



Finding the candidate

Recruitment processes in the
publishing industry
2010



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working with research publishers around the world

This research was commissioned by the Oxford International Centre for Publishing Studies at Oxford Brookes University, and was undertaken by

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1. Purpose of research

This research was commissioned by the Oxford International Centre for Publishing Studies at Oxford Brookes University. It sought to investigate the methods being used within the publishing industry to promote and identify vacancies.

The objective of the research was to see how these methods are changing; to identify problems and benefits with the processes being used, and to see how and if new systems could provide improved solutions.

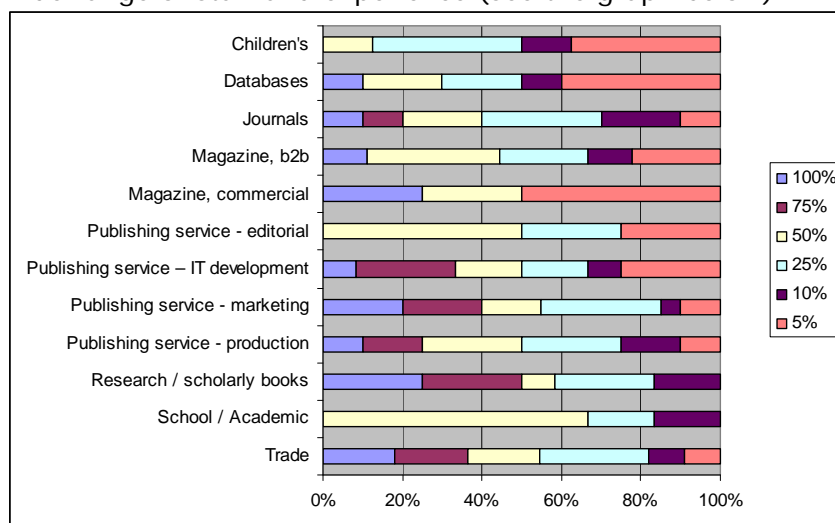
2. Activities undertaken

Face-to-face meetings were undertaken with 30 people from 14 companies. In addition an online survey was run for 6 weeks. It was promoted widely within the UK and abroad and received 78 responses.

Although feedback from the online survey was interesting many people skipped questions so that the data received was not of statistical value – however the comments supplied provided valuable insights. The value of the face-to-face meetings was far higher, and provided a wealth of data, opinions and general information about recruitment processes and problems.

3. Composition of respondents

The meetings and online survey included people from a wide range of companies within the UK and abroad, and demonstrated that the industry rarely specialises on one type of publication or service but frequently includes a variety of product and service types – resulting in a need for a wide range of staff and experience (see the graph below).



The research addressed two groups: (1) those placing job adverts (managers and HR staff), and (2) those who have recently looked for job adverts (new recruits/job-seekers). Each group was questioned to discover their methods and ascertain their opinions.

38 managers responded to the online survey and 19 managers were interviewed (t=57). 40 "employees/recruits" responded to the online survey and 11 were interviewed (t=51).

Many (but not all) of the managers interviewed worked in Human Resources, it appears that the majority of managers responding to the online survey were departmental managers.

Most of the employee/recruit respondents to the online survey and the interviews worked in editorial, but there were also representatives from Production, IT, Sales and Marketing, as well as several whose jobs crossed over several areas (e.g. project managers, business development managers). A wide variety of grades were also represented including Director level (2), senior and middle managers (14), junior professionals (12) support staff (3) and new entrants (5).

A wide variety of company sizes also responded and were involved in the face-to-face meetings. They ranged from companies with fewer than 10 full time employees to companies with over 1000 staff worldwide. Most respondents came from companies with 51-150 staff and those with over 1000 staff.

The majority of respondents appeared to come from the UK, but responses were also received from China (4), France (1), India (1), Kenya (2), Sri Lanka (1), Thailand (1), and the USA (3). Most online respondents did not state the location of their office.

4. Current level of recruitment

The total number of positions that respondents anticipate looking for in the next year is 1565, the average per respondent was 69.

In larger companies a turnover of 10-20% was common but it would be incorrect to assume that this percentage applies equally to smaller companies. Most companies were unable to anticipate the type of vacancies which they were likely to require, but it was suggested that the majority would be in either editorial or production.

