



7 THINGS TO HATE ABOUT IT RECRUITERS

Business forums, professional networking sites and the internet in general is awash with stories detailing just how difficult dealing with an IT recruiter can be. But is all this online odium justified? Are they really the new 'used-car salesman'? Or are recruiters just the fall guys for frustrated job-seekers in a down-turned economy? *iStart* investigates...

A quick look at job forums, IT chat rooms and the blogosphere sees IT recruiters being criticised for everything from ethics, to communication skills, to common sense. Just what is people's beef with this industry? Are recruiters really as terrible as is being made out? Or is all this hyperbole just a case of disappointed candidates shooting the messenger?

When it comes to employment, IT recruiters are the 'middlemen' that control access to the people making the real decisions. Sure, most of us would just rather cut to the chase and talk to the person actually making the decisions than to go through a recruiter - anything else can make you feel like you're running around in circles. But is that all there is to it? We found just what people are saying about the industry and got some answers.

7 things to hate about IT recruiters

1. "I don't feel like the recruiter has my best interests at heart. Is he working for me or the employer? Should I consider him my 'agent'?"

Short answer, no, you shouldn't consider your recruiter your agent. While a good recruiter will work to make you feel as if your interests are neither more nor less important than the clients they represent, remember, it's the client they represent. Nevertheless, recruiters are paid for by the client, usually upon a placement result, so it's in their best interest to keep you happy regardless. If your consultant is giving you the run around, ask for a straight answer about what's going on.

"We do have to be careful how we spend our time," says John Wyatt of Recruit IT. "This is a skill. A good consultant

will know where to spend their time and how much time they spend on each client requirement and candidate liaison...If you are communicating with a consultant, the time engaged by both parties should reflect the likelihood of the placement percentage. If you aren't being given the air time you consider warranted then either the consultant is not for you or there is little likelihood of that agency placing you."

2. "I feel like my recruiter doesn't understand the role they're hiring for. How do I know I'm being well represented if I feel like I know more than this guy? What should I do?"

It's understandable that a recruiter is not going to know every little thing about the position they're recruiting for - after all, if they did, they'd be doing it themselves - so it pays to investigate just what your recruiter's level of expertise is before taking them on.

"A good recruiter will know their client, the hiring manager and the technical environment," says Wyatt. "I would be sure to scout around their level of experience. This can be done respectfully i.e. 'how long have you been with x recruitment company/ how long have you been doing IT recruitment and what is your time dealing with the particular client you are being represented to?'"

Nevertheless, if you find yourself in a position where it's obvious that your recruiter doesn't understand the fundamentals, it may be time to take things to the next level.

"At the end of the day if you don't feel you are getting the right level of service you should ask to speak to their team leader or manager or you can elect to find another recruitment provider who may also be advertising the same role. Just as there are some recruitment providers that leave you wanting, there are others that will provide you with an experience where you want to deal with them over and over again."





3. “My recruiter is not returning my calls. Have they forgotten about me? How do I get a response?”

No one likes to be left waiting by the phone like a heart-sick teenager. We think this sort of lack of communication is unacceptable and if your recruiter won't return your calls drop him and look elsewhere.

“You should be afforded the courtesy of a response when you apply for a role,” says Wyatt. “If your calls are not being returned without reason then this is not a good reflection on that consultant or the company.”

There's a difference of course between not getting your calls returned and not getting the kind of calls you want.

“If you have been provided with a response, but it's not what you necessarily want to hear, but it has been professionally delivered, then that's just a case of the consultant being entitled to provide their opinion. You don't have to agree with it and if it doesn't look like you can progress with that consultant or agency apply elsewhere for a role that suits you and your level of experience better.”

4. “Hang on - is this job even real? I've gone to all the trouble of applying now somehow it just seems to have disappeared into thin air. Did it even exist?”

‘If it seems too good to be true,’ the saying goes, ‘it probably is.’ One of the biggest downsides to using online job sites to look for positions is the plague of false jobs that clog up the boards. Job hunters can log up serious hours applying for these positions only to never hear back from their recruiter, or to hear that ‘while they were unsuccessful this time, the recruiter will keep your details on file for consideration at a later date.’ This is the classic ‘bait and switch’ and is a rather infuriating method for recruiters to increase their databases.

Unfortunately for job seekers, it just comes with the territory.

“I don't agree with advertising to fill a database,” says Wyatt. “I do agree with filling a database when I know there is going to be future opportunities on my immediate horizon that I will want to represent candidates in to.”

