



Recruiters: How to Get More Business in a Down Economy (Part 2)

Learn how to connect better with your buyers and build critical relationships and credibility that will lead to more business.

Part 2 of a three-part series.

By John Vlastelica and Jenifer Lambert

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In the first article, we talked about how to get around the perception by some HR managers that they don't need to pay a fee for talent in this type of economy. Now, in Part 2, we'll share best practices for demonstrating your expertise as a recruiter, building trust with your buyers and getting more business.

How do you address this common frustration by Corporate HR and Hiring Managers?

"It's silly to me that these recruiters – who claim to be experts at sourcing – are cold calling me, with no research into what our company does, who I am, or what kind of people we need. They just start selling. Their lack of research and listening skills are a real turnoff."

As you pitch me your recruiting services, I'm thinking, "Would I want to work with this person if I were a top candidate?" and "Do I want this person working on our behalf, representing our firm's opportunities?"

Best Practices for Demonstrating Expertise, Building Trust and Getting Business

Just like a candidate's initial interview forms a first impression with a hiring manager, your initial contact with a potential buyer of your services is a demonstration of your competence as a recruiter. If the value you promise to your client is based on your ability to source high-caliber talent and artfully persuade them to consider a career move, this is an opportunity to demonstrate that skill. Quite simply – the research you did, your understanding of that prospective client's business and needs, and your tone and approach on the phone are an audition.

Unfortunately, many recruiters respond to a tough market by treating their client development as a numbers game. The thinking goes like this: if I just make more calls, I'll eventually stumble upon the few who are hiring. The problem with this approach is that to increase the volume of calls, recruiters forego any sort of thought or pre-planning going into the call. When your potential buyer feels like a number you can forget about winning their business. The best recruiters use intel to accelerate the sales process.



Hiring managers are being bombarded with cold calls from hungry recruiters. Research is key to warming up an otherwise cold call.

Personal networking and work history can give you great insights into common connections you may have with your target buyer.

1. **People first.** Companies don't buy anything. People do. And people who work in companies would prefer to do business with people they like and trust. Obviously, you are going to do some research to understand the company. Go one step further and use social networking tools, general web searches and your personal connections to do some preliminary research on your target decision maker. Here are some factors to consider when approaching this hiring manager:

- **What does she emphasize in her own background?** Technical competence, leadership skills, educational background, the social impact of her work? Understanding what she emphasizes may give you insights into what she values most in a candidate.
- **What does her past employment and career progression tell you about her?** Does she come from big, more stable multinational organizations or small high-tech startups?
- **Beyond title, what is the scope of her role and size of her department/function at the company?** How does her role fit into the organization's primary goals? Is her department/function likely to be impacted by recent company announcements? Does she likely hire for many different types of people, or just one primary profile (i.e. Test Engineers or Program Managers)? Does she hire in multiple locations?
- **What professional organizations does she belong to?** Do we have people or groups in common?

Armed with this information you'll be able to make a better, warmer connection with her when you call, better understand the business context for any needs she may have, and get a jump start on her candidate preferences.

2. **Get referred.** While most recruiters understand that referrals are the lifeblood of their recruiting efforts (we have no problem asking for candidate referrals), many fail to leverage the power of referrals when it comes to developing new business. What works for accessing hidden talent is equally effective at opening doors with hiring managers. All of the people with whom you interact (placed candidates, active candidates, existing clients, colleagues, etc.) are potential referral sources. You just have to ask.

As you are researching the hiring manager (see #1), you will uncover information about her that you can use to make credible connections to other people in your network. Use personal networking to uncover groups to whom your target is already connected:

- Industry user groups
- Business networks
- Academic, professional, company and alumni associations
- Service, social and philanthropic organizations

The best referral is a personal introduction. So, asking someone you know to introduce you to the Hiring Manager is obviously your best bet. Short of that, simply dropping a mutual connection's name is likely to get your call returned. It's a good idea to check in with your referral source before using their name since your prospect may check in with them first before calling you back.



*Recruiting is a great vocation.
In what other profession do
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3. **Fish in a stocked pond with a baited hook.** In what other profession do potential buyers advertise their intent to buy? Think about it – employers who are hiring often make it known publicly through job postings and other forms of advertisement. You can cut out a lot of unproductive cold calls by calling companies you know are hiring.

Average recruiters approach the hiring manager with an obvious question: “Would you like some help recruiting for this opening?” and they get an obvious answer: “No.” Instead, approach the hiring manager with an informed opinion of the market (“here’s what I’m hearing from my clients in this market”) and a solution in the form of a candidate that you believe is qualified for this position. Here’s the formula:

- A. **Identify the need:** I see that you are currently recruiting for an XYZ position.
- B. **Diffuse the objection:** I assume you are getting a lot of response to that advertisement.
- C. **Create differentiation:** I wanted to connect with you because XYZ searches are one of my areas of specialization.
- D. **Demonstrate your market insight:** My clients are telling me that they’re getting more quantity than quality in this market and that the high performers they need are still hard to find and recruit.
- E. **Provide a solution:** That’s when they call me. I am working with several very strong XYZ candidates that I thought you may be interested in hearing about as a comparison to the response you’re getting on your own.

4. **Let your candidate open the door to new target companies.** Candidates with specific knowledge of a particular market or industry are not only valuable to your client but also to you. The best recruiters leverage the power of a well-connected candidate to get referred, create opportunity and to provide inside information that builds your credibility.

Enlist your candidate in helping you create a target list of companies. “Based on your knowledge of this industry, you must know companies where you can make an immediate impact or bring some strategic value.” Have him articulate specifics about what he knows about each of the companies on his list and why he thinks he would be a good hire for that company. This helps you deliver a credible presentation to your target hiring manager and has the side benefit of testing your candidate’s job search seriousness and industry knowledge.

5. **Balance preparation with execution.** With the amount of information available with a few keystrokes and mouse clicks, there’s no good excuse to approach a potential client blind. At the same time, some recruiters get so bogged down in the research, they never find the time to actually act on it. All the information in the world is useless if you never actually initiate contact with a prospective buyer.



Top performing recruiters spend 1 hour on research and planning for every 3-4 hours of contact.

The best recruiters strike a healthy balance between planning and action by reserving large scheduled blocks of time to initiating contact and dedicating separate time for planning and research. Jenifer studied some of the top producing recruiters in the U.S. and found that they spend approximately 1 hour of research and planning for every 3-4 hours of actual contact. While they have a strong bias for action, they understand that a little targeted research makes their contact time even more productive.

The adage that your calendar reflects your priorities is true. Carve out separate blocks of time in your calendar for calls and for research and you're essentially making an appointment with success.

About the Authors:

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