It was noticeable that the number of positions required in the next year given in the online survey were very much smaller than those quoted at face-to-face meetings. Turnover varies a great deal between companies and it was frequently stressed during face-to-face meetings that a large number of vacancies are due to internal promotion, maternity cover and business expansion, rather than high staff turnover due to dissatisfaction with the current company. It appears that a great many positions are filled from within the company, therefore leading to an exaggeration in the number of job adverts placed. However, from the face-to-face meetings and the

responses online it seems that many companies do not appreciate their level of turnover.

As with many businesses, the majority of new recruits are taken on at junior levels, frequently at the 1st or 2nd job level, and most companies looked to hire a junior person and then fill senior positions from internal promotion to provide a career progression for their staff.

It is of note that during the interviews most of the companies mentioned that they had recently introduced an internship programme, working with universities to provide short-term (paid) placements that might be converted into full time jobs.

It should be noted that two of the overseas respondents indicated a high level of recruitment which is probably associated with business expansion and change.

5. Recruitment problems

*"Too many applicants ...
too many poor quality
applicants."*

It was apparent that problems with recruitment varied between companies, however several trends were noticeable:

- There was no shortage of applicants for first-time positions (in fact frequently there were too many applicants), and generally applicants were of a high quality.
- There were problems in obtaining higher-level staff with relevant skills and experience.
- Most companies recruited at the lower level with a view to promoting senior positions from within.
- Companies with a recognised "brand" experienced fewer problems with recruitment than those that would not be well known amongst job-seekers.

Problems also varied between divisions. It seems that there is a problem in obtaining IT staff with sufficient experience and knowledge. Marketing and Sales appeared to be areas where there was a wealth of applicants, but few with relevant experience.

6. Recruitment avenues

Respondents mentioned various routes for advertising vacancies. There was a great deal of overlap in the methods used, and different methods were used for different job types.

Some publishers are part of larger companies where they are required to use the company websites/agencies.

Comments made about different methods were as follows (in alphabetical order):

Company website

"Not enough information about the company you are applying to."

Most respondents included job adverts on their company website. Some were more sophisticated (and kept up-to-date) than others and allowed online application. These appeared to work well where the company had a recognisable brand image. They were also used to prevent speculative applications by only allowing job-related communications.

The benefits of company websites were that they were free, and enabled more information about the position and the job to be provided than elsewhere. The disadvantages were that they required users to find them (often through adverts placed elsewhere) and required time and effort to maintain.

General press (e.g. The Guardian)

"Expensive, and don't represent the way the company would wish to be represented."

These appear to be used less and less. Most respondents said that they no longer used print adverts, but still used the online for some positions, particularly more senior roles. They appear to be more useful and used in other parts of the world (e.g. India). It appears that recruitment agencies still use the general press to advertise jobs on behalf of clients.

The benefits of using the general press were given as reaching a wider audience than trade-associated job promotion, and they frequently achieved a high response rate.

Problems with using the general press were given as the high cost and sometimes random pricing, and the poor quality of applicants that they attracted.

One interesting comment made about the reduction in print advertisements in the general and trade press is that they used to provide a valuable source of industry information – who was recruiting what. Now, however, the dispersal of job adverts make this information much harder to obtain.

Job boards

"Search results include too many unrelated jobs."

It was felt by most interviewees that general job boards were of limited use for publishing as they were too broad and encouraged too many applicants. Most job-seekers also reported that they found them of little use. Some respondents reported that they used companies that would post adverts on relevant job boards, but the success of this strategy was not reported. They were used predominantly for support and administrative positions, and frequently attracted too many poor quality applicants.

One interesting criticism of job boards concerned the visibility of advertising. The ranking of vacancies is related to the date of placement, so an advert quickly becomes "lost" amongst others and the search facilities appear limited (and inaccurate). Therefore more than one respondent said that to

use them effectively required repeated placement of a job advert to raise them up in the search results.

Job boards were criticised by job seekers for having limited search facilities, which returned inappropriate and uninteresting results.

LinkedIn

"We have good experience of candidates coming from outside publishing."

A few companies reported using LinkedIn. It seems that use of the service is quite new (most respondents saying that they had only started using it within the past year). There were mixed opinions about its current usefulness, but most reported that they felt it would become more important in the future (both for finding people and positions). In particular the specialised groups were seen as a great way of reaching out to relevant people.

There was some evidence of appointments being made from seeking appropriate individuals and responding to adverts on LinkedIn.

