



8 Marketing essentials for recruiters

How to boost your recruitment agency's profits through marketing

White Paper

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Introduction

Although there has always been a need to market vacancies, historically the recruitment sector has seen many aspects of the marketing function as optional. However, the need to meet today's business challenges such as increased competition, rapidly escalating costs and the compliance burden of employment law is increasing operational complexity.

In such an operating environment, profitability and growth are difficult to maintain, and as a result, many recruiters now find that to treat marketing as a 'take it or leave it' option is no longer an affordable luxury.

For recruitment agencies that have not placed too great an emphasis on marketing, the continuing uncertainty in the global economy means there is an increasing need to push promotional activity up the agenda to maximise whatever opportunities are available. For those that have made more of an effort to exploit the marketer's toolbox, now is the time to sharpen existing marketing activity.

In this guide we give an overview of some of the key considerations and concepts for successfully marketing recruitment businesses today.

1. It all begins with the marketing strategy

There are many tactics used by marketers, but where do you begin? How do you know what the best approach is for a recruitment business without thinking it through? You wouldn't go on holiday without planning - flights, accommodation and activities. So why approach marketing like that? The answer is to develop a plan for tactical activity. This is part of the Marketing Strategy. It not only lets you know what you are doing and when, it also sets out why you are doing it.

A Marketing Strategy ensures effective analysis

The need to generate opportunities quickly may mean that the effort directed into strategic planning is minimal. This is often true in smaller organisations where the marketing function operates with limited resources. It's important to resist the temptation to rush the strategy stage, and to dive in and initiate ad-hoc tactical marketing with no real plan which structures activity.

Avoid this at all costs. Do your homework thoroughly first - get the strategy right.

Those that have been through the process lifecycle may be well aware of the wider implications of a Marketing Strategy; however for those that have not, it is worth recapping the points below:

- A Marketing Strategy ensures effective analysis is carried out enabling you to understand your business, target market, competitors and marketplace
 - Because of poor experiences, there may be a perception that marketing performs ineffectively
 - This may be the result of not having a properly prepared Marketing Strategy which causes fundamental errors to occur through lack of analysis and understanding
- Recruitment's 'target market' is actually composed of two distinctly different audience types
 - clients and candidates
 - The strategy forces you to consider all the marketing activity you could pursue, ensuring your effort is spread across the channels and media relevant to each audience type

- The process of creating the strategy is a source of inspiration for campaign ideas; a launch pad to develop content for use in your tactical activities
 - This means creative thinking flourishes up front only if it matches the strategy
 - This is highly efficient because it lets you evaluate the quality of ideas quickly
 - Poor ideas are discarded early in the development process and effort concentrated on good ideas
- A strategy helps you plan your marketing month-on-month and creates the structure for regular organised activity, the hallmark of effective marketing in today's business environment

2. Brand Matters

So you've got a business name and a logo that identifies your business on letterheads, business cards and perhaps your website... so what else do you need? These three may have sufficed 15 or 20 years ago. However, in today's world, a brand cannot be regarded as just a logo.

A brand is a promise that encapsulates your values, positions you in the marketplace against your competitors and appeals to your target audiences. It is the identity of your business, and conveys who your company really is and what it stands for.

The brand is encapsulated and wrapped up in a number of elements, and the logo or brandmark is merely the central graphic component.

Other elements include (but are not limited to):

- The visual language - the use of colour, graphics, photography, typography and layout
- The written language that you use - keywords and phrases
- The narrative contained in a Mission Statement and/or About Us website pages

Taken together these make up your brand. It is extremely important that your website is an accurate vehicle for your brand, because for many it is the first touch point with your firm.

Once created, keep it consistent across everything you do – design, tone of voice and so on. Ensure you and your employees 'live your brand'. It's not just something you create for the purposes of marketing. It is what your business is all about.

3. Focus marketing activity on your website

Digital marketing continues to move forward. We may lament the demise of 'traditional' advertising and marketing channels such as print and broadcast; however it is not that these are irrelevant; today, they simply no longer dominate.

If anything, this works to the advantage of small and mid-sized businesses, because effective marketing is no longer based solely on deep pockets to budget for full page ads or prime-time slots. Much smaller marketing budgets can be used effectively to yield greater value and performance is now almost entirely measurable.

It is now an inescapable fact that your website must be at the focus of your promotional activity - everything needs to point to it. Once, websites were treated as just a shop window. But we have moved way beyond this now. We must engage and communicate with visitors to our websites.

Site visitor expectations are well developed, many shaped by conventions for structuring website content. Make sure that basics like company information and contact details are easy to find and competently written. The site should identify a USP (Unique Selling Point) that positions the business as a 'go to' expert, showcase the brand and demonstrate your presence and immediacy. If you're difficult to get hold of to talk business, prospects and even clients eventually go elsewhere.

