

How to write recruitment advertising copy that works.

Recruiting the right people is key to any organisation's ongoing success, yet many people overlook this very important and useful advertising/marketing opportunity, whilst some simply see writing recruitment copy as a necessary evil. It's something that they'd rather avoid. As a result, they put it off and put it off until they can put it off no more. They then hurriedly throw together a badly written advertisement and scratch their heads when the response is poor. But, as Alasdair Murray explains, writing recruitment ads needn't be a chore and, if done well, can transform your response, generate interest from potential clients and give you the edge over your competitors. First of all...

Decide what the advertising is setting out to achieve

The whole purpose of recruitment advertising is, of course, to generate the right response. That means attracting the attention of the target audience, telling them what they need to know and persuading them to reply to your ad. So, get a clear idea of your target audience, then...

Consider what sort of response you want

It may seem like a silly question, but are you simply advertising a single vacancy or are you happy to do a general trawl of the marketplace? Do you want to deter unsuitable candidates whilst at the same time attracting the right sort of people, or don't you mind if you get inexperienced candidates trying to punch above their weight? After all, they may not be suitable for this role, but who's to say they won't be ideal for one in the future?

Maybe carry out some research

Nine times out of ten, maybe even ninety-nine out of a hundred, you'll be familiar with the type of role you are advertising. But, there may be the odd occasion where it would pay to consider how easy or difficult it is to recruit for the position you're advertising or take into account any preconceptions there may be about your industry or indeed your standing within it. Maybe the salary's a bit low, or better still, higher than the norm. And what about the location? Some might argue that you can tackle the nitty-gritty issues like that once you have candidates in front of you, but generally speaking, job seekers are more likely to thank you if you are up front about everything from the start.

Focus on your tone of voice

OK, you've got a clear picture about what you are setting out to achieve and had a think about the marketplace and any foibles there may be relating to the industry, the salary or location. You're ready to write your copy! But hold on! Have you thought about *who* you are talking to? The tone of your copy should always address the target audience. Senior Legal people don't want to read copy that contains phrases such as "Don't miss out" or "right now" any more than a creative will want to hear "applications are invited" or "the ideal candidate". You've got to get down with the kids (or up with the legal types).

Think of the copy as the spoken word

Copywriting isn't about writing perfect English. It's more about rhythm and tone, simplicity and credibility. If you think of it as the spoken word it's much

easier to write sentences simply and punctuate them clearly. You may have learnt at school not to start sentences with 'But' or 'And'. But, in advertising, no such rule exists! And, there's even better news. You don't have to complicate the issue with lots of elaborate punctuation either! Instead of playing with semi-colons, brackets or sub-clauses, just start a new sentence. See? You're beginning to warm to the task already!

Remember, you're talking to an individual

Seriously, writing recruitment copy needn't be viewed as a chore or a necessary evil. Nor should it be something you leave to the last moment and then hurriedly throw together. Maybe try telling yourself that you're not writing a public address to the world at large. You're having a private conversation with one person who may well have had a bad day and doesn't want to hear the same dull old lines they can read in a thousand and one other advertisements. Candidates want an honest dialogue. They want to be able to recognise the attractions of your role quickly without having to wade through line after line of boring bullet points. They want to be able to match their skills and experience against what you are looking for without having to own up to being 'mature', 'intelligent' or 'reliable' – or any of the other things we can all be if we try.

Try and be creative

OK, I admit it. It's easier said than done. But, in the context of a job post, creativity really means originality. Try and be original. Try and say something that the other ads aren't. Sounds impossible? How about saying something about your organisation or the job that no other employer could say? Maybe you are renowned in your field, perhaps you are going through a period of growth or change. Perhaps this is a brand new role or, within its marketplace place, a unique opportunity. Try and find a unique selling point. Every company has at least one. And, if you took hard enough, you can usually find something to say about the role that will set it apart from all the badly written jobs out there.

