

Case study for Chapter 6

Sun Microsystems and Kingston Recruiting

Sun Microsystems Inc. is one of the world's largest IT companies, specialising in industrial-strength hardware and software, specifically designed for the Internet. Sun operates in 170 countries worldwide – impressive for a company which was only founded in 1982.

In the UK, Sun identified a problem with their sales team. They lacked expertise in storage systems. This meant that Sun was selling systems to clients, but leaving the storage systems business on the table for their competitors to pick up. This was clearly a situation which should not continue, so the company decided to headhunt an individual to head up a new storage systems sales team. Sun's director of products sales, David Thompson, decided that the way forward was to bring in a consultancy.

Kingston Consulting was set up by former IT professionals as a specialist recruiting agency for the computer industry. Kingston discussed the person specification with David Thompson, then went looking – after considerable research, they identified two people who might fit the bill. One of these was Steve Furniss, who was at the time the European technical sales manager at IBM. Steve was not actually looking for a job at the time, but came to the conclusion that it would be foolish not to hear what Sun had to say. "As time went on, I realised that there were a lot of people looking to pull me in," he said. "The message was clear: you really need to talk to Sun." After talking to Sun, Steve made the move, but that was not the end of the story for Kingston.

Next the agency had to recruit a sales team to work with Steve. This they did by painstaking screening of potential applicants. Kingston were looking for people who would fit into Sun's dynamic environment, and who also had the necessary skills and experience to sell in a highly-specialised area. Eventually Kingston assembled a team of four sales people: they have been so successful that Sun is now the top player in the storage systems market in the UK.

Steve Furniss has also been the perfect candidate – Sun were so impressed with his performance that he went on to become worldwide storage product sales director, and is based in San Francisco. This has led to more recruiting opportunities in the UK – which Kingston are already working on.

Case Study Questions

1. Why would a firm the size of Sun need to hire outside consultants? *The purpose of hiring head-hunters is to conduct transactions at arm's length. Potential candidates are more likely to speak to an independent third party than they are to a competitor's representatives. Also, Kingston have a high degree of expertise and inside knowledge in a highly-specialised market.*
2. What routes would be open for hiring the sales force? *Advertising in specialist IT magazines and journals would be a possibility, as would headhunting. For this specialised a role, Kingston would be looking for experienced people – eventually Sun will be in a position to train new recruits, but the salesforce needs to be established first.*
3. How might Kingston have gone about headhunting potential sales managers? *The starting point would be identifying the sales managers in competing companies – in this case IBM. If none of these could be persuaded to leave, promising salespeople with experience of storage systems would be next, but this would be very much a last resort since Sun needed people with experience of management.*

4. What are the dangers in headhunting staff from competitors? *The biggest danger is that the headhunted individual decides to return to his or her former employer, taking sensitive information with them. The second danger is that the headhunted person arrives with a different corporate culture, which may cause friction in the new firm.*