Your website is where you publish informational marketing resources and establish yourself as a thought-leaders. Encourage people to download your valuable content in return for registering their contact details. Your website needs calls-to-action, it needs to generate leads. You want as many people as possible to tell you who they are before they leave the website. Use an automated inbound marketing system to help boost your website from being simply a 'brochure website' and install sign-up or contact us forms to start a dialogue. Start a monthly newsletter to your clients and potential clients (those that sign up for more information on your website). We'll discuss this in more detail later on.

4. Google is a friend worth knowing well

Unless your chosen abode is a cave in a remote region without mod cons, search engines are the way that most of us locate information about services and products we need. Despite the presence of alternatives such as Yahoo! and Bing, Google is the first choice for web searches. Currently nearly 78 out every 100 go through Google's domains. This means Google is a friend that you should get to know well.

Your agency website or vacancies have to be highly visible to Google to be easily found. To most search engine users, this means getting high up the ranking and onto the first page of Google search results.

SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) is the process of fine-tuning your website so that it is friendly to search activity in general and optimised for Google's search algorithm.

Once optimised, your site is highly visible, easily found and returns high up on Google's rankings when keywords relevant to your agency are used by searchers (such as your sector, types of roles you are advertising, and so on). These are likely to identify your service, roles and a location, so 'recruitment', 'I.T. executives' and 'London', for example. Optimisation is achieved through carrying out both onsite and offsite SEO.

A Marketing Strategy ensures effective analysis

- The technical implementation of your website needs to be designed for easy reading and navigation by search engines - the key is to focus on what the user would intuitively do as they view your website. It's not always what you think. Make the features your call-to-actions and main titles. Use bullet points where possible and avoid bulk text full of waffle.
- Make the elements which search engines look for keyword rich (remember from above: the words 'recruitment', your sector or roles and the area); these include page titles and tags such as headings (H1, H2, H3) and images.
- Publish keyword rich content - repeat keywords with care. Always go for the rule of thumb that your content on your website must make sense to your audience. So don't repeat "I.T. executive in Sydney" in every second sentence for the sake of it. Google (and Bing) punish websites by downgrading their ranking.
- Maximise the number of pages on your website. Sometimes more is less!

- Constantly update your website. Don't leave it to be a static 'brochure website'. Visitors and Google will recognise this and you'll not only lose the interest of prospective clients and candidates, but Google will also lower your ranking.

To ensure offsite SEO

Offsite SEO is primarily about having backlinks to your website; backlinks are links on other websites that link to pages on your agency's site. Always go for quality backlinks from relevant websites. Never purchase a service where they build backlinks from random websites. 'Quality links' tend to be links to great content on your website or links from the press. And you need great content that people want to link to (see point 5).

Google AdWords

One other Google element to consider is AdWords. This is the chief source of Google's phenomenal revenue. AdWords returns search links at the top and bottom of Google's results pages. To appear here in the search results you pay for the words that might be search terms relevant to your specific recruitment expertise.

Every time someone searches and clicks on your AdWords result it costs you the amount you bid for the keyword. You determine your maximum budget, so there's no danger of breaking the bank. This is known as PPC or Pay Per Click. AdWords complements SEO and it is useful for optimising your website to be search engine friendly.

Remember, SEO can't target every keyword and AdWords enables you to target a wider range of keywords. This is ideal if you wish to capture traffic from keywords which generate higher search but your content doesn't necessarily use the exact same terms, such as unique job titles or niche sectors that are related to a broader industry. Beyond Google, you can also run PPC campaigns on social networking sites like LinkedIn and Facebook and niche websites which provide directories.

5. Content is king and helps you rule the marketplace

Recruitment businesses are a cornerstone of wider economic success. The process of helping businesses identify and secure the services of the individuals they need to prosper is a critical enabler of growth. The value of your recruitment business resides in combining expertise in assessing people with your knowledge of specific industries, role specialisations, and the needs of your clients.

You must create content that showcases this expertise and demonstrates how you are different. Your views are valuable to your target audiences because they help inform, and to you, since they often help to start dialogues that attract new clients or candidates. 'Content' in this context is marketing communications or marcomms. Successful content formats that allow you to demonstrate thought leadership include white papers, guides, eBooks, blogs, newsletters, podcasts and videos. Content could include tips on getting a job, finding a recruitment agency or content that helps people in your target industry.

The processes that bring it all together are well established as digital marketing essentials; the website is an inbound marketing hub where content is centrally held; the contact details of website visitors are captured ready for marketing campaigns; creating lively and engaging marcomms and using email marketing, social media and advertising to promote it provides a framework for sustained and regular activity.

Try to maximise the mileage of your concepts and ideas by repurposing your content. A blog can be used in a newsletter; a podcast can be transcribed for reading. A white paper may be used as a landing page and in an email marketing campaign. Re-use content in as many ways as possible.

