



## How to attract top performing Field Sales professionals

Your field team are the face of your company, the people who give the first face to face impression of your business to any prospective customer. A poor piece of recruitment in this area is costly, and not just in terms of financial outlay for recruitment costs. Get it wrong and any prospective customer will be left with a long lasting negative impression of your business that could ensure they are turning to your competitors for years to come.

This guide will highlight the 9 biggest mistakes that companies make when recruiting Field Sales professionals; why they happen and how to avoid them. You will discover how to improve your resources and reduce your recruitment costs, which will save you valuable time when you are recruiting.

### 1. Panic buying

Yes, it is damaging to have a territory unmanned. The cost of having no one in post in terms of your pipeline is daunting. You feel the pressure to get someone on board and fast. But this is no reason to offer the first smooth talking, sales has-been whose CV lands on your desk. Take time to source and interview the full range of candidates that are available to you. This may take a few weeks and another month to wait for your new employee to work out their notice period, but when they start you will have full confidence in their ability to represent your company and, if your new recruit is the right candidate they will begin to make a noticeable impact from day one. The alternative – you hire the wrong candidate, go through the tedious process of extracting them from your organisation and spend months rectifying the damage their poor salesmanship has caused. Oh, and you have to go through the entire recruitment process once again.

### 2. Not advertising the role in the right places

It is widely accepted that you need to advertise your vacancy in order to attract candidates. How and where you advertise will have a massive impact on the quality of the applicants. The aim is to attract not only field sales people that are actively looking for work, but also passive potential job seekers who might move for the right opportunity.

Consider the options available to you. Generic job boards such as 'Totaljobs' 'Reed' or 'CVLibrary' can attract a good number of candidates as they are well known career sites covering multiple disciplines. Specific websites such as 'simplysalesjobs.co.uk' will usually attract more experienced sales professionals. Needless to say, consider your industry, if you are recruiting for a field sales executive from an FMCG background, advertising via 'The Grocer' will yield far better results than advertising in 'Horse and Hound'!

Alternatively, you could use traditional methods of advertising such as the local newspaper, although I would argue that it can be an expensive experience and the majority of job seekers now tend to look for work online. One thing to consider with all direct advertising is that there is no guarantee. If you do not successfully recruit through your advertisement, you are back to square one.



Use your job description to create an advert for the role, making sure that the advert has the job title, salary, location of work and some appealing extracts of the job description that will entice job seekers to apply. You want your job advert to stand out, so work out what sets your opportunity apart from other jobs and use this to create a strong headline for your advert.

Consider the audience that you are looking to appeal to, for sales, the chances are that this headline will be best focussed around financial or other benefits that the role offers. It is proven that you will receive a better advert response with a salary clearly stated on the advert. When you are tempted to put 'Competitive Salary' on your advert, consider that most sales roles that state this are low level, door to door or telesales opportunities and top sales professionals are very likely to be put off from reading the rest of the advert, let alone applying

Your chosen agency can advertise the role for you, usually for no additional cost. Their costs are usually built into the final fee which you will only pay if you decide to recruit one of their candidates. In addition to this free advertising service you would typically get a safety net of the agency's guarantee should the new hire not be the top performing field sales professional that you expected. Your chosen agency can also headhunt for you should you be looking for a specific skill set, or perhaps you need some niche industry experience. Again, this should all be part of their candidate attraction strategy and included in the final fee should you recruit via their service.

Forward thinking agencies embrace social media as a tool for headhunting or attracting passive job seekers that aren't actively looking at job sites. Ask your agency what their social media activity is like; I would be looking for them to talk about how they use pay per click advertising on Facebook, Indeed or LinkedIn to promote your vacancy.

### **3. Look internally**

It may well be you already have the ideal candidate under your nose. If you have an internal sales team, chances are many of these employees would jump at the chance to be considered for a field-based position. They know the business, the products and probably most of your existing customer base, as well as who they need to target. Yes, they would need training and support but so would any new employee.

Keep an eye on the talent already in your business and you could find that your next superstar sales executive is already on your payroll waiting for their opportunity to shine. Some of the best field executives started out as internal sales. Looking internally when you are recruiting also sends the right message to your staff. It shows you care about retaining and promoting good people, and there are good prospects for career progression. In a recent staffing poll, it was said that 77% of all employees were more motivated by internal promotions at work than by a pay rise! So, not only could you get your current vacancy filled, you will motivate an employee and create a culture of positivity. Because of their existing knowledge it is highly likely that they will quickly become a profitable contributor to your sales team!

### **4. Be flexible**

It is all too easy to have a check list of exactly what you want from your next hire. In your mind you have the perfect picture of your newest team member and nothing less than a carbon copy will



suffice. Be flexible. If a candidate ticks all the boxes but there are one or two elements that are not quite what you expected rationalise how important these missing qualities really are. Can you offer additional training to compensate for the lacking elements?