IT'S A TOUGH JOB MARKET OUT THERE. EMPLOYERS KNOW THAT THERE IS FIERCE COMPETITION FOR POSITIONS - THEY CAN AFFORD TO BE PICKY AND THEY CAN AFFORD TO KEEP REMUNERATION RATES LOW. THE RECRUITER HAS TO BE THE FACE FOR THIS HARD LINE, ALL THE WHILE MANAGING SCREEDS OF INCREASINGLY DESPERATE CANDIDATES.

If the job seems too good to be true the best strategy is to simply take it with a grain of salt, and be sceptical until the interview is booked.

5. "I'm not getting any feedback! Where is my application at? Will someone call if I don't get the job?"

Poor communication is an unattractive trait in anyone's book. And when candidates are waiting on tenterhooks for a response from their consultant, anticipation levels can reach fever pitch. While recruiters may be in the employ of the person ultimately hiring you for the job, applying for a position is a lot of work in itself - if your recruiter is making it harder, get mad.

Wyatt says that you should expect to be kept up to date on where your application is in the process, whether the unexpected has arisen or not.

"A good consultant will provide a time frame. Client circumstances do change however and sometimes timelines are pushed out. If this occurs a short email to this effect from the agency should be expected. If you are not getting the communication level you desire let your consultant know that you need to know more or more frequently. They should advise you [of your application's status] and reset expectations if required."

6. "I've been working as a contractor, but I don't want to be a contractor forever. I get the feeling my recruiter is pigeon-holing me - how do I know he's putting me out there for jobs I want, not just jobs I can do?"

The key here is to make sure that your recruiter understands explicitly what you're going for and that your intentions are reflected in your documentation. Your recruiter is then obligated to market your skills in the manner you've specified.

"If you position your covering letter and tailor your

resume with an introduction that explains your employment history and your future career preferences then this will be respected and you will be marketed in this capacity," says Wyatt. "If you aren't then there is a problem. This may be a timing thing i.e. the market is only taking on contractors in your particular skill discipline or the consultant is not listening to your needs and it's time for you to take your resume elsewhere."

7. "This guy doesn't seem like he's very skilled or professional. How do I know he's presenting me to employers in the best light?"

"If this is your initial thought then that's not a good start!" says Wyatt.

"Most roles advertised in the NZ market are not exclusively listed, which means, as a candidate, you have a choice as to what agency represents you for a particular role. If you are uncomfortable about the person representing you then you could escalate it (if it's not the owner or manager that you are dealing with). What would I do however? I would ask [your consultant] to respectfully put your application on hold to allow you time to digest your career move. I'd then walk out, get on the web and find out if another agency has the same role. If they do and the new consultant/agency you meet lines up with your skill/professional expectations then work with that consultant and withdraw your resume from the other agency and from their database."

Changing jobs is a stressful time in anyone's life. And having to deal with a recruiter who gives you the impression that they don't understand, or even worse, doesn't care about your situation, is guaranteed to set your blood boiling.

Nevertheless, recruiters are, by definition, the people that stand between candidates and the people who mat-



LIKE IT OR NOT, WHILE THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS IS IN PROGRESS, THE CONSULTANTS WORKING FOR YOU ARE THE FACE OF YOUR BUSINESS. DEMAND THE SAME STANDARDS OF THEM THAT YOU WOULD OF ANYONE ELSE IN YOUR EMPLOY.

ter; between the job-seeker and his goal. Recruiters control access to people and positions, and therefore it's easy to get that feeling of being out of control when applying for a position by way of a consultant.

And it's a tough job market out there. Employers know that there is fierce competition for positions - they can afford to be picky and they can afford to keep remuneration rates low. The recruiter has to be the face for this hard line, all the while managing screeds of increasingly desperate candidates.

Nevertheless, candidates still have power in the process.

"Remember, you do have a choice," says Wyatt. "You need to feel comfortable that you are being provided with your best shot at the market. Your recruitment consultant may be responsible for placing you at an employer you subsequently work for for the next 5 years so it's a very important decision and you don't have to accept second best!"

What should employers look for in a recruiter?

For businesses, the stakes are even higher. The recruitment consultant will be your link between your business and the people who ultimately work there, so it pays to spend a little time to make sure that decisions with long-term consequences, like who works at your company, are good ones.

Get personal recommendations

When it comes to selecting a recruiter to represent your business, the network does tell the story. By finding out from friends and colleagues who they were placed by, who they recommend in the market and what their experience

was, you can gauge the suitability of a recruiter for your needs. Any recruitment company worth their salt will have an extensive network of contacts, so testing this network in the first instance by asking for referrals is a good place to start.

