

Quality Check

Pharma companies are often lacking in awareness when it comes to their recruitment providers. Ensuring your supplier is compliant with regulations, upholds an ethical standard, and has the right industry knowledge can improve not only internal quality, but also wider brand image

Matthew Beedle at
NonStop Recruitment

How do companies assess their suppliers? We all know about the heavy regulations governing manufacturing, clinical and drug safety within the pharmaceutical industry, and the great lengths to which businesses go to ensure their suppliers are compliant with them. Simply put, failure to meet these standards can mean huge fines and other penalties, as well as risk to the population. However, making sure that the same standards are kept has proven to be a major headache for pharma companies, CROs, contract manufacturing organisations and consultancies across the board.

The question I pose to pharma companies and service providers is: how much do you actually know about your labour providers and recruitment firms? What we see in the recruitment industry is a huge number of businesses, from large multinationals to one-man bands operated from someone's house. The regulations covering employment and contract staffing are not as substantial as GxP, but there are still many laws in place, and a large number of firms are not compliant with them.

Legal Issues

An obvious example comes from labour-leasing licences across Europe. In most countries, to hire a contractor, an agency or representative needs to have a local licence in order to lease out staff for assignments. Many companies do not have such licences, and often recruit or contract out services illegally. This poses a risk to the labour supply, but can also result in major legal issues. In particular, this is a lesson that UK firms should pay attention to, as UK contracting laws are a lot less complex than those in other countries, such as Switzerland.

When it comes to the issue of service quality, many companies do not fully understand the depth of work that happens behind a CV being sent for a position. We and other members of the Association of Professional Staffing Companies (APSCo), often find that the only factor most human resources departments and procurement services take into account is the end CV that they receive. The process of how they received the details of that particular

candidate is very rarely analysed. But should companies be taking more notice and trying to find out whether the agency is working ethically? Do they provide candidates with feedback? Do they sell each specific company in the right way? And do they even have the relevant knowledge? A bad recruitment provider can potentially be damaging to a business in the long-term.

Assuring Quality

For companies looking for the answers to such questions, there is often no way to find out. Very few recruitment firms have any quality assurance measures in place to demonstrate what their staff are actually doing. This is an area that needs significant further investment; it is advisable to have a team of staff in place at operational headquarters who perform quality assurance checks on all consultants – this should cover everything from quality of calls, adverts and admin, to in-depth assessments of ethical practice, and an ability to build rapport with candidates and clients. These reports can then be forwarded independently to clients, enabling claims made in pitches to be backed up with evidence, as well as making consultants accountable for the way they work.

As to why quality of staffing is important, I will run through a scenario that I see playing out on a daily basis in the industry. Companies that go for a low-quality service (perhaps because it is cheap, or maybe due to misinformation), over time have issues with their image in the marketplace. Others within the industry will be consistently contacted on behalf of

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said company and, if badly sold to, not given feedback or called for inappropriate roles, a level of negativity will develop.

Another very startling observation is that companies that have poor-quality providers seem to consistently only hire candidates who are actively applying for adverts. Often people want to leave for good reasons; but, by not having access to those who are too busy to search for a new job, or who will only move for something specific, businesses will face a drop in personnel quality in the long-term – and the cost could be significant.

Making Improvements

How can a company improve their staffing compliance and quality? From a legal prospective, it is important to ensure a provider has the correct licences for the specific region and for the scope of the work being provided. Outside of recruitment licences specific

to contracting, labour-leasing licences are key across Europe and something pharma should be urged to take notice of. Companies without them will need to use third-party providers for contractor interactions compliance, but is this the most effective option for all parties?

From the perspective of internal quality, providers should be asked how they can ensure what their consultants are doing, and expect to demonstrate what work they have carried out. Other than this, it is recommended to discuss with line managers in each department, to find out which providers have shown good industry knowledge, and been consistently ethical and supportive. The truth is, most staff are going to know recruiters in their market and will tell you who comes across best in reality.

Thinking about recruitment quality from a supply chain perspective,

with regard to long-term benefits and legal compliance, can save your company money, improve your market image and brand, and give you the staff that are less likely to get you into trouble over GxP. There is a common saying in industry: "People hire on skills and fire on attitude." Does this apply to your company?

About the author



Matthew Beedle is currently a Team Leader at NonStop Recruitment and is specialised in the recruitment for regulatory affairs in the Swiss pharmaceutical sector. He is also Co-Chair for the APSCo pharmaceutical group – a representative body for niche recruitment businesses in Europe looking to set up best ethical and working standards in the industry.
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