue. As part of our masterplan, for example, we are looking forward to developing cruise ship facilities. This will mean a change in how we, as a harbour company, do business and enters us firmly into the tourism sphere. We also have plans to develop an International Diaspora Centre, which will be a first, not just for Ireland, but for Europe. We are on our way to developing an urban beach with seawater baths alongside the East Pier.

How would you describe your work style?
My work style is driven. I believe management should be allowed to manage with clear guidance and direction. Procrastination frustrates me. Consistent service and standards are my priority.

What is the most valuable professional lesson you have learned so far?
There is always a wolf in the woods. When circumstances change unexpectedly, be they economical or environ-

mental, you should have a survival plan so that you are ready for the wolf. You have to find inner strength and resilience deep in your core when faced with difficult times. I have also learned to take advice when it's given, or seek it when needed, because you can't do everything alone. Your team and close ones should be your support, so choose wisely who you want around you.

Whose career do you most admire and why?
Miriam O'Callaghan, RTE

broadcaster and journalist. She is an intelligent, charming and talented broadcaster, who represents working women so well with her seamless pride in motherhood.

What is the most valuable career advice you can offer others?

Really love what you do, otherwise you will never be truly fulfilled or enjoy life. From a career perspective, always have a goal to aim for so that you don't get stuck in a rut. Create these challenges and goals for yourself.

In terms of doing business in Ireland, what do you think is the biggest challenge we face?

It is important to remember that we are an island, so we have to fight harder for our place at every level. I would like to see the government provide more training incentives for young people, so we can retain them in our industries.

What is your ultimate professional goal?
My ultimate goal is to see Dun Laoghaire Harbour, and the surrounding areas, reinvented. To achieve this, my current priority is to see our masterplan for Dun Laoghaire gather momentum. In my own business, it would be to continue to re-invest and improve our service standards, so all our customers are left with a positive experience.

Movers & Shakers

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■ Bob Hoffman is the new chief executive of The Sales Institute of Ireland. Hoffman joins from Three Ireland where he was client director for 12 months. He was also a sales director with Shared Access for four years.



■ Helen Moore has joined Lisney in the role of director for new homes. Moore was formerly portfolio manager with Nama for three years, a Central Bank credit analyst for 12 months, and a director with Savills for two years.



■ Espion has appointed a new head of technology distribution for Northern Ireland. Keith Bradley joined the company three years ago from Trapeze Networks where he was a sales engineer for close to three years.



■ Lisa Rocca is Coldwell Banker Estates' new residential sales manager for south Dublin. Rocca joins from Heritage Properties where she was a property project manager for 13 years.



■ Paralympics Ireland has announced the appointment of a new performance manager. Dave Malone has been head of swimming with the organisation for the past four-and-a-half years having been a full-time Paralympic swimmer for 15 years.



■ James Kehoe has been appointed product manager with Compliance & Risks in Cork. He had previously been the founder of Policy Impact Assessment, a role he held for three years. Prior to that he was a commercial manager with NECL in Cork.

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