

Case study

Nottingham Evening Post

The Company

The Nottingham Post is the main evening newspaper for the Nottingham metropolitan area, with a daily circulation of over 94,000.

The Nottingham Evening Post focuses on the issues and news that impact the lives of the people in Nottingham. The Post has won a host of national awards for dealing with local and national issues such as the environment, racial equality, literacy and health,

The Issue

The Post is the leading newspaper in the region. Classified advertising is an important revenue generator for the paper so its success plays a vital part in maintaining a competitive edge. The intensely competitive nature of the media industry means that newspapers are having to look closely at their human

resource programmes to overcome high staff turnover rates and ensure effective training programmes are in place.

Sales managers at The Post wanted to ensure they recruited a motivated, enthusiastic team who worked well together and delivered results. They wanted to recruit the right people for the right role.

The recruitment process at The Post had traditionally consisted of three interviews, which took up a lot of the managerial team's time. They wanted to be able to reach a shortlist of potential candidates quickly, so reducing the overall interview process whilst at the same time making it more effective.

Niki Hall, Classified Sales Director comments "Recruiting sales people is, to a large extent, all about the person sitting in front of you: how do they come across and how would they interact with customers?"



A good sales team can make a huge difference to the financial health of a company so it is essential to ensure the right people are in the right job. Good sales people have many skills – negotiation, persuasion, listening and presenting – but an interview can only provide a limited forum for the candidate to present his/her skills. Interviews are not foolproof and we wanted to be able to efficiently shortlist the people for interview.”

To meet these demands and avoid high staff turnover, The Post decided to review the way it recruited its sales teams and look closely at the staff training programmes.

Dawn Blatherwick, Classified Training Manager comments “We have always taken a very proactive approach to training, all our sales people attend courses on negotiation, customer service as well as on the different approaches to take in different sales environments – either face-to-face or over the telephone. However, we tended to take a ‘sheep-dip’ approach to it, preferring to place all our classified ad team members on the full range of courses. This was great in that all sales people received training but we wanted to make the process much more targeted towards individual’s specific training needs”.

The Post also wanted to address the management of the sales team, realising that individual employees behave differently under different styles of management. The Post wanted to investigate this further to maximise potential and focus ability on strong behavioural characteristics of each team member.

Dawn Blatherwick comments “Each team member responds to a different management style. To gain commitment and maximise the performance of each person in the team we needed to recognise why each person behaves the way they do and respond accordingly. We needed to be aware of our employee’s preferred working style in order to manage them better and maximise the potential of the team.”

Solution

The Post used Thomas International’s Personal Profile Analysis (PPA) and associated reports as part of its

recruitment, training and management process.

The PPA assesses an individual’s behaviour in the work environment. The questionnaire poses a series of questions, taking no more than seven minutes to complete, with the answers charted on a graph under the four headings of Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Compliance (DISC). The PPA is used to trace behavioural patterns and predict likely behaviours at work.

The PPA highlighted that they preferred to communicate on paper or via email rather than verbally so I have tailored my approach accordingly. As a result my team is happier, more motivated and more successful.”

Niki Hall comments “We wanted to be able to use the PPA to help in the way we interviewed internal and external candidates. For all external candidates we profiled them prior to interview and used the interview questionnaire to ask the right questions in a focused way. The questionnaire also enabled us to identify questions we would not have otherwise thought to ask. With internal recruitment, we were already familiar with the candidates so the PPA aided the professionalism of the interview through maintaining objectivity. As a result the interview process has been shortened to one main interview and an informal evening with prospective team members.”

Dawn Blatherwick adds “It was particularly important when recruiting for a team leader role that we understood how they would respond to different interview techniques. We needed to discover whether under pressure they would yield their position or remain firm. The PPA prompted us to ask questions in a way that would establish this.”

The PPA is used to enable the candidates to understand their strengths and limitations and help clarify goals and objectives. It promotes self awareness by charting an employee’s likely behaviour

and operating style and providing an indication of how their behaviour could be modified for their own and the company's best interests.

Specific reports can be printed from the PPA and The Post uses several including:

- **Compatibility** – this compares two individuals work styles and provides a powerful insight into how they communicate and interact, the ease with which they work together and their perceptions of each other. There are recommendations for possible improvement.
- **Strengths and Limitations** – this report is presented as a series of bullet points summarising the main findings of the PPA for the individual under review. It is a powerful tool for senior management who need a fast and effective overview of a prospective or current staff member.
- **Sales/Management/Interview Questionnaires** - The "Interview Questionnaire" provide a series of questions to be used at interview. The questions are selected by direct reference to the PPA scores and target the likely strengths and behavioural preferences of the individual being interviewed. The 'Management Questionnaire' focuses on the likely management style of the individual under review. "Sales Questionnaire" focuses on the likely selling style of the individual and their strengths and limitations.

The strengths and limitations report has helped identify specific training needs so that a development plan can be drawn up for each employee.

The development plan charts which areas need work on and how training can fill that gap.

With regard to the management questionnaire, Blatherwick comments "Using the PPA to understand the preferred working style of each member of my team has really helped me communicate much better with them. My team are all High S's who are very good at concentrating on the job in hand and completing work thoroughly. I, on the other hand, prefer diversification and variety. The PPA helped me to modify my behaviour to manage my team better.

I now leave them to get on with projects and enable them to see them through to completion. The PPA highlighted that they preferred to communicate on paper or via email rather than verbally so I have tailored my approach accordingly. As a result my team is happier, more motivated and more successful."

Summary

By using the PPA as part of its assessment and development programmes, The Post is able to recruit more efficiently and manage its sales teams more effectively.

"As newspapers across the country compete against the main national press for mindshare, having the right staff in the right positions is critical. It is not just the specific job that matters, the person must also be suited to the corporate culture and other team members. Thomas International has helped The Post better understand, direct and motivate their team members towards improved personal, team and corporate goals."

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