Think about the structure of the advertisement

It's great to try something new and different, but don't do it just for the sake of it. Chances are, most readers of your ad will have read a fair few in their time. They may want to be challenged and intrigued, but they don't want to be confused or baffled. There are no two ways about it - an accepted formula for structuring recruitment advertisements has built up over the years. One that readers know, recognise, trust and pretty much expect. It's almost a quick reference code that has become part of the whole culture of recruitment advertising, particularly these days within the confines of job boards. Here it is: - something about the company, something about the job, something about the person, something about the benefits. Feel free to break away from that formula, but it honestly is best not to without good reason.

So let's begin

First off, take a moment to consider the job title (you may well have already done so. If so, I apologise). Is it an industry standard or an internal job title your company uses? Will it attract people, or is it confusing? Don't be afraid to

question the use of a particular job title if you think it is something that is not going to be instantly recognised by your target audience.

That dreaded SEO content

Time was when we just wrote our copy to the best of our ability and, provided it had all the key bits and pieces in there it would generally get a decent response. Now of course, in a decade where everyone has migrated from the press to online, it's a slightly different ball game. However, the way I look at it is, provided you use a recognised job title, put in a clear location and have a salary attached to the role that is genuinely competitive, you are well on the way to getting your copy read. Sure, you need to sprinkle it with key words and maybe repeat the job title a couple of times, but by and large you will do that as a matter of course as you write the ad. Plus, a typical search will generally consist of job title, location and salary and maybe a couple of skill sets/qualifications, so chances are, whoever you are looking for, you will have included the specific qualification they need or the experience of x,y & z the role requires. Put simply, search engine optimisation needs to be considered, but don't make your copy stutter or stop and start in order to try and fulfil every possible SEO criteria. Your ad will get found if the top end is right.

Be authentic. Avoid clichés.

Most job seekers have seen thousands of clichés. They would far rather hear that you have just implemented a sexy new training programme or believe in empowering your people rather than that you are 'dynamic' or 'go-ahead'. And rather than say 'an opportunity now exists' (which sounds like you took the last person out and shot them) find something positive to say instead. It all goes back to identifying your USP really. Do that and being authentic becomes much easier.

Consider putting some 'screens' in your copy

For those not familiar with the term, a screen is something we use to deter applicants. That's right, put them off. Sounds awful, but actually it makes sense if quality of response is at the forefront of your mind rather than quantity (remember earlier when I asked 'general trawl' or 'specific vacancy'?). As I mentioned, people often try and punch above their weight when it comes to applying for jobs. If an ad says 'substantial experience of blah blah blah', they, with their 12 months in the role, will chance their arm. It's human nature. So, what you need to do is make sure that there are enough (but not too many to bore everyone senseless) specifics relating to skills and experience to make it quite clear what sort of person you are looking for. If they need a degree or equivalent, say so. If they need to have operated at a senior level or to have in-depth knowledge of specific applications or software, again, say so. In short, don't leave yourself open to receiving floods of applications, if that is not what you are after. If on the other hand, you're happy to be inundated then fine, be briefer and less specific (either way, get back to each and every applicant. Maybe even consider how you could use their skills and experience in the future for another role that might come up).

Do a spell check

It's OK. I threw that error in on purpose. I'll wager that more than a few of you thought 'hang on, here's this self-appointed copywriting "guru" telling us how to write copy and lo and behold he can't even spell check his own copy'. Well, imagine if that was your impression of me, what your reader's impression of an ad strewn with grammatical and typographical errors is going to be like? So spell check! Better still, maybe get a colleague to read through your copy as well.

And finally...

Don't forget, it's not just potential candidates that will be reading your ad. Your competitors will too, not to mention possible future clients. It may only be a bit of copy to you, but to every reader it is much more than that. To the job seeker you are a potential career path. To the curious browser you could be a future supplier. And, to the seriously concerned competitor, it's a clear sign that you have a real edge over them. And that alone has got to make it all worthwhile, hasn't it?