Only a few recruits/job-seekers mentioned LinkedIn, but those that did felt it was a useful tool on which to promote themselves and their experience/interests. They also liked the nature of specialist groups and felt that this provided them with access to more targeted vacancies.

Local websites (e.g. Gumtree)

"Can be too generic, hard to search for a specific company or role."

These were mentioned as good ways of obtaining staff looking for work in a particular area – in particular being valuable for recruiting in locations outside their main publishing hubs.

The benefits were that they focused on people looking for work within a specific locality, and reached out to a wide (not necessarily publishing) audience. They were also easy to use, and often quite cheap.

The disadvantages were that they were not specialised, and could sometimes result in high levels of applicants.

Professional Associations

"Sometimes have jobs I don't find elsewhere."

Several respondents mentioned using professional association services to advertise jobs (e.g. ALPSP and SYP). These were not considered to be the main route for any companies, but seen as a helpful way of reaching out.

One concern mentioned was that the alerts did not necessarily go to job seekers but to members of the association who would (understandably) rarely pass them on to colleagues.

Recruitment agencies

"The saving in time more than out-weighs the fees (not sure the Finance Director agrees)."

Most respondents used recruitment companies (or "Contingency agencies") to a greater or lesser extent. Some companies used them exclusively, however many

reported that they make less use of them now than they had done in the past.

The key benefits of using such agencies was perceived to be the relatively low effort required by the publisher to obtain a pre-selected group of applicants. Where they were most successful, the publisher had developed a good (and often long-term) relationship with the agency so that they understood the needs of the company. The importance of building good relationships was emphasised by a comment from one respondent "Some of them are quite frankly useless".

Job-seekers were also often pleased with agencies as they felt that they not only found them appropriate jobs, but also helped them with their application and provide information about salaries, etc.

A range of agencies were provided since most specialised in specific areas. In some companies they were used exclusively in some departments (such as HR and finance recruitment), but were not used at all in others.

Balancing the benefits, they were frequently criticised for being expensive (costing up to 25% of first-year salary for a successful placement), for not understanding job requirements (particularly in new crossover areas), and for not finding new people (re-sending applicants for multiple jobs). Some job seekers also complained that they sent them inappropriate vacancies or ignored them once they had become registered.

It should be remembered that agencies do not appear to operate internationally and so are not available in some parts of the world.

For some high level jobs specialist search services were used to identify candidates but these were only rarely used.

Trade publications (e.g. The Bookseller)

"More likely to have leading publishers."

Trade publications were still being used by a large number of respondents, although it seems that their use is declining. Almost all the advertising was moving to the online site rather than the print (although some publications were offering special prices to retain print adverts).

It was reported that they usually obtained a good response rate and also helped to promote the company profile. However to balance this, several respondents thought that they were an expensive way of recruiting.

Job seekers frequently used trade publications as a source of vacancies, often – but not always – relying on the online. They generally found them useful in two ways: to inform them of vacancies and let them know which agencies to contact.

University websites

"Good way to find new talent."

These came out as a popular way to reach new job seekers, and were mentioned by all respondents at interview. There were three main benefits given: that

they are free, that they reach out to graduates with relevant qualifications, and that they raise the profile of the company.

They were, however, criticised for attracting too many and unsuitable applicants for some positions, and for providing a lack of feedback.

It appears that Scottish Universities operate a network whereby a job needs to be posted once to appear on all the relevant sites, however this does not operate in the UK, and so the amount of effort required to place adverts was seen as a barrier to their use.

Job seekers reported that they frequently used such university websites to search for positions – some recent graduates using them almost exclusively.

Web 2.0 avenues

"Web 2.0 networks are useful only for reference checking."

Feelings about Web 2.0 services (other than LinkedIn) were mixed. Some companies had initiated a FaceBook account, and two had Twitter accounts. These were used for company news including job adverts. (Recruitment agencies frequently use Web 2.0 avenues to keep job seekers apprised of opportunities.)

Opinions of their value to publishers were ambivalent, and it was not generally thought that there was huge potential in them. However the companies using them thought that they served a valuable purpose in raising the profile of the company and were worth the effort to maintain them.

Word-of-mouth and informal networks

"Most of my interviews have come from networking."

Although these are harder to track, it appears that within publishing a great number of jobs are discovered through personal informal networks. Some companies promote this route and encourage staff to tell their friends about vacancies (some offering a financial reward after successful placement).

