
Freight's back to hiring, not firing

Feel-good factor returning as recruitment firms report vacancies



By Gavin van Marle

Hiring employees in the freight industry is back on the agenda again after a pickup in business over the last couple of months.

Recruitment companies operating at a variety of levels told *IFW* last week that there has been a recent uplift in enquiries from freight forwarders and logistics companies looking to expand headcounts.

Craig Shaffner, operations manager at AA Appointments, had more vacancies on his books than at the same time last year. "There is a feel-good factor going on. I'm probably pulling in 10 to 15 vacancies a week, although it remains quite hard to get good people."

Chas Dowton, director at specialist freight recruitment agency First Choice, said: "This has probably been one of the toughest years - certainly worse than after 9/11 - and we've gone from a situation in last December, January and February where companies were laying-off staff, to having the past three months of continuous improvement."

However, he added that most of the new appointments were temporary posts, rather than for permanent positions.

"What's happened is that a lot of companies are really stretched after making redundancies earlier in the year. As soon as the workload picks up they are hiring temporary staff to cover that work, and covering those slots until they are ready to hire permanently.

"August saw our best performance, but I wouldn't get too excited by it - a lot of companies are still very cautious, and no one is sure how long the recovery will take.

"One client told me he expects it to pick up until November and December, when it will slow, before picking up again next year. If it is a w-shaped recession, we are right at the middle of the w."

He also added that much of the recruitment was for lower-level posts, and the executive search side was recovering at a slower pace.

"Companies want management that will bring business with them, but there are not enough quality people like that."

Larry Woelk, business development director at BIS George Henderson, said that in the last few weeks the logistics recruitment firm had begun receiving unsolicited requests from companies looking to hire.

"For most of this year, most of our assignments came out of our own initiatives.

"I would say that the market is certainly perkier than it was, but it is also more difficult to identify good people. There are a lot more applicants, but less quality, which makes our job harder because every position we have is flooded with applicants.

"But the feel-good factor is starting to return. There's definitely more of a buzz, although it's also fair to say that the sector takes longer to feel good than bad."

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