HIRING GUIDE

The Example Guide to Working with Recruitment Agencies

Written by people who spent 20 years on your side of the desk: poor candidate relevance, a misunderstood brief, and a recruiter who goes quiet after the second CV rejection — here's how to stop that happening.

We've spent most of our careers on your side of the fence. For over 20 years we led and built marketing teams, and we usually had fairly poor experiences with recruiters — weak candidate relevance, a general misunderstanding of the brief, and a recruiter whose engagement visibly wanes after two or three CV rejections.

We set out to fix that, but we'll also admit we were part of the problem ourselves. How you engage a recruiter, in any domain, dictates the output you get back. This guide is what we've learned over the years — you might conclude you're better off running the search yourself, or you might just change how you brief and manage the recruiters you already use. Either way, the aim is the same: get better value from recruitment.

THE INCENTIVE PROBLEM

How Recruiters Really Operate: Risk vs Reward

Imagine you're buying wine. You ask three people to find you the perfect bottle, and whoever wins gets £5,000 — the other two get nothing. The first buyer goes to the corner shop and grabs the first ten bottles he sees. The second goes to Waitrose, reasons that Bordeaux is usually decent, and buys three bottles of it. The third asks what wine you actually like, goes to a specialist shop, tries a wide range from regions he knows well, and comes back with a bottle of 1975 Margaux.

All three are taking a real shot at the prize, but each is weighing risk differently — and that's exactly what shapes how much of their time you get. Now imagine that third buyer comes back to find the first buyer's ten bottles have already been delivered, you liked two of them, and you've already drunk them. What is he going to do with that 1975 Margaux he's just gone to the trouble of acquiring?

“Recruiters are incentivised to work with clients who will provide a fee. The greater the certainty of earning that fee, the more of their time you will get — the lower the certainty, the less.”

Treat a recruitment agency as a contingent necessity and force it to compete against others, and you won't get that bottle of 1975 Margaux — unless the agency happens to know a very good corner shop.

FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK

Choosing Your Recruiter

There are many kinds of recruiter — big agencies or small boutiques — and the real question is what you actually want from the relationship. Before you sign anyone up, ask these questions.

Before you sign anyone up, ask:

- [ ] **Who will be representing our brand? Is it the person you're speaking to now, or someone more junior with very little grasp of the role? Who's actually talking to your candidates in the market, and are they upholding your brand values?**
- [ ] **How will they carry out the search? Are they scouring the market for whoever's available, or hunting for the best-fit talent whether that person is actively looking or not? Some recruiters only approach people open to work, some rely purely on job ad applicants, and some approach anyone who fits the brief.**
- [ ] **Have they actually understood the brief? It doesn't always matter — many technical roles are largely box-checking exercises — but senior or creative roles are more subjective and open to nuance. Check the recruiter understands what your candidates do day-to-day and genuinely knows the industry.**
- [ ] **Who have they placed in similar roles? Ask for examples, and ask why those candidates were the best fit for that company — it's the fastest way to gauge candidate quality.**
- [ ] **How do they prefer to work? Ask this and you'll often hear "we prefer to work exclusively." If so, follow up with why — and listen for evidence of a genuinely high-quality process and a real timescale attached to that exclusivity.**

SPEED

Nailing Your Hiring Process

Even with an exclusivity deal in place, a recruiter may still be presenting your shortlisted candidates to other roles — it's risk vs reward again, and recruiters need to make money like any other business. Unless the fee is guaranteed, expect some competition for your candidates.

That makes speed non-negotiable. The longer you take over assessing CVs, arranging interviews, giving interview follow-up, arranging second interviews, deciding internally and putting an offer together, the greater the risk your chosen candidate goes elsewhere — or worse, pulls out through sheer frustration. We've seen it happen, and it results in hiring processes that stretch beyond two months.

24 hrs Commit to feeding back on **every CV within 24 hours**, and to giving post-interview feedback within 24 hours too.

Before the process starts:

- [ ] **Put dates in the diary. Agree with your recruiter in advance when the first round of interviews will take place, confirm internally that everyone required is available, and block-book if you need to.**
- [ ] **Set yourself an SLA. Commit to feeding back on every CV within 24 hours, and to giving post-interview feedback within 24 hours too — the longer this takes, the more the whole process extends.**
- [ ] **Use Calendly (or similar). Let candidates pick interview slots within a set timeframe so internal diaries don't clash.**
- [ ] **Get your offer letters and contracts done in advance. Prepare all of this at the start of the process so nobody is left hanging once you're ready to move.**

THE BRIEF

Give Them a Really Solid Brief

No information is bad information. Our market insight reports help TA teams build a solid understanding of a new role or location, so salaries and offers are aligned with what the market actually expects. We carry out a salary survey entirely bespoke to you, covering the full salary and package expectations of your local market and the work situations candidates are looking for.

That report also indicates the size of the market and its potential churn, looks into which competitors are active in it, how much they're recruiting, and what they're offering to attract talent.

- Salary & package expectations
- Work situations candidates want
- Market size
- Potential churn
- Active competitors
- How much they're recruiting
- What they're offering

HOW WE WORK

Full-Service Recruitment

We're often brought in when TA teams are stretched, or when a role is particularly difficult to fill. For some roles we're simply not needed — but for others, our experience of having done or line-managed the role ourselves, combined with market expertise, is genuinely useful. We've worked with recruiters and TA experts over the last two years to refine our process, learning from the best and building our own marketing skills on top of it.

We take a thorough brief from your hiring managers, dig into the culture and the day-to-day, then source, screen and support you through the whole process:

1. Briefing meeting
2. Sourcing

3. Screening calls
4. Presentation of candidate shortlist
5. Support in scheduling interviews and preparing candidates
6. Negotiation
7. Preparation of candidate documents and references
8. Free replacement in probation

NUMBERS TO REMEMBER

Three numbers from this guide

20%

of the candidate's annual salary — our full-service fee

24 hrs

the CV and interview feedback SLA we recommend you set yourself

2 mths+

how long a slow hiring process can drag on, and lose you the candidate

> We are building a brand that I would always have wanted to use when I was in marketing. That combination of expertise and service is something I could never find. What's more, our flexibility extends to the whole team. We work around our clients and our candidates, not a strict nine-to-five, and certainly not in an office. This means we can attract talented people to become recruiters, and make recruitment a far more pleasurable experience for everyone.
>
> — GARETH CARTMAN, FOUNDER

Example Recruitment — marketing-led headhunters for SaaS and FinTech startups and scaleups in New York and London.
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