Specialist knowledge

Make sure that the recruitment company you select specialises in your business's field. This may sound obvious, but recruitment agencies often 'specialise' in doing a little bit of everything. If you're going to be hiring for specialised IT roles, make sure your agency knows their stuff. Ensure they understand the market, find out their experience filling similar roles, and their experience with businesses like yours.

Interview your recruiter

An employer/recruiter relationship is an important one. Make sure you understand the consultant's basic knowledge from a technical perspective, what their knowledge is of your market and whether you feel comfortable being represented by that consultant and by the organisation. The more they know about you and your organisation, the better result you'll achieve and the better you'll be represented in the marketplace during the process.

Demand professionalism

Pay attention to how a potential consultant deals with you. Do they return calls and emails promptly? Are they on time and focused on the task at hand or are they disorganised and distracted? Are they well presented? Like it or not, while the recruitment process is in progress, the consultants working for you are the face of your business. Demand the same standards of them that you would of anyone else in your employ.





Strategic Decisions Faster

In a challenging economic climate, the difference between surviving and thriving depends on your ability to make rapid, high quality, strategic decisions. To do this you need instant access to information about your talent, policies and processes that is not only relevant, but complete and accurate.

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Think. Beyond

Get references

Ask your recruiter for references and then check them. Talk to people who have engaged them previously and ask how the experience was. Make sure you feel comfortable with this recruiter representing your business in the marketplace. Again, they will be working for you – treat them that way.

DIY Recruiting

Of course there's no law that says employers have to go through a recruiter at all. Major New Zealand companies like Fletcher Building and Westpac are now conducting recruiting in-house. For large companies this can represent a significant saving up-front (recruitment agencies can charge anywhere between 12 to 15 per cent of successful candidate's annual salary). And while it's true that recruiting in-house can be a time-consuming process, it can be done, and with plenty of DIY software toolkits available, and a few best-practice tips, the whole job can be made a lot easier.

4 steps to efficient in-house recruitment

1. Build your brand

Recent research suggests that candidates will tell at least seven people when they've gone to an interview – if they've walked away with an unfavourable impression of your business, that impression will be shared. Conducting interviews is all part of building your business's brand. A shabby, disorganised interview process will leave candidates thinking that your company is shabby and disorganised.

Likewise, make sure you respond to candidates, even if they are unsuccessful – failure to do so will result in rejected candidates sharing their negative experience of your company with others.

2. It's all about the network

Ask colleagues and peers that you respect for their professional recommendations – it's a great way to gain access to quality people. Be careful however to maintain professional distance between the peer and the recommended candidate. Relationships are a complicated beast and it's easy to lose friends if you don't feel inclined to follow a peer's advice. Consider employing an outside party to act as a go-between in the process to avoid any hurt feelings and to insulate yourself from resentment over an enthusiastic recommendation wasn't followed through.

Likewise, when it comes to free advice, you usually get what you pay for. Make sure recommended candidates are subjected to the same rigorous testing procedures as any other candidate. It's necessary not only to make sure you've got the right person for the job, but to ensure that you're presenting yourself and your company in a serious and professional manner.

A survey conducted in 2010 Destination Talent across 1332 Australian executives found that recruitment firms were the most popular method of job hunting for executives. Their experiences with recruitment consultants however were far from plain sailing.

The survey also looked at why employees get itchy feet, what influences their decisions when selecting a new job and just what their current employer needs to do to retain them (hint: it's all about the money).

1. Job search channels While a wide range of channels are used to find jobs, a majority 23.2 per cent of executives credited recruitment firms for delivering their last job. Who you know matters; 22.3 per cent found their new job through personal contacts and networking. Referrals worked for 20 per cent and cold calling delivered jobs to 1.1 per cent.

2. Love/hate relationship with recruiters Illustrating the ubiquity of recruitment firms in the Australian employment market, a majority 64 per cent of executives have found a job at least once in their career using their service. However, 33 per cent have negative opinions, and only 18.66 per cent considered recruitment firms to be effective.

3. Online channels Job boards delivered new jobs to 11.6 per cent of executives. The three-way nexus between executives, recruiters and job boards is unlikely to change; a large 67 per cent intended to use job boards in the next twelve months. Employers' websites delivered new jobs to 3.2 per cent of executives.

