



The South looking up

Nigel Wright's London office was officially launched in 2007. It was the first permanent location the business established outside of the North East to facilitate the national and international growth of its consumer industry practise. In the six years since its inception, the team in London as well Nigel Wright's presence in the South of England has grown significantly.

Today the brand is recognised as a market leader, serving small family businesses as well as global leading companies and supporting them in the selection and development of talent across sales, marketing and operations roles. Managing Consultant Chris Vallow, one of the original team relocated to the capital to launch the London office, gives an overview of current market opportunities in the South.

It's been a challenging start to 2013, but the market is beginning to look positive again and the team here are currently very busy. Our client's have a new determined focus on sourcing the best people, yet those people are, in the main, not currently looking to move. Therefore, we're really seeing a commitment from businesses of all sizes in the sector, to working in partnership with specialists like ourselves, on a retained basis, in order to identify and attract top talent.

Food and drink is particularly buoyant at the moment, across the categories. Obviously the frozen category has had a setback following the 'horsegate' scandal, and there is still a great deal of uncertainty in the market, over what impact this will ultimately have on consumer habits. Will people go fresh or chilled – we just don't know. The companies that deal with the issue openly and honestly are beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel, the businesses that haven't been openly testing their products however are likely to still face problems, over the coming months.

In consumer electronics, big ticket items have definitely taken a hit and generally activity is much quieter in the category. It's a mixed industry though - Samsung's recent 41% increase in profits is testament to that. Elsewhere in consumer electronics, things aren't as rosy. Health and Beauty is strong. People still want to treat themselves, even if they're not buying washing machines or TVs. Hayley Snowball has recently joined our London team as a Senior Consultant, to further develop our Health and Beauty offering in the South.

Most businesses in London and the South are willing to widen their catchment area to get the best people. Clients are increasingly offering work/life balance incentives to those who would face a long commute into the City, to guarantee their services. Growth in the UK, however, is still very slow and for some, none existent. Therefore we are also seeing clients from across the industry fervently looking overseas for new opportunities. International roles have increased significantly over the last five years and even more so in the last six to twelve months, as companies seek to expand abroad.

In the food industry, big expat markets such as North America and Australia are a new focus. Selling heritage brands to British expats is widely seen as a big and perhaps untapped market. Significantly, firms are actually looking to establish operations and build teams on the ground in these countries, rather than just exporting, and are sending out UK experienced managers to lead these projects and build and manage teams.

Digital continues to be a focus for our clients. Even the food manufacturing sector is catching on, trying to capitalise on the 'buy now' culture, which is so pervasive in the UK today. Affiliate programmes with supermarkets at the local level are being utilised to capture market share and innovative digital leaders are in demand. Innovation and 'outside the box' thinking is prevalent in Consumer as usual, with a big focus this year being improving the overall quality of customer engagement. This will be put to the test in the summer, when brands try to fill the void left by last year's Olympic Games and Jubilee Celebrations.

We are, however, anticipating a busy summer. The period where candidates were just happy to sit tight and stay focused on job security, rather than career advancement, is definitely over. Pay freezes in the industry have left many feeling ready to consider new futures, where their true value can be met. Knowledge as well as category and skills development are also major drivers for candidates, perhaps starting to look for that next move.