Whilst using personal networks has several advantages, one disadvantage mentioned several times was that it encouraged the lack of diversity which is prevalent within the industry, and led to a lack of candidates bringing fresh ideas and perspectives into the business. This was a theme picked up several times.

Other methods and initiatives

The variety of methods use by most publishers appeared to be quite conservative, relying on trusted methods which required a low level of input from the HR departments. However some companies confirmed that they are expending efforts in raising their visibility to potential job-seekers, particularly with relevant universities. From the perspective of new recruits this would be a valuable exercise since several mentioned that the university careers advice rarely included publishing for graduates with scientific or other qualifications not immediately linked to publishing.

Several companies were working with government bodies to increase their workforce diversity by implementing work placement schemes. Also – as mentioned above – a great number of the companies reported the introduction of recent internship schemes to bring in new recruits with the possibility of full time appointment at the end of their internship.

One company reported that it has initiated a corporate alumni programme. This not only provides selected company news, but also advertises vacant positions. The rationale is that a returning member of staff will already know the organisation, and if they pass on the vacancy to another person they will provide an ambassadorial role for the company.

7. Recruitment costs

"The websites we use are free."

The costs of paid for advertising varied a great deal from a few hundred pounds to several thousand. Few respondents revealed recruitment budgets, many saying that there was no centralised budget and that it was charged to the recruiting division as part of the salary bill. Where it was reported, a figure of £10,000 was given.

When asked what pricing models would be felt to be preferable there was a mixed response. There was no definite preferred model, however the most acceptable/preferred models were:

- a charge per job advert (30%)
- a method that was free but required a high level of staff time (24%)
- a charge for each search undertaken (18%)
- a fee based on the employee salary (15%).

The most unpopular charging model proposed was a set fee based on the size of the company.

8. Changes in recruitment processes

"We were previously very reliant on agencies, we are now more proactive and more closely involved in recruitment which leads to a better candidate experience."

Of the publishers interviewed, about half reported that they are becoming more involved in recruitment and using agencies less. It was acknowledged that to make good use of online promotion of vacancies required additional effort which some companies said they did not have time

for, however those that were making the efforts reported good success and a higher quality of recruit.

Within the online survey although 6 respondents said that they had not changed their processes, 7 said that they had, particularly making use of free advertising – on their own site and on university sites. They also stated that they had started to experiment with social media.

Two companies reported recently starting to use Twitter to promote vacancies, and most mentioned (tentatively) using LinkedIn.

9. Job-seeking activities– problems and benefits

"I wish companies were more transparent about the wages. It puts me off applying as I'm concerned the company will try to get away with paying as little as possible."

Job seekers reported a wide range of approaches to identify suitable vacancies. Those coming from university appeared to rely a great deal on the university websites and the job sites that the university recommended.

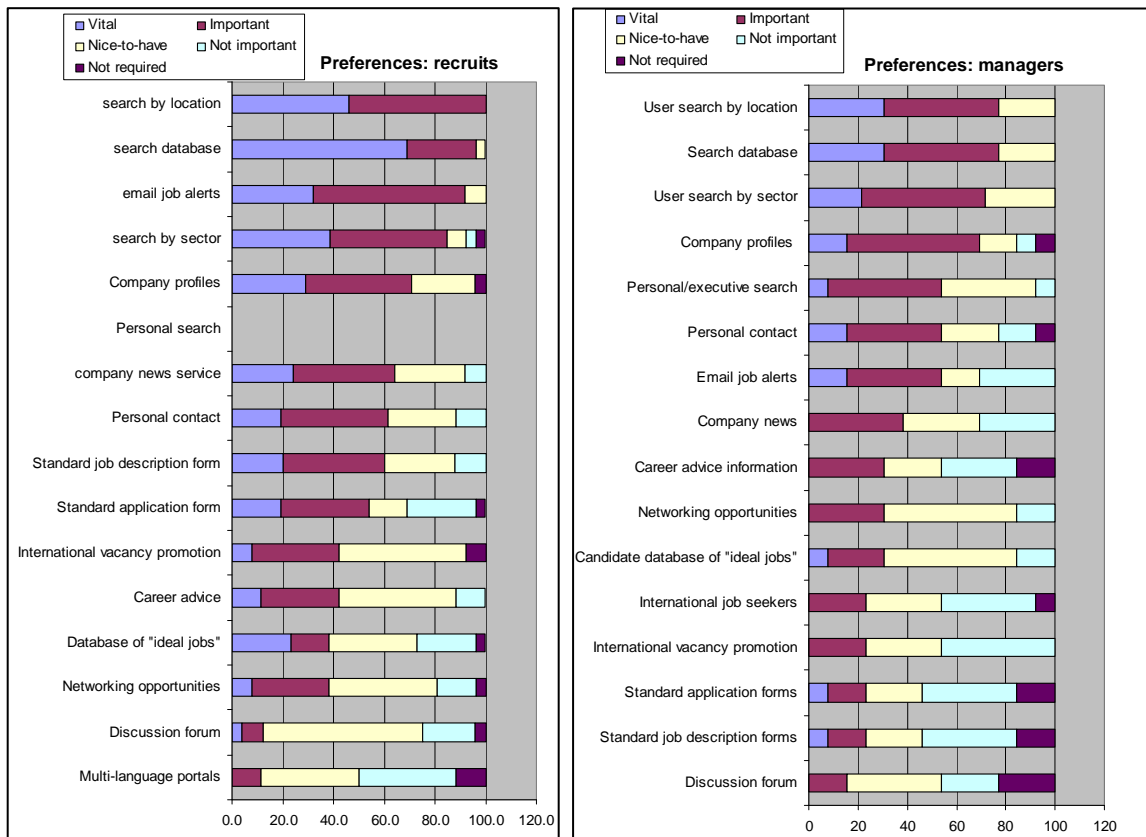
Those with experience frequently signed up with recruitment agencies, and supplemented this with searching the trade press (mostly online) and company websites.

