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Having Trouble Finding Good People?

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Direct marketers, specifically very talented direct marketers, occupy a privileged place in the job market right now. They are in demand. I think there are two reasons for this.

The first is the steady increase in the role of digital marketing within the overall marketing mix. First there was the dot-com boom, then the dot-com bust. Now, digital marketing is finally becoming what it always should have been: a superb marketing medium in the one-to-one world.

But few people out there have extensive history in interactive marketing. It's a concept in its adolescent stages. Where do companies turn to find people who understand these concepts? They turn to direct marketers. DMers have been doing this segmented one-to-one stuff for years.

The second reason is the steady growth of ROI marketing. Companies are starting to spend again. They know they can't cost-cut their way to success. But caution reigns. If they spend a dollar, they want to know exactly what the return on that dollar will be. Goodbye lavish Super Bowl ads, hello accountability and ROI. No matter the medium, clients expect a quantifiable return on their investments. So they're looking to direct marketers — direct marketers who are accustomed to functioning in this world of actual results.

This is why I think that the job market in direct marketing is not mirroring the trends in the general economy. In a world where it seems that there are more candidates than there are jobs, the very talented DMers are noticing that they are in the enviable position of low supply and high demand.

Few employers realize yet that this is happening. In the search business, I see the trends in the early stages. A few of my clients have just started to feel the frustration of watching top players slip through their fingers.

Being an optimist, and occasionally a contrarian, I predict that this trend will continue. Attracting top players to join your organization will grow even tougher in the coming months. How can you improve your chance of bringing these kinds of candidates on board?

There are companies that consistently close the top candidates. The overarching reason is that they understand the nature of the top player at this specific point in time in our industry. Knowing what's going on in the minds of the top players helps these companies pull them over the top to join their organizations.

Here are some of their guidelines and practices:

- **They give the interview process top priority.** These people represent the future of their organization. Smart people sense when they're being squeezed into a crowded calendar. And they draw conclusions about how the company functions in other areas when they see this.

- **The wooing process goes both ways.** They know that it's equally important to entice the candidate as it is for the candidate to convince them to be hired.
- **Establishing consistency of message is critical to the interview process.** Furthermore, successful companies take precautions to ensure that no one uses the medium to vent his or her own frustrations with the company. You'd be surprised how often this happens.
- **They don't over-interview.** How many people really need to meet and approve of this person? More isn't always better. How many new people can someone meet in one day and still be effective?
- **Share the vision.** Top players want to know about the company's future goals. To them, a new job isn't the end of a job search. It's the start of a new life.
- **Present the challenge.** Really good people want to be challenged.
- **A good conversation is 50 percent listening and 50 percent talking.** The same is true of a good interview.
- **They know how important it is to stay in constant contact with people they are interested in.** We talk with our candidates daily, weekends included, if necessary. We take their temperature regularly. A new situation can crop up in one day and change everything. Constant communication eliminates surprises.
- **Top players come in all shapes and sizes.** Smart companies look for fresh thinking in unusual places. They welcome the diversity of unusual backgrounds. They delve into how the candidate thinks. They don't confine themselves to seeing only what the candidate has done.
- **The world has changed.** People make choices for different reasons than they did just a few years ago. There is more focus on the "now" and the need to spend one's days doing what is enjoyable and feels worthwhile. Again, to a top player, a new position is not the end of a job search; it's the start of a new life.

Keep these guidelines in mind, but, most of all, know that very talented direct marketers are in demand. Understanding how they think, view opportunities and make decisions should help you attract these people to your company. n

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