How to tell a good IT recruitment agency from a bad one

Anyone who ever found themselves looking for a new job will have experience of both good and bad agencies. The trouble is knowing what sets a good agency apart from a mediocre one. From the first moment they approach you, there will be telltale signs though – below is our guide to what you ought to look out for in order to help you decide to what degree you ought to trust them, and whether you should engage with them.

Have they asked you if it is convenient to speak? If someone calls you on your mobile during working hours, the likelihood is that it will either not be convenient, or that you might have to ring them back at another time, or slip away to a private place where you can take the call – but in the first instance, they ought to check that you can speak freely.

Has the agent phoned you about a specific opportunity? If so, are they able to explain it to you comprehensibly? That doesn't mean they need to be technical, but they might need a basic understanding in order to ensure that the role is right for your skills and abilities at this stage of your career. This isn't an exact science but quite often if you look good on paper, a good agency will call you to find out exactly what sort of thing you are looking for, with a view to contacting you again in the future regarding a specific role. An agent that drones on yet offers no real information about the opportunity is unlikely to provide much assistance to you, as they probably don't even know what they are looking for.

What is their process? The old 'come in and register with us' is rather outdated and better suited to a temporary or commercial agency, and it offers you no guarantee of securing even a CV submission, let alone an interview. But a good agency who submits your CV to their client will want to meet you if possible, or at the very least conduct a thorough telephone interview with you in order to discuss the role properly and get to know a bit about you. After all, you are not just representing yourself at interview, you are also representing them, and they will want to make sure that you are well prepared, that you have researched the company thoroughly and answer any last minute questions you might have. This is an important part of the process and making a good impression with the agency is vital – as the client will trust their judgment. Be wary of agencies that ask you minimal questions before submitting your CV – if it is as easy as just flinging your details out without knowing anything about you other than what's on the screen in front of them, chances are they will care very little whether you are a good match or not and will merely be playing a numbers game.

How do they handle your expectations? Being honest in business is really important in recruitment – we all have to deliver bad news as well as good news, and for every one successful candidate that gets the job there will be three or four interviewees who did not. An agency that does not contact you to let you know if you have been successful after interview is a truly poor one, and you should not use them again. Whether you have been successful or not, as soon as they know, they ought to inform you as well.

What can you learn from their website? A company dealing in IT recruitment really ought to have a decent website offering testimonials from clients indicating they have done a good job. A bland

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website filled with industry jargon and that offers very little insight into why the company is actually better than their competitors indicates that they are probably not.

A good agency is one that will put you through your paces on their client's behalf – this might mean that they ask you to take a technical assessment, attend an interview with them, or ask you to provide references. Their intention isn't to make the process more complicated, it is to eliminate the possibility of sending you to an interview for a role you are not right for, and that isn't right for you, and thereby wasting your time and the client's. A thorough, professional, informed approach is what sets the good agencies apart – and with this in mind, you will probably gain a good idea of what kind of an agency they are the very first time they make contact with you.

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