Most complained that unless they specifically wanted a job within a specific location or with a specific company, there were too many places to search and too much time required. They also reported that it was easy to miss interesting positions. There were frequent criticisms of incomplete (and inaccurate) job descriptions and job titles, lack of information about the recruiting company (even on their own site), and the lack of salary information.

There were some complaints about unprofessional behaviour within the publishers and agencies: specifically not replying to applications, or taking a long time to do so.

10. Recruitment services of value

Comparing the importance that recruits and employers place on different services, it is reassuring to see that they tally very closely. See the graphs below which have been sorted in order items that are most important (vital+important) to the respondents.



11. New ways – networking and websites

Face-to-face interviews suggested that networking sites plus a website devoted to promoting vacancies in publishing may be an attractive addition to the mix of avenues for finding recruits. The online survey asked for opinions on this.

Reasons given for why such methods may prove valuable included the following responses. Primarily respondents thought that the combination of a large number of users who (by joining the network) had confirmed their interest in the profession would help to match up vacancies with applicants. Online networks also provided a way of finding out about the applicants through reading their public profiles. The free nature of such networks was also considered to be a benefit.

Disadvantages of using such networks included a concern that the methodology could result in too many unsuitable applicants and if widely used could contribute to "digital noise" and lower impact.

The survey also asked about the idea of a website devoted to publishing vacancies. This was agreed to be a good idea by all respondents, but opinions of its success were mixed.

On the plus side it was thought that it would make recruitment easier as there would be a pool to pick from, and it would also help with international

vacancies and applicants. Recruits thought it would save them time and help them to find appropriate positions – particularly those from the smaller (and less visible) publishers.

However it was suggested that it would again reinforce the lack of diversity within the industry – only attracting those people who had already decided to look for a job in publishing. It was also felt that it may duplicate the websites of the professional associations and existing networks. One respondent questioned if it was needed with LinkedIn potentially providing the same service.

12. Summary

Recruitment systems within the industry are changing slowly, having moved (and still moving) towards more online and networked methods of advertising and finding vacancies.

Publishers appear to be making greater use of their own website, and those of associations, and finding ways of promoting their vacancies freely – but with greater associated internal staff costs.

The research highlighted no obvious problems with the systems currently in use, but suggest that there are further opportunities to use online systems (networks, etc.) to link suitable applicants to vacancies and broaden the diversity of skills and staff within the industry.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who gave up their time for face-to-face meetings and to complete the online survey.

About PSP Consulting

Pippa Smart, PSP Consulting, is a publishing consultant with many years' experience of providing training to editors and publishing staff. She was previously the Chair of the Professional Development Committee of ALPSP (the Association of Learned, Professional and Scholarly Publishers) and also a member of the Board of Directors of the Publishing NTO (National Training Organization).

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About the Oxford Brookes International Centre for Publishing

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