

A closer look at France

Strategies for overcoming difficult market conditions

The French employment market continues to perform poorly compared to its peers in Europe. While other countries are experiencing market momentum following years of instability and stagnation, France's woes only seem to be deepening. >>





Unemployment is now at its highest level in 15 years and economic growth projections suggest that the favourable conditions required for significant job creation are not on the horizon.

Additionally, the cost of labour, the 35 hour working week and the officious French Employment Code continue to make life extremely difficult for French employers seeking to increase their workforce. The economic situation, together with these additional factors, could have a major impact on the future availability of talent in France.

In the first instance, talent is increasingly globally mobile and we are already rapidly losing a plethora of excellent candidates to other countries. Furthermore, there is a lack of young people entering the labour market, as well as getting the necessary experience and stability associated with working in permanent positions. Temporary and short term contracts now make up 13% of the overall workforce and only 20% of temporary workers now gain a full time position after a year in a temporary role.

Together with the imminent increase in the number of people reaching retirement age in France in the next few years, the already small talent pool could effectively disappear in the very near future. It is vitally important therefore, for French companies seeking to grow their workforce, to make sure they are recognised as 'employers of choice' within this tightly controlled and highly competitive market for talent.

The 2014 LinkedIn Talent Trends report confirmed that a company's employment brand is a key factor in persuading people in France to consider changing jobs. Interestingly, company reputation for great products or services and for hiring great people, were also 'above the global average' reasons for tempting people away from their perceived security in the French market. Other factors that would further influence passive candidates include remuneration, better work life balance and opportunities for advancement.

Indeed, according to the report, the importance of job security is relatively low in France compared the rest of Europe and around 50% of those in employment are open to talking to recruiters. So, although 'loyalty' is heralded as the one truly positive factor for French employers today, French professionals are still very open to new opportunities and, for the right offer, will move.

As a specialist provider of talent solutions to the French consumer industry, Nigel Wright is extremely cognisant of the types of skills businesses operating within the broad industry require today to remain competitive. The consumer industry could be perceived as a beacon of hope within France. France's FMCG industry experienced growth of 2% during Q2 2014, yet to maintain this tenuous upward trajectory, companies within the sector need to address changes in consumer behaviour successfully.

Focusing on innovation, customer value and trends such as health and wellness is essential. Companies must also react to the rising importance of digital connectivity, which is increasingly an integral part of the lives of older as well as younger people. Having a deep understanding of category dynamics will help companies overcome difficult market conditions and to gain that understanding they must utilise insight to profile and segment customers and be agile when developing targeting strategies. Consequently, R&D, NPD, digital marketing, customer insight and category management profiles are in high demand.

During the last 12 months Nigel Wright has worked on numerous recruitment campaigns seeking talent for these types of positions. Utilising its excellent networks, broad exposure to the French executive talent market and research driven approach, has enabled Nigel Wright to be innovative in terms of how it identifies and attracts the best candidates in the market. Significantly, it has gone to market by selling a different yet compelling proposition to candidates, utilising value added services such as candidate packs and client microsites to help raise awareness of clients' employment brands, through promoting career opportunities and other

benefits in addition to the role. This process has been extremely successful, despite the difficult enduring trading conditions.

Manuel Lecugy is the Country Manager for Nigel Wright, based in Paris. He joined the business in November 2014, bringing over 15 years experience in the French HR and recruitment market where he has predominantly specialised in serving the broad retail, FMCG, distribution and luxury goods industries. Nigel Wright France works with a broad range of domestic and international clients across Europe, Middle East and Africa and Asia.

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Market snapshot

FRANCE

Last year the French economy made a fragile recovery, experiencing growth of 0.4%. Experts predict that this low rate of growth will continue in 2015 due to low oil prices and the weakness of the Euro.

In its attempt to revive the economy, the French government implemented a number of reforms last year, and outlined plans to open up various regulated sectors. In 2015, it also plans to increase the number of businesses operating on Sundays. This, according to a national statistics report, is expected to expand the economy by 0.3% in the first two quarters.

It is doubtful that these factors will make an impact on unemployment however, which rose to its highest level yet in Q3 2014, a record 2.8 million. Businesses are also expected to hold back on implementing major investment plans until conditions change.