For example, a good client of mine that operated within a small niche industry interviewed someone they really liked, and who ticked most of the boxes except they didn't have any experience of selling their products. They had, however, sold a closely related product into the same client base. After weighing up their options my client decided to take the candidate on and implemented additional product training into his induction. The result, the client employed a top performing field sales executive that was willing to learn, and with a small amount of additional support he was a strong ambassador for the business and produced consistently strong sales figures.

## 5. Be consistent with your interviews

We all know that as a hiring manager the route to recruiting a new field sales person or any member of staff is usually through HR. Your HR team/individual are great to have involved in the process due to their skill and experience of recruiting. As the successful candidate will ultimately work for you it is essential that you are significantly involved in the recruitment and interview process.

Take the time to meet with your HR representative and ensure they understand exactly what you are looking for and why. Equally this works when you're liaising directly with a recruitment agency. If you only give your recruiter limited information and let them fill in the blanks, they will assume the rest and we all know what that results in... lots of time wasted for all parties on sifting through the wrong CVs and interviewing the wrong people. If you are recruiting alongside another hiring manager for a job share role, make sure you are both on the same page too. If you put the time in to start by properly communicating your requirements however busy you are, you will save time in the long run.

With all the recruiting experience we have we still insist on meeting with all of our new clients in person to ensure we have all the information needed to effectively recruit for them. Without this meeting we would be stabbing in the dark resulting in frustration from all parties and a lot of wasted time and energy.

## 6. Plan a structure and stick to it

When it comes to interviewing, consistency is key. You wouldn't expect to fairly judge a contest without evaluating the entrants on the same criteria, the same applies when hiring your field sales team. Prior to the interview work out a series of questions that you want to ask based on what is required for the role and write them down. If you are asking candidates to present at their interview, then make sure they have the same brief. You get the idea. Naturally your delivery will differ depending on the candidate that you are interviewing but, if you write down the answers to the set questions then you will be left with a full understanding of how they compare to each other which you can use to help in your decision-making process.

When I interview for my field sales executives I draw up a competency-based interview structure using the job description I have taken from my client. I then interview all of the candidates using this structure and write up the report into a matrix where I can apply an overall rating to each interviewee. Yes, it takes a bit of time in the preparation but in the long term it is invaluable.



## 7. Don't be afraid to ask for more candidates

So, you have interviewed and second interviewed all of your applicants but are still not convinced by any of them. First, ask yourself if you could afford to be more flexible, is there a gem of a candidate in there who just needs a bit finer tuning? If the answer is no, then don't be afraid to ask for more candidates. If you are working with a recruitment agency they may be reluctant to start the process again but stick to your guns. You know your business better than anyone else and as per point one, far better to take the time you need to find the right candidate for your role, then employ in haste and spend the foreseeable future rueing the day that you signed that employment contract!

## 8. Not taking up references

Any offer of employment to a potential employee should always be made 'pending satisfactory references'. If you don't take up references this can leave your company wide open to potential problems.

You should take up references to clarify the information the candidate has disclosed to you, both on their CV and at interview is correct. You will also want to verify and confirm the candidate's credentials.

Believe it or not people do stretch the truth! I was truly shocked when at one time I was speaking to a new client to Vanilla and to hear of their experience when recruiting for a field sales professional for their technology business. They had managed to find what they believed to be an honest, hardworking and tenacious professional sales person, and offered them the job. All was going well, until about four months into the role cracks started to appear. There were inconsistencies in the person's work performance, targets were not being hit and the candidate was regularly calling in sick.

It was only at this point that the Managing Director decided to take up references. To his astonishment, the length of time the sales professional had been in their previous roles had been stretched to improve the CV, they had grossly exaggerated their sales figures and there were major disparities in their reasons for leaving former employers.

Although this is an extreme example it should serve as a warning to all employers about the importance of taking references.

References should be used to verify information about your new recruit so that you can be confident they will prove to be a successful member of your team.

## 9. Ongoing training and development

The contract is signed, the induction is finished, and your new sales executive is off to his or her first sales appointment in their shiny new lease car. You sit down and pat yourself on the back for your great recruitment efforts and wait in earnest for the new sales to start rolling in, right? Wrong! Don't be complacent. Sales executives that are out on the road alone for most of their day need encouragement and to feel valued.



The induction period is the foundation for getting the most out of any new employee; don't assume that because they might be an internal candidate or experienced sales professional that they will pick things up as they go along. Make the effort to ensure they feel part of the business and show your commitment to their success with the company by laying out an ongoing training and development plan for them.

Arrange for them to spend time with different areas of the business as well as other sales executives and if you can, get out and spend time with them yourself on a regular basis.

The result, a happy employee that feels valued and who is completely committed to a long and successful career with your company. Not to mention you have a motivated field sales executive that is achieving targets. Win-win!

**We hope you have found this guide useful. At Vanilla Recruitment, we pride ourselves on the level of customer service we provide to our candidates and clients ensuring the recruitment experience is a positive one.**

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