

Unearthing diamonds in a tough recruitment market

Much like buying a diamond ring, recruiting for the jewellery trade is not a black and white affair. You need individuals with top-notch people skills who can quickly build a relationship with customers, since every person who steps into the shop could potentially make an 'emotional' purchase.

Signet Group employs more than 6,000 staff across its well-known brands, Ernest Jones, H Samuel and Leslie Davis. Like many retailers, staff retention has been a problem for the organisation and the sector is known for its high staff 'churn' rates. Added to that, competition for candidates among retailers is fierce, and a high-street presence and popular consumer brand name is not always enough to attract the best people.

Signet knew it needed to raise its profile if it was to stand out and introduced an HR strategy under the banner, 'Employing and Developing the Best'.

"We tried to pull all of the elements together from the beginning, so as well as improving recruitment methods, we made sure we were offering the career path that recruits would need," says Sheena Macdonald, resourcing manager at Signet.

On the recruitment front, one of the first decisions it made was to implement online recruitment technology from PeopleBank (part of Workthing) – a provider of recruitment management systems and corporate career portals.

Following research, Signet identified key criteria that should be incorporated into the hiring process, including above-average rapport-building skills, which are necessary for a sales environment where each transaction is deemed an emotional purchase. Candidates also needed to be comfortable working within tight security and procedural constraints, due to working with high-value goods.

PeopleBank designed corporate career sites for the three brands. Each now acts as the hub for recruitment and screening and an online advertising strategy was launched to drive jobseekers directly to the sites. Print, and even store window advertisements, also encourage can-

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Ernest Jones: one of the Signet brands to benefit from online screening

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didates to apply for jobs online.

At the same time, Signet reviewed its store roles and created new candidate profiles. With the help of business psychologists Kaisen Consulting, a motivation questionnaire was compiled, designed to 'screen out' rather than 'select in'.

Called 'Are we right for you?', it looks for a match between the candidate's motivations and Signet's working environment. It is now embedded within PeopleBank technology, forming a seamless part of the online application process.

"We hope that we're actually doing the candidate a favour by helping them to opt out or opt in at an early stage," says Macdonald. "Although we're still evaluating initial results, we strongly believe this screening tool is playing an important part in improving retention."

Signet is now screening out around 40 per cent of applicants via the questionnaire before a shortlist of candidates with the best motivational fit is forwarded to field managers.

Since it has been working with

PeopleBank, Signet's HR cost per employee has decreased and cost per hire has been a major contributor in this. There is also a reduced reliance on recruitment consultancies, generating savings in consultancy fees, and time-to-hire has been reduced.

"From the feedback we've had, we're also starting to see labour turnover come down," says Macdonald, who, as a next step, wants to build an online talent pool to keep track of potential recruits.

The technology is also helping candidate communication, which PeopleBank commercial director Bill Shipton cites as a vital when dealing with future generations.

"Online recruitment is not just about money. How you deal with people says a lot about your employer brand," says Shipton. "The generation that is at school now and the one coming out of university does everything online and expects fast response times."

Searching for information about prospective employers on corporate sites is already becoming standard practice for interviewees, and Shipton says organisations must ensure that their sites work hard for them to attract future talent.

"There are still a lot of poor offerings out there, and companies must look at what their careers sections are saying about them," Shipton adds.

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