6. The role of social media

Social media provides another channel, allowing businesses and business users to tap the potential of personal and professional networks. It is also an opportunity for companies and individuals to strike up a conversation. It has dramatically changed the way any company interacts with their clients. Therefore, it is imperative that you have an appreciation for the power of social media channels. There are also differentiations in social media channels between client and candidate tools for recruiters.

LinkedIn is firmly established as the business social media tool of choice where it is useful for agencies as well as professional individuals to have a presence. LinkedIn is primarily aimed at B2B products and services; and connecting those seeking professional relationships. LinkedIn is a great channel to promote your company values and news. Share content to gain traction and attract new connections. Don't feel limited to your own content either. If you see a topical opinion or research piece on LinkedIn Pulse, share it with your immediate connections.

In recruitment, LinkedIn is viewed as more relevant for attracting clients. That said, jobs groups on LinkedIn are useful for finding candidates. Jobs may be directly posted on the site or recruiters may locate candidates - either active job seekers or not - that may be suitable for roles that need to be filled.

Facebook tends to speak to consumer audiences and B2C product and service suppliers; its networks are rooted in personal relationships. The popularity of Facebook and its unrivalled domination of the social media landscape make it an essential tool for attracting candidates. It is an invaluable information age grapevine for spreading the word about roles among networks that are essentially personal rather than professional.

However, as Facebook branches out with its powerful advertising capabilities, more and more B2B companies are turning to the social channel. So don't completely discredit it and use your personal networks to get the word out about your latest availabilities. As all recruiters know, your success is heavily reliant on your strong networking skills. Facebook can provide you with an opportunity if used in the appropriate way. Don't forget to clean up your personal profile (e.g. remove those compromising photos of you at a local bar in the early hours!) or create a professional profile where you add professional 'friends' before you start to broadcast professional-related messages.

Twitter is also an effective social media platform for engaging with people that may be prospective candidates or clients. From the head hunter's point of view, Twitter is useful for identifying subject matter experts on just about anything under the sun. Begin to follow particular topics related to your core sector. See who the main tweeters or retweeters are and go from there. If someone is sharing topical and insightful news or content via Twitter, you'll want to get to know them. They could be your next premium candidate!

The main process for recruiters looking for clients, especially on LinkedIn and Twitter is to identify, listen to and engage corporate HR or other 'hiring and firing' decision makers. When developing new business, the fact that the agency uses social channels to attract candidates may appeal to prospective clients that recognise the value of social media.

YouTube also has a place here for recruiters as promotional videos are readily uploaded and may be easily linked to websites or from LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. Subscribe to the channels of your clients and leads to always stay up to date with their latest news. Knowledge is power!

7. Use automated marketing systems

The use of marketing automation systems that integrate CRM to perform email marketing is extremely popular. These systems can be acquired as Software as a Service (SaaS) applications delivered over the web.

Charging is by monthly subscription and/or usage, so there is nothing to buy and no cost prohibitive capital investment. Once set up, marketing automation provides the fulfilment mechanism for regular structured activity that helps to cultivate your prospective clients.

Here's an example of a typical lead generation and nurturing process that can be automated:

- Create a campaign specific webpage - a 'landing page'- in the marketing system
- Link it to your website, and send searchers from Google AdWords to it
- Ask for contact details to download a guide - something like this one you're reading
- People download the guide and you've captured their data - their contact details
- Set up a series of automated responder emails to stay in touch with prospects
- Pass those that show regular interest on to your sales team to open a personal dialogue

8. Sell more to your current customers

An essential tactic within your marketing strategy should be to up-sell and cross-sell your range of recruitment services to your existing clients. It's highly likely that there is scope to expand the business with your clients, so make sure you get the message out about your full range of services.

There are a number of communication channels to help do this. Regular email newsletters are an especially useful format for promoting the sale of new services and demonstrating your thought leadership to existing customers. How about redesigning your letterheads or compliment slips so that they include your full service resume? Every piece of formal communication then becomes a potential sales agent for you.

You could also design special offers that capture the attention and assist in converting clients to take new or expanded services.

Next steps with your marketing

Larger recruiters with in-house marketers may wish to open a dialogue internally to discuss the ideas in this guide. No matter how well we believe our marketing may be buttoned up, there is always room for improvement.

Many smaller agencies may recognise the value of the approach outlined here, but lack the time, resource or know-how to do it themselves. You may wish to consult with marketing agencies that have the expertise to deliver integrated marketing activity as an outsourced service.

Be sure to weigh up the costs of outsourcing compared with hiring an internal marketing executive to self-manage your own automated marketing system. There is no one-size fits all option with Marketing. Our only suggestion is to simply start somewhere and grow from there. Keep asking questions and sign up to marketing blogs to keep up to date with the latest trends, tips and news.

ETZ is your recruitment back office

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