

Choosing a recruitment agency

When looking for a new position, it can be tricky to know where to begin and a couple of questions immediately spring to mind; whether to use a recruitment agency and if so, which one to pick?

So, exactly what are the benefits of using a recruitment agency?

Overall, a good recruitment consultant can often make the difference between a successful and efficient job search and a lot of wasted effort.

1. Discussing your career plan and whether a move is right for you

The first step in the process would be for the recruitment consultant to find out what you enjoy doing and whether a move is right for you. It is easy to be affected by a particularly bad period of work and by exploring your reasons for looking elsewhere and asking searching questions the consultant can assist you in deciding whether you really want to move. Alternatively a chat with your manager or peers may be more beneficial as a first step. If you do decide the time is ripe for a move then they can again advise more generally on areas / roles or companies that would be suitable taking into account your preferences.

2. Research & knowledge of the vacancies

By knowing the market and what companies are actively recruiting and advertising vacancies at the current time, the amount of research that you personally have to do is drastically reduced. Also, many companies take on staff for vacancies which are not advertised very widely and in this instance, the recruitment consultant will know who is the best person to call to find out about such positions and will carry out this search for you.

3. CV writing guidance

The CV is the first tool in marketing yourself to a company and so it is crucial that it accurately brings out your skills, particularly transferable skills and strengths and targets the vacancies available. Having established which vacancies are available and matched up those with your preferences, the consultant can then provide detailed advice on putting together a CV.

4. Personal recommendations

Where a consultant has built up a good reputation with employers or via their own contacts then their personal recommendation will also help in gaining you an interview. This aspect can be enhanced where the consultant themselves is an actuary and hence has a certain level of credibility, as well as personally knowing a number of key decision makers. This is very important where a candidate is looking to move into a different discipline or does not quite have the right experience for the role in question.

5. Interview practice

Tips on interview technique and even the opportunity to do practice interviews with the consultant can then follow. These can be invaluable, particularly if you have not had an interview for several years or have previously been turned down after interview and are not sure of the reasons why. As a trained interviewer the consultant can give you constructive feedback on how you are coming across, how to demonstrate your strengths effectively and even tips on what are good questions to ask. The consultant's technical knowledge is also useful, as inevitably you will be asked technical questions in the real interview so it is a good idea to practice answering this type of question.

6. Post-interview review

Following the interview a good consultant will then gather your feedback on the interview, and crucially will ask about any questions you feel you could have answered better or concerns that you have. If there is any negative feedback from the company in these areas the consultant can then use the opportunity to reiterate what you meant to say.

7. Salary negotiations

Many candidates find it hard to negotiate successfully and again this is a process where the consultant can add value and do the negotiating on your behalf as well as checking any concerns or queries that you may have.

They will have a good feel for what is an appropriate level of salary for the position and so can ensure that your expectations & requests are realistic and make sure you receive an offer to fully reflect your abilities.

8. Decision time

Hopefully by this stage you will have several offers and now need to choose between them. Again the consultant can help with this process both by their knowledge of the company cultures, their advice on how each position may influence your long-term career, teasing out your main motivators etc.

Overall there are many areas where recruitment agencies can add value apart from the obvious one of knowing what vacancies are available. However standards of service can vary dramatically and it is important to find an agency that you can trust and will offer the benefits outlined above.

Which agency to choose?

There is generally little benefit in going to more than one agency. In fact it can be detrimental as your CV may go to a particular employer from several sources which could give the impression that you are "desperate" for a role. Also it makes it a lot more difficult to manage the process and keep up to date with where your applications

are, which agency is dealing with which company, different people calling you about different roles etc.

Far preferential is to find an agency dealing with all of the actuarial employers and can therefore manage the whole process in a more efficient way for you. This also means that when you are deciding between jobs, the agency can provide you with unbiased advice on the pros and cons of each employer.

The first thing to do is ask around for personal recommendations. Clearly you can't openly ask your employer whom they would recommend but there may be other actuarial friends or discrete colleagues who could give some feedback on agencies they have used. Steer clear of any if your friend had little idea of what happened to their CV, which companies were contacted or received minimal feedback from the agency.

Some agencies employ actuaries as recruitment consultants. This adds extra value to the process in that the actuary has the technical background to fully understand your skills, and particularly what your transferable skills are if you are looking to go in a slightly different direction. An actuary can also give you a practice technical interview thereby helping further with your preparation and can suggest good sources for background material if required. They are likely to have a number of personal contacts in the industry and therefore will have a good insight into the different employers. In dealing with professional people you can be confident of a discreet and confidential service.

Another option is to call a few agencies up. You should quickly get a good feel for how much knowledge the consultant has, their level of experience and whether they have your best interests at heart.

A key consideration is to not be swayed in your choice of agency by who is advertising a particular role. Often an agency only advertises a small selection of their positions and through their regular employer contacts can quickly find out about a specific job that has caught your eye. So if you like a job advert from one agency but want to deal specifically with another one, it's worth giving the preferred one a call.

Finally all that's left to say is Good Luck with your job searching!