# On the Frontline

## Databases – are they really worth the money?

**I know that many of you** will laugh when you read my article this month. I am going to take you back to recruiting before the internet, e-mail; job boards and computerized databases (pre 1995 for me). Believe it or not, recruiters still made money prior to these innovations!

Most of my years spent on a desk were pre 1995 so I believe that I am competently able to discuss the virtues of building and managing a desk manually and comment on what I believe the benefits to be. For the Gen X amongst you, let me walk you through the manual process. Client cards were set up – normally A4 size where every consultant who made contact with the client wrote their comments. These were kept in a central area so all consultants had access to them. Candidate files were kept in trolleys beside consultants desks. For temp consultants, finishers files were stood up in the trolley so you could easily see how many finishers you had this week. The logic being that you had to replace your finishers and add 2 to grow your temporary desk.

The administration functions were even better and I am yet to see a recruitment database that can do what we did manually. When a candidate registered with the agency, their resume was logged into a registration book. Then an administrator checked each and every resume against the client cards. If a client card did not exist for a company (and that company was within our geographical area) then a client card was created and our manager allocated the cold call in our weekly meeting. We had huge filing systems because of course every piece of paper had to be stored for seven years.

As consultants, we always asked marketing questions in interview. Because we didn't have on line job boards to alert us – it was important to know who my candidate was interviewing with and how my job compared with others the candidate was looking at.

We always delivered shortlists in person, we had more time in those days. Our clients did not expect us to fill a job in 24 hours like they do now. We could only rely on fax machines if we could not get there in person. I remember in the early 1990's when I worked for a large recruitment firm in the UK. If a contingent job came in, we had to quickly take our fax machine off the hook so that our biggest competitor would not telephone it an engage it so that we couldn't fax resumes to our client. It was that competitive!

We worked less candidates in those days too. We didn't have key word searches to find suitable candidates for jobs. We had available's lists that listed our candidates attributes and desired salary. We kept in touch with those candidates that we were working on. Rarely was a permanent candidate (of reasonable quality) on my available's list for more than a month. If I hadn't placed him/her then my competitor would have.

We knew when we received a resume that the candidate really wanted our help. We didn't have to sift through mountains of resumes that were received as a result of key word searches against job board advertised jobs. You know the ones you receive off the major job boards that don't have a cover letter attached and when you contact the candidate, the candidate doesn't even know their resume has gone to you.

Same with temps. We had our core bank of temporaries who we kept in work – we kind of felt an obligation to and we kept these on an availables list as well. We also had their details in our trolleys. When we knew someone was finishing up this week, we stood their candidate file up in our trolley so we knew exactly how many jobs we had to refill this week to ensure that our figures didn't drop. We were also acutely aware (because it was staring us in the face) of who was becoming available and therefore who could be reverse marketed that week as well. In those days we used to fill temp jobs as they came in. We knew who was available and was finishing that week so could easily fill a job as it came in. This of course meant clients did not call other agencies – they knew that we had solved the problem for them so didn't need to.

Every time a candidate was spoken to, their candidate file was updated. That was so we could prove to our colleagues that we had kept in touch with those candidates we were working on. We used to operate a candidate ownership situation where I got 50% if my colleague placed my candidate in his/her job. Our sales meetings in those days were like auctions – everyone brought in their unfilled jobs and great candidates who were auctioned to the highest bidder.

Now days we can link candidates to jobs, jobs to clients and do exceptional key word searches. I just wonder if somewhere along the line service got lost in the process. Every consultant wants to let clients know they have the largest database. I would question whether quantity is better than quality. Back in the old days we had a 96% fill rate on all jobs (I was in the accounting recruitment market). I wonder if agencies today could boast such a rate utilising the technology we now have available and I wonder what percentage of candidates on those huge databases are ever contacted – we know call that candidate care! Technology has certainly meant that we can deal with a higher volume and do it quicker BUT has something been lost in the process?

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