

PRESS RELEASE  
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Company        **Turnaround Group**  
Telephone      03 9620 7744  
Email            enquiries@turnaround.com  
Web              www.turnaround.com

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We decided to focus our research around recruitment agencies and what makes a recruitment agency, in this tough market, desirable to the very best recruiter looking to make a move?

The truth is – excellent recruitment consultants are still hard to find. With > 30% less recruiters in the industry than what there were this time last year, there are simply less to choose from and how many top consultants with a good billing history and an established desk want to move and start from scratch in this tough market anyway? (Let's face it most desks are going to be started from scratch or with a few warm leads, gone are the days of the luxury "hot desk".) A solid company brand and employee value proposition (EVP) to attract the best is now as important if not more important than ever.

In the past 6 months Turnaround recruitment to recruitment has had jobs called in (that's right, jobs called in from agencies looking to recruit!), all sorts of specifications, Senior Management roles in Australia and the Asia Pacific, junior call centre recruiters through to quite specific biotech engineering recruiters. The requirements are of a similar ilk, "we want the top biller from a competitor, in the same sector, someone who can hit the ground running, with contacts that they can bring and most importantly a strong business development focus." Of course they do who doesn't? My question to these agencies is why would that top biller want to work for you and what have you got to offer?

Through our research we came across a handful of agencies that were arrogant enough to think that just because they are hiring, they will have the pick of recruiters, this is simply not the case. Sure, there are more recruiters on the market to interview and choose from, but you just told me that you want the top biller from a direct competitor, not someone who has been performance managed out or who has been redundant as a way of moving them on. (Turnaround believes that there are genuine redundancies

happening, however many redundancies are a way of moving on “dead wood”.) 80% of Managers questioned, believed that those top billers would want to work for them because of their culture and their brand.

The next question we asked was – What exactly is branding? After many conversations, the general consensus was that branding is a perception or image you give to market. This perception comes from the ethics, ideas, beliefs that you portray and how you behave. Some of that image will come from ex employees and current employees and some of the image quite simply from marketing and PR. Certainly your agency perception, in the current market, can change from week to week, winning a certain account, hiring a respected manager or on the flip side closing branches and making redundancies can all influence what a potential hire thinks about you. Your brand also comes from the clients and candidates you work with, the old saying the bad news travels fast is so true a candidate or clients who have had a bad experience will tell everyone!

Recently I got talking with a young lad on the tram who thought he knew me from somewhere, he was off to register with an agency and before he found out what I did, with disdain, he said “I hate recruiters”. He couldn’t really tell me why except to say he felt like it was all about being placed and the recruiter making money, no returned phone calls, no follow up etc. the usual bad habits lazy recruiters have. I asked how he got his last job and the job before that, he said through an agency! I asked why did he keep going back? “Because they are a big agency and I assume they have a lot of jobs on”. Whilst this tram rider had a successful experience i.e.: securing a role, he had a bad incident with the recruiter and wouldn’t recommend them to his friends or use them to hire when he was a potential client! Strange but true, as a large, well known recruitment agency you may think you are safe into thinking you have a great brand because you are well known, however if you’re not practicing good recruitment techniques (like any sized agency) your brand will suffer and along with that the profits and your ability to attract the best recruitment consultants in town. Of course all the managers we spoke with thought their agency had great branding and was attractive to good recruiters, although about 10% were reluctantly honest and said their branding could use some “development”.

What do the recruiters think? Many recruiters we meet with have mixed messages of **who** they think is a good agency and somewhere they think they’d like to work. It seems that they are particularly confused in this market with redundancies one day, restructures and hires the next. Or the recruiter may think the brand is strong in a specific discipline; however they’ve heard that the new manager isn’t so good or just because generalist agency down the road has a strong IT team, doesn’t mean that’s the best IT recruitment team in town, or does it? In some cases, our confused recruiter has heard that the agency we are representing them to, is in a dire financial state and are near to closing down, this news has stemmed from a few disgruntled non performing, ex employees spreading gossip and untrue rumours. Consultants also need to be self aware of their personal brand in the market place and

how important it is to be recognised as the best in their space and a desirable employee, not only to guarantee success in their current role but for any future role they should go for. Personal brand, now that's a whole other article....

When asked **what** attributes make a good agency, there was very little confusion, and the answers were consistent. 74% of recruiters we spoke with believe that "strong leadership and vision" was the most important. Disillusioned recruiters want direction and positivity they want to know that "everything will be ok". Coming in a close second was "financial stability". Then following was "greater market perception", when asked why does greater market perception mean so much, they responded (some would say either selfishly or cleverly) with "working for a brand renowned in their sector, means my business development will be easier and the opportunity to bill better!" We all know this is not always necessarily the case. 12 months ago "greater market perception" was down on the list under base salary and most certainly below lucrative commission structure. Recruiters are now starting to realise that there's no point to a fabulous commission structure or the highest base salary if you're in an environment not conducive to billing! They are taking job offers for the opportunity not just for the money. We've sent excellent recruiters off to interview with agencies they perceive to be great, only to come back and say "umm, you were right, no matter how good that brand is, I could never work for that guy, he's just an idiot".

Other answers to what makes an attractive brand included, "innovative", "adding value", "practicing what they preach" (e.g. offering a work life balance or a mature recruitment style). All these nice things and must haves are all good and well and seem important at the start, but it's when the interview goes well with the agency manager that the recruiter really starts to buy in to the agency and vice versa. That's when the candidate starts to develop their own true understanding of the brand, but you need to be able to get that person in front of you in the first instance and it's not that easy if you're perceived as an "average brand".

So finally, I asked our leaders in recruitment what they were doing (and what could they recommend) to maintain a solid brand in an unpredictable market, which was attractive to top recruiters.

- Strategically align yourself and keep using your rec to rec for your companies PR, and for tapping into those top recruiters who wouldn't normally be attracted to your brand.
- Have tangible evidence as to why you are an agency of choice (strong and long standing client relationships, winning new business, identify the cream of the crop roles you have been working on, good staff retention etc).

- Get your message out to market before someone else makes something up! Do this collectively with your current staff members; make it a vision, clear and consistent. Every single person that comes in contact with your agency should have a positive experience so they are singing from the same hymn book too!
- Concentrate on leadership. Engage your recruiters so they know that the success of the agency depends on them. Dealing with and getting through tough times will define your business. Through strong leadership and management, you will come out of the down turn with stronger more resilient recruiters who have refined and superior skills. With that comes an attractive brand, the ability to attract the best recruiters and of course a profitable business.

Don't underestimate the power of branding and the perception you give to market. To quote one general manager in a finance recruitment agency "ultimately, your brand is built by the strengths of your consultants".