

Maximising sales performance

By **Brent Duffy**, Director, Maximus

With my background in recruitment and 16 years of sales experience, I know first-hand how economic changes affect recruitment sales. Through the ups and downs, I have learned an important fact of recruitment life: faced with a tight market and demanding clients, a successful recruiter will be the one who is the most strategic.

The current market is client-driven and will probably remain so for the foreseeable future. Given there are around 3,000 recruitment agencies in Australia totalling more than 15,000 staff,¹ winning new clients and growing existing ones will remain competitive. So how do you gain an edge and stand out?

My first manager taught me that in recruitment sales, the more energy, effort and thought you put in, the more you will achieve. Only you can fill your sales pipeline with prospective clients and your in-tray with vacancies. However, being active does not necessarily mean working 14 hours a day, making cold calls and visiting prospects. It means working smarter.

HOW TO GET SMART

Understand your clients

Clients want to work with a recruiter who really understands their business and offers advice, candidates and solutions that will help them grow. They also want someone who adds value, for example who researches alternative options they hadn't asked for.

The more you know about your clients' business and people, the more proactive you can be. Track their performance in the business pages, browse industry websites and keep your ear to the ground about changes. As an expert in their business, you will lift yourself above the pack.

Research the macro business environment

While driving productivity is the number one issue and priority for organisations

today, they don't necessarily want to bring on new headcount, so every manager is trying to increase outputs with less people. As a result, they have become very short term focused and have little to no time or headspace to see what is happening in their market. As consultants, we have the ability to close this gap for clients, yet we often underestimate and underutilise our market intelligence and commercial acumen.

To become a great recruiter, thoroughly research your clients' industry segments, keep abreast of how trends and changes impact them and know how they perform against their competitors. Do they face major threats or opportunities? Share your insights and knowledge with your clients. Position yourself as their trusted advisor and you will be the first person they call for advice, not just to fill a job.

Nurture people

Clients and candidates are the currency of our industry. A candidate may one day be a client and vice versa. They are your conduit to job and talent leads.

Once you have established a relationship with someone, don't let it lapse. Keep in touch with them. Remember: if you don't stay close to them, one of your competitors will.

Be proactive

Advertisement chasing, CV floating and reverse marketing candidates are always essential for bringing on new jobs. But your competitors will do this too, so think of more creative ways to get in front of clients.

Be proactive with clients – don't just email a resume and wait for their call. Once you are up to speed with their organisation and their industry, call them. Most managers want the highest calibre person in their team, and they want them now. You are not bothering them if you call to discuss a candidate who is obviously a good match for their role.

Put together a thorough sales plan

We are all time-poor. A good sales person is not the one who spends the most hours at work; they are the one who is clear about the most productive ways to invest their time.

Use your industry knowledge to plan your next sales period. List clients you want to see and the insights or value you can offer them, and create a list of new clients to target and why. Prioritise your lists – which ones are likely to provide the best outcome for your efforts? Do this every quarter. This kind of tactical planning will help you spend productive time and look after your existing clients and win new ones.

Develop high-performance sales people

If you manage a team of recruitment sales people, aim to turn each one into a highly motivated, high achieving performer. There are many levers you can pull to do this. They include:

- better selection;
- driving engagement;
- great culture;
- superior sales and planning tools;
- workable client relationship management systems; and
- a clear sales cycle.

You also need to become a high performer yourself. Successful managers have the skills to be their team's driver, motivator, trainer, compliance manager, mentor, counsellor, role model, coach and performance manager.

Recruitment is a proactive industry that requires drive and motivation. If you invest energy, time, research and thought into your clients and your team, you will get the outputs you want. ■



Brent Duffy is a Director of Maximus, a leading business performance consultancy specialising in strategy, sales force effectiveness, leadership development and

organisational development. Brent has consulted to and developed many of Australia's top senior leaders and executives across a wide range of sectors. His core capabilities are in strategy planning and execution, sales force development, performance management and leadership development. Brent joined Maximus in 2003 after an eight-year career with Morgan and Banks Group and has since added value to an impressive list of clients including: News Limited, QBE, Marsh, Corrs lawyers, ING, 3M, Tabcorp and Caltex.