

MARKETING THE MOST PLACEABLE CANDIDATE

Recently, many of the calls and e-mails I have received address the same subject, candidate marketing. Typical of these messages is one I received this morning from a strong regional client with multiple offices and specialties. To quote part of her message:

“In these challenging economic times, should our consultants be spending 50% of their time servicing exiting clients and 50% of their time marketing candidates?”

As I pointed out in my response, these choices are not arbitrary or mutually exclusive. Rather, they should always be marketing MPCs (Most Placeable Candidates) to their new and existing clients. This is one of the benefits of having an on-going relationship with their firm. The clients receive the benefit of “right of first refusal” on outstanding talent when it becomes available.

As an overall approach, marketing an MPC is generally a good methodology to use regardless of the vagaries of the economy because there is **ALWAYS a shortage of good people – the “Difference Makers”**. It is particularly important because of the present state of the economy, where many clients are not actively seeking new employees. Therefore, our call affords them an opportunity to “topgrade” (see *“Topgrading” by Bradford D. Smart – Prentice Hall, 1999*), to take advantage of an opportunity to strengthen their team while providing us with a placement where a “no openings” situation may exist.

However, in order to be consistently successful in marketing MPCs, you must:

1. Properly select the right MPC and gain their buy-in and cooperation.
2. Select the right companies to contact and then target your approach to the appropriate hiring authority.
3. Develop and deliver an MPC presentation that, if your contact were to hire your MPC, demonstrates how they would impact, in a positive fashion, the performance capacity of their group, division or company.

However, everything depends on your ability to recognize an MPC when you have one and then, very importantly, you need to know what to do with them once they are identified.

In order for a candidate to be classified as a true Most Placeable Candidate (MPC), they must meet a minimum of five basic criteria.

1. The must possess marketable skills. Skills that are in demand. These may be skills that have evolved from work experience, educational background or a combination of both, but most importantly, in your marketplace, they must be in DEMAND.
2. The MPC must be realistic about their job search criteria, including position, title, location, compensation and benefits. However, this does not necessarily mean they are unemployed or looking to make a change. Rather, at a minimum, it must reflect a true picture of the type of realistic opportunity this MPC would enthusiastically embrace.

3. The MPC must be available for interviews within a reasonable timeframe and be willing to start a new position within two weeks of acceptance. This means that the MPC is not a shopper, but rather is committed to making a job change now if you can provide an opportunity that matches the above listed criteria.
4. The MPC must provide viable, work related references that can be checked prior to commencing activity on their behalf. These references should include not only previous supervisors but peer references as well. If the MPC is a manager or executive, then the references should also include individuals who have been direct reports to them. For MPCs in sales or sales management, a carefully constructed list of clients/customers should be included.
5. The MPC must willingly support your marketing efforts on their behalf. This criterion may be the most important because it directly influences the manner in which you will market them to perspective hiring authorities. It requires the MPC to provide you with the following information:
 - a. A carefully constructed list of companies for which they would have an interest in working and very importantly, why they are interested in these particular organizations.
 - b. In specific terms, what benefits can they bring to each of the companies they have selected within their first year of employment? The answer to this question will provide you with the information you require in order to develop a value-based presentation for each call.

The primary reason a true MPC will cooperate by providing you with the above requested information is the fact they have much to gain and little to lose by equipping you with the tools needed to do what they prefer and/or are unwilling to do for themselves.

As study after study has proven over the years, self-promotion (which includes marketing oneself) is ranked only behind death and public speaking as a primary fear for most people.

The active involvement of the MPC is the critical factor. Because they have identified the targeted companies, they are pre-sold on the prospect of interviewing with them. Additionally, they have provided the key elements for your customized, value based MPC presentations. When these presentations are augmented with performance based reference checks and professionally delivered to the appropriate employers, the positive results will far exceed those achieved by the typical recruiter who just “pitches a candidate”.

On average for the recruiters I've trained in this approach, their MPCs generally identify somewhere between ten and twenty companies to approach on their behalf. However, just as important is the identification of the appropriate hiring authority to contact. This individual should be the manager or executive to whom your MPC would report if the company hired them. In other words, this is the manager or executive that would benefit the most from the contributions the MPC could make to their organization.

Remember

When marketing, particularly when marketing an MPC make certain you only contact managers and/or executives who have the authority to say “yes” in response to your presentation. Adhering to this rule will help insure that your efforts will be followed by appropriate action on the part of the employer.

