

CASE STUDY

MICROSOFT

Re-establishing its place in the recruitment market

About Microsoft

Founded in 1975, Microsoft (Nasdaq "MSFT") is the worldwide leader in software, services and solutions that help people and businesses realise their full potential.

Business Challenge

How could Microsoft re-establish its place in the recruitment marketplace?

Microsoft UK wanted to embark on a major programme to recruit over 130 people within six months and to populate a 'talent database' that could be exploited after this period, as vacancies arose.

But, having been away from the IT recruitment market for a number of years, Microsoft had a number of concerns:

- What was going on in the market?
- How had the internet affected the way in which IT professionals search for jobs?
- What were people's preconceptions of Microsoft as an employer?

Solution

A highly innovative, multi-channel campaign designed to create 'buzz' in the industry as well as attract candidates – the entire strategy being informed by a programme of bespoke research.

Research

We undertook two phases of research – the first, desk research into the IT recruitment market and the second, an online attitude survey of Microsoft employees (excellent examples of the type of person Microsoft was looking to recruit more of).

Our desk research outlined the scale of the challenge ahead: demand for IT professionals was up 125% on the previous year. Advertised vacancies had increased for a fourth consecutive quarter – and by more than 20% in the previous three months. New wave Microsoft technologies were the big 'in demand' skills, with security the new 'hot' area.

Banks and large corporates were feeding the frenzy, while London and its surrounds formed the epicentre of renewed demand. A third of businesses claimed they had trouble filling IT vacancies, most saying it was hurting their bottom line. Salaries were rising slowly, but job title inflation was out of control ("Everyone

coming fresh out of university calls themselves an 'architect' these days," one commentator complained). In fact, the industry had restructured following the dot.bust and many low grade IT jobs had been outsourced abroad, leaving only high value talent behind. Suddenly, nobody was junior anymore.

An investigation of media options soon revealed that a campaign saying "Microsoft is hiring" wouldn't cut it in this market. The online job boards were heaving with vacancies. Big names like Oracle, LogicaCMG and IBM were running double-page spreads in the trade press (IBM, in fact, did so in the Sunday Times – at around £200,000 for just one ad).

We asked around 470 Microsoft employees how they searched for jobs, how that might have changed with time, what non-traditional media we could exploit and what they thought the compelling messages might be. One of the most interesting findings related to the way in which the web had affected job-hunting. Whereas word-of-mouth related activities had secured jobs for almost half the employees questioned, that figure nose-dived when they were searching for a new job.

Today's candidates evidently had considerably more confidence in the internet as a career change tool; however, few checked employer

sites 'just in case' they were looking for staff and, perhaps surprisingly in this market, press advertising proved popular.

It seems that IT jobseekers scan the internet and recruitment press for opportunities before pursuing them further online. Prior to the research, we had considered advertising in lifestyle magazines but, when a very diverse range of hobbies and interests were revealed by the survey, this became impractical. However, the high numbers of people using wi-fi services interested us – and the comments we received on the culture at Microsoft provided us with a promising platform for a creative message.

With a budget of £200,000, at the planning stage we kept roughly a third of it in reserve, allowing us to take stock mid-way through the campaign – to assess the effectiveness of key media, identify outstanding roles and commit additional resources as appropriate.

The remaining £140,000 was committed to a multiple channel strategy, designed to direct 'traffic' to the jobs section of the Microsoft corporate website. We hit high profile traditional media, including the Sunday Times, Computing and Computer Weekly with relatively small, inexpensive ads with creativity designed to achieve maximum impact. We also secured on-going coverage for Microsoft on all major careers portals, including the newly relaunched MSN. Email 'gossip' newsletters, such as The Register, performed well in our survey, so this was utilised along with sites like ZDNet and Silicon.

Finally, we conducted a range of activities to raise awareness of Microsoft in the industry,

generate PR and leverage employee referrals. These included wi-fi landing point ads – the first time this medium had ever been exploited for recruitment.

Our creative message throughout focused on Microsoft UK's culture – hitherto largely invisible and, to some extent, merely imagined. We positioned Microsoft as the place where ideas rule, with ads featuring doodles and notebook scribbles – the sort of images that challenged preconceptions of corporate blandness and conformity. These are shown on the previous page.



Result

Before this initiative, Microsoft UK was typically generating 50 CVs a week without advertising, most of them speculative, many inappropriate. This campaign increased weekly applications via the careers site to 200 a week.

Anecdotal feedback suggests that calibre and relevance were both significantly higher than previously. Unfortunately, Microsoft was unable to include ad reference tracking in the online application process; therefore, there is little hard data to support specific channel choices. Nonetheless, Microsoft UK reported that it was delighted with the campaign's effectiveness, both in profile raising and filling vacancies.

So much so that this campaign has now developed into a full scale branding project, with some of the results shown here.