4. Social networks and media Online social networks are relatively new with only a small 0.8 per cent using the medium to successfully find a job. 35 per cent plan to use social networks to look for a job; 28 per cent were still sitting on the fence, while 37 per cent planned to bypass them altogether.

5. Job search triggers The majority (30 per cent) started a job search because of financial considerations, while career (23 per cent) and lifestyle (19 per cent) considerations were also important triggers to start a job search.

6. Show me the money A majority 87 per cent thought pay should be increased every year. Only a small minority (7 per cent) were willing to wait up to two years. A pay rise of 6-10 per cent with a current employer was considered fair by 54 per cent of executives. In contrast, 71 per cent would expect pay rises of 11 per cent or more from new employers.

7. What causes pay rise Pay rise is intricately related to performance. A majority 53 per cent received a pay hike as a result of performance; 20 per cent by changing employers. Male executives tend to be rewarded more for performance, while females are more likely to get their pay rise by changing employers or jobs.

8. Importance of remuneration Salary influences motivation of an executive and dictates how opinion and decisions on employers are made; 68 per cent of executives believed remuneration package is a strong motivator in doing a job effectively. The majority (79 per cent) thought remuneration packages are an important factor in choosing a future employer.

9. Happy with employer, but vigilant In general executives were satisfied (55 per cent) with their current employer, yet there is little loyalty; 77 per cent of executives were ready to leave their current employer if a new and better opportunity came along, a much higher number than the 24 per cent who are not satisfied with employers.

10. Expectation from employers Reality of work life often contrasted with executives' views of an ideal employer. Work-life balance is valued by a majority 27 per cent, but when it comes to actually changing jobs only 19 per cent make a move on lifestyle and work-life considerations; financial (30 per cent) and career concerns (23 per cent) take precedence.

11. Short work tenure Executives in Australia, on average, have worked for eight different employers since joining the workforce. Tenure with an employer is generally short. A majority 72 per cent of executives have been working with their current employer for less than five years. Only 18.5 per cent have work tenures between 5-10 years with their current employer.

12. Correlation between education and remuneration A correlation exists between education level attained and salary levels of executives. A majority 67 per cent of those who earn \$500,000 and above have a Master's degree while only 34 per cent of those who earn less than \$100,000 have similar qualifications.

13. Location and mobility A majority 48 per cent were willing to relocate overseas, while 30 per cent will consider the option if an opportunity arises. Similar sentiments were displayed for relocating locally. A significant 14 per cent of executives started job searches solely on location considerations.

14. Brand me Executives accept responsibility for their own career trajectory. The vast majority (90 per cent) thought it important to promote and develop their personal brand instead of the employer's. This desire is more pronounced amongst those in full-time roles (83 per cent) than contractors (14 per cent).

15. Confidence The majority of executives (60 per cent) were confident they could find a job within three months. Only 6 per cent were not confident of finding a job. Given that the recruitment lifecycle for executives is longer than other job groups, it highlights the confidence executives enjoy.

Executive Monitor – Understanding the Behaviour and Intention of Executives in Australia. Destination Talent, 2010.



3. The procedure

Decide what the procedure for the recruitment process will be ahead of time, and make sure that everyone involved - including interviewers, other staff and the candidates themselves - understand it too.

Let the candidate know the timescale you'll be working to, and find out if they are in talks with other companies - it would be a shame to miss striking a deal with the right candidate because of a false sense of urgency or lack thereof.

Invest the majority of your time with the appropriate people. Use telephone interviewing to reduce the number of people you interview face-to-face, and if hiring a number of technical staff, consider using online testing methods as part of the screening process.

If someone is unsuitable for the role, cut them loose immediately with a polite note, and an explanation if necessary. For more promising candidates, spend some time discussing the role in detail, company culture, expectations and reasons for the job arising, but keep things moving at an appropriate pace. Be scrupulously honest with all descriptions and resist the urge to simply update an old

document for the job description.

Late in the process, include an exercise that requires the candidate to spend time on a task - this will help gauge the candidate's commitment to the position.

4. Interviewing

Prepare thoroughly for interviews. Do not read CVs for the first time in front of interviewees. Rather, prepare in the same fashion as you would for meeting with an important client - not only will the interview run more smoothly, but you'll find out exactly what you need to know and the candidate will know you mean business.

Represent your business enthusiastically. Some candidates you talk to may be considering another offer and very good candidates may have several. Such candidates will be waiting for you to 'sell' the position, so sell it (but be honest about the negatives).

Finally, provide honest feedback as quickly as possible - excessive delays will make candidates doubt your sincerity. **f**