Once you and your MPC have compiled the list of companies to be called and identified the appropriate contact at each organization, additional research may be necessary in order to provide enough critical information, information for you to use in customizing the presentation for each call. Generally, when this research is complete, you will find that minor adjustments are all that is required in order to provide the necessary differentiation. After all, if the targeted companies have been properly selected, the MPC’s skills and abilities should easily be adaptable to the environment and mission of each organization. Keep in mind, that marketing an MPC is definitely a situation where “one size does not fit all”.

Just as for most people, the table must be set before dinner is served, in like fashion, the recruiter should prepare the contacts at the targeted companies to openly receive the MPC presentation. This is where many recruiters have problems. They stumble with their opening comments and consequently are viewed by the prospect as “pitching a candidate”.

Here are some examples of opening comments that may help “set the table” for your MPC presentation.

“(Contact’s name), this is (your name) and I am a recruiter. Can you speak freely for a few minutes?”

Sound familiar? It should because many recruiters use it as the opening for their recruiting calls. However, since our first objective on every call is to get the attention of the person we are calling, this opening also works well on marketing calls. It generally creates curiosity and an openness to hear what you have to say. Nevertheless, even if their response is, “*I don’t have time*” or “*I don’t talk with recruiters*”, it quickly brings them into the conversation. From this point, if you are properly trained, it is relatively easy to take either of these responses and use them as a springboard to developing a directed business dialogue with the contact.

Another example:

“(Contact’s name), this is (your name) and I’m calling you today in response to an unusual opportunity that has presented itself and, if the timing is right, could have potential benefit for both you and your organization.”

“Can you speak freely for a few minutes?”

Notice with this script there is no initial mention of what I do or the name of my company. Again, our objective is to gain their attention.

A third example, which incorporates both of the above, is very similar to an approach we have used successfully for many years.

“(Contact’s name), this is (your name) and I’m calling you under rather unusual circumstances. (Position yourself and your services). It was in this capacity that I made contact with a (position title). After several intensive interviews he/she successfully completed our behaviorally based evaluation process. Subsequently, he/she requested that I make discreet inquiries on his/her behalf to a carefully selected group of companies that could benefit the most from his/her specialized expertise. He/she included your firm in this group and that’s the reason for my call.

“Can you speak freely for a few minutes?”

There is no attempt to sell in these opening comments, merely to generate an interest in hearing your presentation. This particular opening statement not only builds interest (curiosity) but also provides a justification for the call.

As each presentation needs to be customized to reflect the marketable qualities of the MPC as well as the unique circumstances of the targeted contact, it would be difficult to go further with it in the context of this article. Suffice is to say that the remaining part of your MPC presentation should cover no more than three value based selling points to help insure you do not confuse the contact or create a circumstance where you “take back the sale” by providing too much detail.

Remember

“If you want to sell John Brown what John Brown buys, you have to sell John Brown through John Brown’s eyes.” – Lou Scott

Therefore, your opening MPC presentation should be designed to accomplish a minimum of three objectives:

1. Gain the contact’s attention.
2. Eliminate, or at least not create, a reflex rejection.
3. Change the call from a monologue (you talk) to a dialogue (you both talk with an emphasis on you listening). It is through the accomplishment of this third objective that you learn “how” and “what” your contact is willing to “buy”.

This is the “payoff” for candidate marketing. In most instances you will either generate interest in your MPC, or determine what would be of interest to the employer as you begin to build a business relationship.

Proper candidate marketing, with a true MPC, remains the approach that consistently produces the best results. However, it is not the only approach that can be used. Nevertheless, it is time tested and proven to be the most effective business generator for both rookies and experienced recruiters alike regardless of economic conditions. If you have not tried it or are not doing it properly (“pitching candidates”), there is no time like the present to incorporate this approach into your daily activities. The potential for substantial return will more than justify your commitment of time and effort.



*Terry Petra is available for one-on-one coaching, consulting and group training through “**Petra On Call**”, a cost effective approach to receiving the full benefit of his expertise. For details on Terry’s products and services, including “**Business Appraisals**”, visit his web site at: www.tpetra.com. As always, if you have questions or comments about this article or wish to receive Terry’s input on any other topic related to this business, your calls and e-mails are most welcome. Terry can be reached at (651) 738-8561 or e-mail him at Terry@tpetra.com.*