

# Recruitment and talent trends in the UK consumer sector



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While overall retail spending remains sluggish, categories such as food and apparel have experienced incremental improvement during the first quarter of the year. Shopping online in particular has been a major catalyst for overall growth and the UK ecommerce market is now recognised as the biggest and most sophisticated in the world.

Analysts assert however, that despite these positive movements in the market, we are still a long way from a full recovery. Consumer companies therefore, are preparing to enter an increasingly complex and challenging period in the sector by ensuring that their hiring strategies are aligned with the major talent management trends impacting the employment market.

In the UK, intense competition to hire the best talent available has already returned to the consumer industries. With innovation in areas such as marketing, sales and customer engagement increasing at a rapid speed, more and more firms are turning to recruitment, rather than developing internal capability, to satisfy immediate skills shortages. As organisations are generally more lean and productive today, there are greater expectations on new hires to be high performing. This is particularly the case for middle and senior level appointments, and it means companies expect a significant return on the investment they have made in recruitment.

At the same time however, companies are trying even harder to keep their best employees. Employer branding as a talent strategy is once again

In 2012 there has been a modest recovery in the UK consumer market. Spending on consumer goods across the different categories has slowly risen as confidence in an economic recovery has seeped back into the mindset of UK consumers. These positive results are certainly good news for many of our clients.

Taking centre stage, as businesses seek to create intimate and rewarding working cultures to ensure employees feel engaged in the wider organisation and are therefore less likely to want to leave. To complement this, the use of multiple social media platforms to promote the employer brand and connect with potential new hires is also a growing trend. As competition for talent increases, companies (particularly those in the consumer industries) are aware that a poor candidate experience can have negative implications that go beyond the hiring process.

Social media and the greater internet focused job search habits of candidates have also made the talent acquisition and retention process more complex. Employee referrals, for example, have become popular in many sectors as social media has essentially democratized the recruitment process. This development, however, also means recruitment firms that can navigate this environment successfully, have also begun to stand out from the crowd. No one is more aware and engaged in social media than a recruitment consultant – the advantages are obvious. Rather than recognising social media as a recruitment solution (where the recruiter becomes obsolete) employers are instead realising that they need to work more closely with the experts, in order to get their hiring right first time.

What we have noticed is that the economic climate has essentially created conditions where there are fewer average performing businesses. Companies tend to be either quite successful or struggling to survive; not many exist in the space in between. In the consumer sector, those businesses that are performing well have invested time and resources into

trying to understand and anticipate the future in terms of what sort of skills and capabilities they need, to avoid falling behind. Understanding and developing expertise in areas such as global supply chain, ecommerce and sustainability are high on the strategic agendas of many of our clients.

For example, many UK companies (either with international operations or those with operations solely in the UK market) are seeking leadership talent to drive innovation in the supply chain. A key part of this is trying to identify better ways to integrate the supply chain with ecommerce sales channels. This requires leaders with very specific qualities such as knowledge of distribution and sales but also people with prior experience of working for online businesses and an intimate understanding of how consumers engage with products both online and offline. This kind of talent is still emerging and rare but also essential for commercial and operational success in today's consumer market.

The other big area for consumer firms is sustainability. Businesses that have an environmental, ethical or social agenda at the heart of their

corporate philosophy have been shown to outperform those that don't. Increasingly firms need to make sure they bring in the right kind of skills and expertise to develop areas such as sustainable production practices, packaging, ethical sourcing of ingredients or even eco friendly shelf stacking. It's a hugely diverse and constantly evolving area of business strategy, which again requires a very specific kind of talent to make it work.

Nigel Wright continues to work alongside small family businesses as well as global leading consumer brands, supporting them in the selection and development of talent across sales, marketing and operations roles. Although our business is international we pride ourselves on our ability to be effective at the local level, within the countries we operate. As the UK is our oldest market we have an intimate understanding of the trends that are impacting the consumer industries and our experienced consultants can advise clients on key strategic areas that go beyond the hiring process.

## Continued European expansion...

Nigel Wright

Since our affiliation with Baird Capital Partners at the end of last year, our business has continued to grow rapidly, consistently outperforming the market.

### INTERNATIONAL CAPABILITY

For over twenty years we have worked alongside small family businesses as well as global leading consumer brands, supporting them in the selection and development of talent across sales, marketing and operations roles. Our networks therefore are far reaching and the opportunities we subsequently bring to the market are broad, skilled and multi-disciplined.

Beyond the hiring process, we regularly publish 'thought leadership papers' on a range of issues and trends that are impacting the consumer industries. Together with the various networking events we organise every year, we ensure that our customers are provided with tools they can use in their day to day roles, as well as with vibrant communities where they can network and debate the big ideas of the day.

As a specialist consumer sector consultancy, above all else we offer customers an in-depth understanding of the complex and challenging environments they work in every-day. Because the majority of our consultants were previously employed in the consumer sectors, they have a unique ability to intimately understand the needs and the challenges those working in the industry face. This means they can act as true advisors to clients as well as ambassadors for them in the marketplace.

Although our business is international we pride ourselves on ability to be effective at the local level within the countries and regions we operate. For clients, this means they have the benefit of our 'no silos' approach to recruitment. Once a candidate is identified and registered they can be immediately represented in any of our markets across Europe and beyond. The talent pool therefore is larger, as all of our offices share information such as candidate profiles or trends in skills shortages and can add significant value to clients, from a domestic or international perspective.

While retaining market share and expanding our European operations, we have increasingly supported our international clients with their growth strategies in developing economies, sourcing talent in Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Middle East, in line with global demand.

To accommodate new employees and strengthen our pan-European networks, we also moved into larger office space in London, Paris, Stockholm, Oslo, Amsterdam, Brussels, Düsseldorf, Madrid and Geneva. The new offices provide an excellent base for our teams to drive growth in our core markets as well as offering our clients and candidates professional locations to meet. They are all in central and prestigious locations and have helped to promote our premium image as well as attract high potential people.

Our growth has not gone unnoticed. In November Nigel Wright was featured in the UK Recruiter Hot 100, appearing in 19th place ahead of established names such as Harvey Nash, Hudson and Robert Walters. Nigel Wright was the only Consumer industry specialist on this year's list.

In the same week, Denmark's Økonomisk Ugebrev (Economics Weekly) published its latest research on search and selection companies operating in the Danish Market. Nigel Wright was in placed 10th in a list which consisted mainly of global executive search and recruitment providers including Korn/Ferry, Mercuri Unval, Amrop Hever, Odgers Berndtson, Russell Reynolds and Hays. Earlier this year we were also featured in the latest rankings of the 50 fastest growing recruitment firms in the UK.

Fifty percent of our fees now come from overseas and we are anticipating further growth this year as we look to expand our presence in new markets.