

The Future of Agencies

To Survive A Competitive Talent Market, Agencies Must Rewrite Recruitment Rules

The industry needs to revisit its definition of an ideal candidate



The pandemic has completely upended the traditional work model. As a result, employees learned to self advocate and demand flexibility. Imagezoo/Getty Images

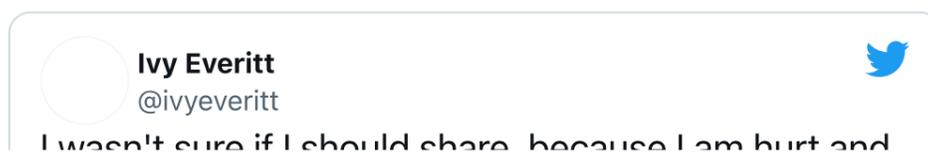


By Emmy Liederman

OCTOBER 20, 2021

When Ivy Everitt got laid off from her job in August, she was unsure of where or how to make the announcement. Everitt had only been working in her previous role at IT consulting company Cognizant for three months, and her position didn't survive the company's latest round of budget cuts.

When Everitt turned to Twitter, it wasn't in search of a new job—she was just looking for a space to vent. But when she opened up to her followers, she was met with an unexpected amount of support.



I wasn't sure if I should share, because I am a bit embarrassed and confused, but today I got news that my position is being cut due to budgeting at the company I started working with just over a month ago.

8:07 PM · Aug 19, 2021



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Messages from the agency community started flooding her inbox that day, including one from [VMLY&R](#)'s Chelsie McCullough. After setting up a few calls with McCullough and her team, Everitt was soon offered a position as the agency's senior social media strategist.

Before this opportunity arose, Everitt had always been confident in her talent, but unsure of just how to get the industry's attention.

"I only ever worked in digital marketing on the brand side or in-house," she said. "My traits are transferable and I'm so excited that they see that, but I was scared to start the conversation and too nervous to apply. It just seemed unattainable."

As agencies increasingly struggle to retain talent, they are rethinking how they identify, attract and engage with new industry candidates. Focusing every effort on traditional recruitment channels like LinkedIn, obsessing over the prestige of marketing degrees and requiring competitive industry internships is no longer just an inequitable approach—it is also not sustainable in today's job market. These practices are turn offs for new talent, as they signal to those who carry the skills but lack the experience that the industry could never be for them.

"It's no secret that the talent pool has been like the shrinking watering hole in the Serengeti," said John Osborn, CEO of OMD. "What we need to do is be more creative, thoughtful and resourceful in terms of how we're finding the best talent that's out there."



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Rewriting recruitment

OMD's latest recruitment initiative addresses two roadblocks in the industry: how to recruit more diverse staff and how to address the talent pool drought. The agency has just on-boarded its first class of The Nest, a paid fellowship program that functions as an expedited marketing education. Candidates are offered a full-time position at [OMD](#) when they complete the six month program. Eric Villarreal, former member of the U.S. Marine Corps with a degree in Threat and Response Management, is one of four members of The Nest's first fellowship class.



"We are looking for people who don't necessarily know anything about the industry, but are curious," said Aurelie Binisti, executive director of human resources at OMD. "We're not looking at marketing degrees or internship experiences."



Agencies are realizing that if they want to address the talent crisis, they must challenge their preconceived criteria for what it means to recruit an ideal candidate. According to Greg Plater, a former professional basketball player who is now an art director at Sid Lee, success in the advertising industry does not come with a set of prerequisites.



"The talent is out there, but it's all about where you look," he said. "It's not just on the talent side to reach out to you because they may not know they're the right fit. You have to be proactive."



Jaylen Culp, an associate integrated strategist at Campbell Ewald who graduated in 2020, believes that instead of prestigious marketing degrees and age-old qualifications, recruiters need to put their energy into identifying transferable skills.

"As a strategist, there is nothing that can directly prepare you for that role," he said. "It takes life experience and it takes different perspectives, but that's the beauty of marketing. You're reflecting culture."

In today's market, interesting new talent doesn't just fall in the hands of one team. Stacey Martin, chief people officer at PMG, stressed that recruitment has become a group effort. The agency has grown its employee head count by more than 150% in the last year, which she attributes to hiring managers being more engaged the process. PMG has also hired 75 recent graduates through a graduate leadership program, which equips

employees with early career training and development.

Embracing entrepreneurship

The pandemic has completely upended the traditional work model. When employers were stripped of all order, employees learned to self advocate and demand flexibility.

“People are realizing that there is a lot of opportunity outside of these rigid structures. They are waking up, and I don’t know if the industry is catching up as fast.”

Joe Cole, creative recruiter, We Are Rosie

Every agency must consider the specialized value proposition that they offer candidates. Brandon Bush just landed his first full-time job as a copywriter and DE&I coordinator at creative agency Haddad & Partners. After working as an intern, the agency crafted this dual role to cater to his interests, which was a crucial selling point.

“For people my age, it definitely feels like there is more opportunity,” said Kristen Wong, a strategy analyst at voice and conversational AI agency RAIN. “Instead of scrounging around and settling for something, the opportunity to find value at work feels greater.”

Geoffrey Goldberg is the co-founder and chief creative officer of creative agency Movers & Shakers, which has **grown more than 2,000 percent in the past three years**. After entering the industry with a musical theater background, Goldberg understands that a gig at his agency may just be one step in a multifaceted career for employees.

“We’ve always looked for people who have an entrepreneurially-minded approach to their work,” he said. “We don’t want to stand in the way of anyone on our team going after what they want to do in life.”

Agencies are working to create a more inviting work structure by diversifying employee qualifications, switching up recruitment channels and thinking about how they can support their employees in the long run. According to Everitt, who was invited to enter the agency world through a Twitter DM, simply reassuring those who are entering the industry that they are welcome, qualified and worthy of attention goes a long way.

“Even if you know you have the skill sets, you don’t always know that they will be reflected,” she said. “When they are actually noticed, it feels really good.”



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