

Outside the box: How to source managers from external sources

Automotive retailers turn to digital technology and other industry sectors when internal promotion is not possible

There was a time when automotive retailers relied heavily on headhunters to find the best talent. But, due to cost constraints and succession planning, those days are gone.

While dealers are more focused than they used to be on recruiting from within, they are using digital technology, such as social media, to attract external candidates they may not have previously been able to reach.

Melvin Rogers, Sytner Group's director of human resources, said while the company appoints 80% of its managers from within its ranks, it does also use its network of contacts in the motor industry to source candidates.

"We believe that the very best talent is not always actively looking for their next opportunity and therefore we use networking tools such as LinkedIn to promote careers at Sytner and directly approach people regarding specific opportunities," he said.

"The recruitment team embrace a 'never stop looking for great talent' ethos and will constantly communicate on job boards and social media to promote Sytner and our fantastic opportunities and careers."

Rogers said Sytner looks for candidates

with the right attitude and behaviour who can work within a team, and listen and contribute, as well as be honest and respectful. In return, he said they will get the training and support needed to progress their career.

"Sytner is committed to developing talent and building careers," he said. "If a candidate doesn't have the specific experience, but has the right attitude and behaviour, we believe that we can teach the technical knowledge they will need to build a successful career."

Rogers said Sytner's learning and development team provides a range of industry-leading courses run by an experienced team of coaches. They cover everything from core modules and courses to one-to-one training in the dealerships to help get newly appointed managers up and running as soon as possible.

For the more specialist roles, Rogers said the company carries out technical assessments of the applicants. The group has also made some recent HR appointments through effective succession planning.

Scott Smith, recruitment manager at Swansway Garages, said the group advertises on LinkedIn and its own website, as well as all the major online job boards, but also headhunts within the

local markets using its own recruitment team.

He said Swansway recently hired an aftersales manager for its Audi branch in Carlisle who was working at Lookers Volkswagen Carlisle at the time.

"We contacted them and arranged initially to meet for a coffee and talk to them about the role," he said. "Then when they accepted the offer, it was a matter of onboarding them and getting them familiar with our systems and processes and the company culture."

Smith said the company prefers to use its own HR team rather than external recruiters because its research has shown retention levels to be higher among those staff hired directly by the company.

"We are honest and up-front with the candidate from the start about the requirements and expectations of the role, whereas sometimes an agency can try and sell you the dream," he said. "If you can gain their trust and respect from the outset you are much more likely to keep them longer term."

Smith said education is only a consideration when trying to find the ideal candidate for the top jobs. A proven track record in their previous roles is more important, he said.

"We are always looking at ways to

progress our employees' careers and helping them to make the next step up," he said. "Above all, they need to understand the core values of our business and be able to fit within our culture."

For certain roles where the company is looking for a different perspective, Smith said Swansway will use headhunters to recruit from outside of the motor industry. One recent example of this, he said, was for the group HR director role. The dealer group ended up hiring the head of HR from a firm of solicitors.

"We really try and match the type of recruitment to the role and area we are hiring from," he said.

"For example, in Carlisle, because a lot of people read the local paper there, we tend to advertise new roles at our dealerships there."

Clare Martin, group HR director at Jardine Motors Group, said the company has an active pipeline of external candidates that it can call on when they can't fill the role internally. The group also uses automotive executive search company Ennis & Co for more specialist positions, such as when it recently recruited a new IT director, she said.

"In the case of pipelining, if the candidate meets our criteria for the role we would interview them and keep them warm," she said. "That ensures we have a steady flow of candidates should a suitable vacancy arise that we may otherwise struggle to fill."

In terms of qualities the company looks for in a middle to senior management level candidate, Martin said strategic awareness and commerciality were key, as well as the ability to lead and adaptability, particularly given the current tougher trading conditions in the market.

The recent spate of high street collapses and closures at retailers such as Mothercare, Homebase, Toys R Us and House of Fraser has swelled the talent pool of managers that dealer groups may be able to tap into.

Among those to take advantage was TrustFord, which has recruited from

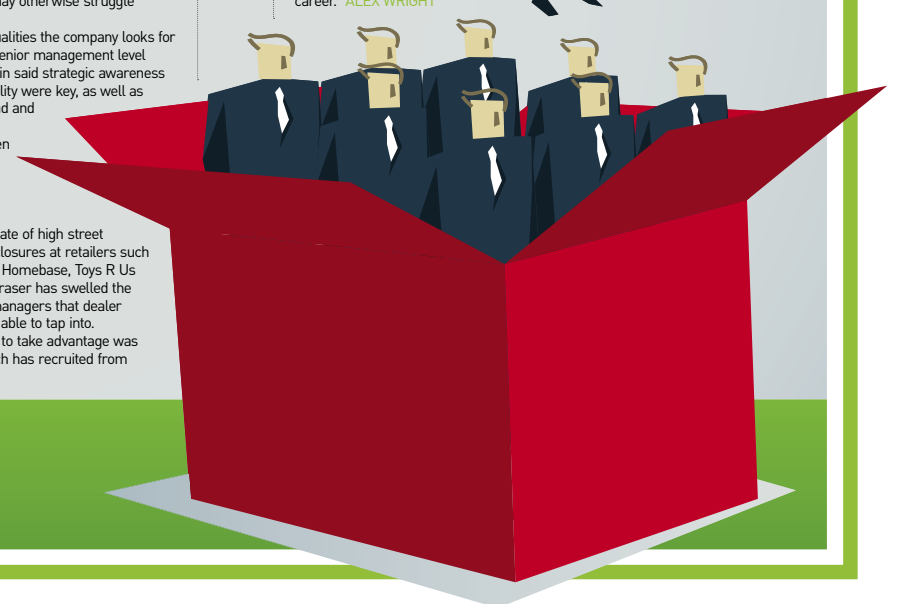
brands including Sainsbury's, Argos, DFS and Barclays.

Martin said high street retail and hospitality were among the areas outside of the motor industry from which Jardine would seek to recruit.

Lynne McBurney, group head of people at Arnold Clark, who herself has moved through the ranks, said education and qualifications are important when it comes to recruiting for specialist roles such as accountants. For a sales role, she said customer service experience is more important.

"While experience and qualifications are key, it's important to have someone with the right work ethic and values," she said. "We have our own dedicated GTG Training centre where staff can receive the right training and quickly get up to speed on the technical side to equip them with the necessary skills such as using our systems."

"What we find now is that we are very much having to sell the organisation to the candidate rather than the other way round. So we're really focusing on hooking them in from the start by telling them the story about our company, its core values and why it's such a great place to work and progress your career." **ALEX WRIGHT**



WE USE NETWORKING TOOLS SUCH AS LINKEDIN TO PROMOTE CAREERS AT SYTNER AND DIRECTLY APPROACH PEOPLE REGARDING SPECIFIC OPPORTUNITIES MELVIN ROGERS, SYTNER