

Hiring a Sales Person Overseas

As your export opportunities grow, you may want to recruit someone on the ground to develop your new market. However, the approach you take should be driven by, and integrated within, your overall business plan.

Hiring the Right Person

Having employees overseas will naturally mean tax and social insurance obligations in that country. Expert advice should be taken from the start to minimize potential hiccups and to allow you to concentrate on selling and growing the business.

Recruitment is a step forward for your company but it's important not to rush in, no matter how exciting the prospects. Hiring the wrong person could create problems that take months, even years, to resolve, with reputational damage, missed opportunities and HR headaches all part of the collateral damage, not to mention the toll on your emotions, time planning and your strategic business plan.

Recruitment

Your new recruit is your business card in the market so, to find the right person, it helps to build a profile of the ideal candidate. Knowledge of your customer base is valuable in this regard. Are you selling into an emerging sector or a mature market? Is technical knowledge essential or are good contacts more important?

Bear in mind your job specification may be different in the new country to the home market. If you're recruiting in a different culture, language, salary, and education zone, you have to take all the new factors into consideration. In the recruitment process, you are selling your company. It's important to paint a positive but authentic picture of who you are. Being honest about where your challenges lie may scare off weaker candidates, but it will show strong candidates where they can bring added value.

Recruitment consultants can seem expensive but, in markets where the business culture is significantly different, they may provide a critical steer in the right direction. However, it's important to ensure you find the right head-hunter for your sector and job spec.

Reference and background checks are essential but can be difficult and culturally sensitive. You may be able to use your own network to identify someone who can give an honest appraisal of the candidate.

Tips

- Be aware of recruitment times, employment levels and salary expectations from the start. Remember it can take up to six months to get the right person on board. Don't compromise for a quick result.
- Create a profile of your ideal hire and use a pre-defined system for ranking and rating each candidate.
- Make sure you are asking the right questions: Does this person need to have led a team before? Do they need to know your product? Do they need to have pre-existing contacts in the customer base?
- Try psychometric testing. These tests are cheap, incredibly accurate and almost impossible to trick.
- Asking candidates to substantiate assertions about previous salaries, particularly for a high-end hire, can help separate bluffers from serious prospects.
- Consider simulated sales calls and a PowerPoint presentation as a final challenge for prospective candidates. It can quickly reveal real ability.
- Stay in contact. Once you've got your hire, keep in touch in the period before they come on board. This reassures them they have made the right decision and could prevent a costly last-minute episode of cold feet.

Pitfalls to avoid

- Objectivity is the single most important factor in effective interviewing. If you insist on hiring on gut instinct, you run the risk of getting caught out by the charismatic 'sales spoofer'.



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- Your sales leaders may react negatively to a profiling process, arguing it takes too long. Explain that, by ‘qualifying out’ candidates along the way, you are giving yourself more time to focus on the most qualified candidates.
- Don’t veer off pre-set questions specifically designed to evoke responses in the interview process. You risk losing objectivity and a true picture of the candidate’s strengths and weaknesses.
- Cultural differences are real and need to be accounted for. The sales personality that works best in the US is typically much stronger than in your country. A brash persona in China, on the other hand, will not be conducive to success.
- What is the context of your candidate’s previous success? A sales executive who performed well in a big company might be a dismal failure working from home.
- A recruiter’s goal is, understandably, to place a candidate and get paid. However their agenda should not rush yours. Their job is to identify and screen candidates; the rest is up to you.
- In the US, firing isn’t such a big issue and putting a new hire on 60 to 90 days probation is good practice. In the EU, probationary terms and conditions will vary from country to country.
- Make sure you can communicate. If you don’t share fluency in a language with your new recruit, it can be difficult to integrate them fully into the team.
- You need to have an anchor employee, someone you can rely on to operate the business successfully in a particular location.

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