

Job descriptions – a wasted opportunity

By Nicole Underwood, General Manager, Entrée Recruitment

It's time to throw out your old, boring, outdated and (usually) long job descriptions! They are costing you candidates! In today's market, the highest quality candidates – the talent that we are all finding so hard to attract, recruit and retain – have estimated drop off rates as high as 90% once they have read a job description. Some of the reasons include: the description doesn't excite or engage them; the work looks exactly the same as their current position; their skills don't meet all the "essential" criteria; unclear, unprofessional and "reactive" language; long documents that don't capture their interest.

What doesn't work


Imagine all that effort you have put into writing an advertisement, all that money you have spent using attraction strategies and all that time invested in the recruitment process wasted because of one document. The truth is that job descriptions have traditionally been a document kept on file by human resources as a "must have" that outlines all tasks, skills, qualifications and experience required to do a certain job within an organisation. These ineffective job descriptions often include spelling errors, use of internal jargon, are often way too long and wordy, as well as being unclear and visually unappealing.

The reality today is that these documents are now being judged by commercially savvy job seekers who know what they want and will pick and choose the jobs they apply for and ultimately accept. They don't want just any job – they want an opportunity that presents a better challenge than the one they are already doing. Once they read a job description that sounds essentially like their current job – where is the incentive to change?

The opportunity

This is where the opportunity lies! 98% of organisations are missing this sales opportunity to entice, engage and excite candidates into their organisation through having an up-to-date, professional and different job description. If used effectively, a job description can become a sales tool to showcase each opportunity within your organisation as a unique proposi-

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tion that displays a commitment to investing in people, each role and a strategic recruitment strategy to find the best talent in the market.

Tips to achieving this include:

1. Short and simple (not more than 3 pages)
2. Stating an overall purpose of the role (expressed as an outcome, not an action)
3. Most exciting tasks and challenges (not all of them)
4. Outcomes to be produced and key result areas
5. Transferable skills required to be successful
6. Current – (reviewed every 12 months as a minimum)
7. Visually appealing

Experience vs Competency

The biggest area to review in any job description is the experience, skills and industry knowledge required to do the job. In the majority of job descriptions I read, this is usually listed as essential criteria. The challenge I ask is where do you find these candidates who have three to five years experience, doing exactly the same job, in the exact same industry with all the qualifications and attribute criteria you are after? They certainly aren't surfing accounting job boards looking for your vacancy! Today there are over 12,000 full-time accounting vacancies listed nationally on www.seek.com.au – the competition has never been stronger in a market of nearly full employment. To stand out as an employer has never been harder so take this opportunity to recruit on competency and not on experience. Consider the alternative: what are the transferable skills someone

could bring to the role? What competencies do they need to demonstrate? Decision-making skills, analytical ability and project management skills? Do they necessarily need to have done the same job in the same industry? I would argue that for most positions this is not essential and is merely a precedent that has been set in the job descriptions you have been following for the past 10 years. Ditch the essential skills, experience and industry criteria and look for competencies and transferable skills to open up a whole new pool of candidates and potential talent.

Job descriptions in this market should can be used as an attraction tool to encourage candidates in the market to investigate your opportunity further, not to dismiss it and decide on their own accord that it is not worth pursuing. What are the most exciting parts of your role and how can that be expressed effectively? Is "seeking five years SAP experience" as exciting as saying "use your SAP knowledge to lead our system implementation team"?

Keeping job descriptions specific, up-to-date and focused on the most challenging aspects of a job will result in a wider and higher quality of candidates for you to choose from. And remember, people apply for the work that they will be doing, not the skills they possess – the tip is to write your job descriptions with this in mind. Candidates in this market have one subconscious question they want answered: "What's in it for me?" Your job as the employer is to demonstrate how your opportunity is better than their current situation and to draw them into the possibility of something more rewarding. ■