

Global Sage evolves methods for talent acquisition

The international financial services consultancy is utilising advanced technology and intelligence at every level of its business to deliver both qualitative and quantitative information and pinpoint which individuals are the verifiable money-makers. As CEO John Wright explains, Global Sage is transforming the business of executive search across the breadth of the financial services industry.

Most senior financial recruitment companies pursue a tried-and-tested approach to meet their clients' hiring needs: networking.

Headhunters can regularly be found wining and dining clients and senior bankers in an effort to keep abreast of their needs. It's an effective means to ensure cordial relations with prospective clients and candidates, and help the recruiters place small teams of people.

But this approach can also prove limiting when it comes to more comprehensive franchise-building capabilities. That is where Global Sage comes in.

The company is one of the only genuinely global financial-services specialists in the world. That breadth alone confers it some major advantages over its Asian rivals.

"Most regional head-hunters are good at what they do, but mostly on a tactical basis. Where we differ is that we give our clients competitive advantage and strategic advice based on advanced intelligence gathering," says John Wright, CEO of Global Sage.

A key component of this is to provide exhaustive levels of analysis and research on individuals or units or even entire companies instead of merely keeping tabs on select individuals in the market.

The company proactively offers its clients detailed analysis of their business, such as departmental performance, peer-to-peer analysis, reputation analysis, market-share studies, geographic trends and business flows. Wright notes that the results turned up by such granular analysis are frequently unknown even to the senior managers of the banks that receive it.

"We don't have a research team in Global Sage; we're all researchers," says Wright. "Everybody in the company contributes to our market and specific client knowledge."

A 12-YEAR HISTORY OF EXCELLENCE

Global Sage was formed in 1998. Wright recounts that when setting up the company he spotted a vacant niche for technology-led analysis in the financial services recruitment market.

"Many of our rivals belong to businesses that are much older than us," he says. "But we could not have done our technology-focused model had we started before we did. It was definitely an advantage not to be a first mover in this industry."

Global Sage quickly filled this information void, attracting a selection of industry experts to help the company become a genuine partner and adviser to international financial institutions.

An integral part of this process involves attracting the right sort of employees. Hires made by the company span many different types of professionals, and include former heads of corporate development and strategy at investment banks.

In fact Global Sage has only tended to disregard one type of financial services professional when it considers employees for itself: existing recruiters.

"It's nothing personal; I know and like many of my peers. But I've found that traditional head-hunters just don't possess the right temperament for the way Global Sage sees that this business needs to be done," explains

Wright. "Instead, we have hired consultants, former bankers, chief operating officers, or journalists and other private investigators. They are more driven by the desire to unlock and analyse information."

Global Sage's unique approach quickly gained favour with Asia's financial services industry.

Global Sage has been featured in the top-tier of *Asiamoney's* annual Headhunters Poll since the poll was started. The firm has ranked as a top-five regional headhunter company, or higher for nine years in a row, and holds similar rankings in other polls around the globe. Global Sage has consistently impressed more than any other recruitment company in Asia ex-Japan in the 10 years *Asiamoney* has run its Headhunters Poll.

ANALYTICAL ADVANTAGE

Global Sage's technological focus and capabilities in particular set it aside from its competitors. IT permeates every facet of the company's approach.

"We are constantly upgrading and adding to our computer systems, models and algorithms," says Wright. "We



GLOBAL SAGE IN HONG KONG

From left: John Wright; Jamie Souter; Sheila Wong; Sophia Yan; Andrew Miller; May Koon; Gregory Robinson; Sylvia Poon; Daniel Clark; Michael Di Cicco.

have programmers in Hong Kong, Nova Scotia and Johannesburg all working to support the company."

To help develop these abilities, Global Sage has hired the top competitive technology team, which writes algorithms to individual performance from public information, as well creating programmes that can effectively map businesses.

An integral part of this technology-led process is to sift through the vast amount of information available on the internet and pair it with our on-the-ground coverage.

The reason for this is simple: when data about individuals or companies from multiple different sources is pulled together and scrutinised it can provide meaningful analysis of a candidate's personal experience, lifestyle preferences and character strengths and deficiencies. That offers clients some true insight into the candidates that they have to consider.

"Very few companies in the world can deliver true analysis of individuals and teams well; it's all very speculative. But all of the important decisions taken in business ultimately revolve around people," says Wright. "So being able to analyse them effectively is a vital part of meeting the needs of prospective employers. Our clients are in two businesses: capital and people. We take care of the people dimensions."

The company marries publicly available information with multiple other sources and research methods to derive a detailed analysis of a particular candidate's worth to their institution or prospective employer in terms of revenue, personality traits, cultural fit and other criteria important to the client. "Ultimately our goal in the search process is to deliver rainmakers for our clients," Wright says.

Using this quantitative and qualitative process Global Sage identifies the outstanding candidates or teams for a vacant role and builds an accurate picture of each candidate's business preferences and personality strengths and weaknesses.

"Clients do not tend to see much value in the mere generation of lists of names, and there are too many people in a potential employer that have their own opinions on who would make for good hires," says Wright. "What we do differently is to analyse the candidates and what they can do. Anecdotal claims about generating revenue are not important; verifying a candidate's ability to create revenue is."

This approach goes some way beyond being able to supply a C.V. and personal endorsements of a candidate.

"When we use our analysis to consider individual performance we frequently unearth highly talented traders, salespeople, analysts or bankers who are excellent at their jobs but go relatively unnoticed when compared to counterparts who are better at selling themselves," says Wright. "But when we show our clients the results of our findings they can make the right decisions."

It's an approach that works for many more businesses than just investment and private banks. Global Sage has regularly worked with private equity companies, hedge funds and even sovereign wealth funds.

RESEARCH-DRIVEN

Increasingly, executive recruitment is just one facet of what Global Sage offers its global clientele.

While Global Sage chooses to be retained by a small number of clients, the company aspires to offer a whole range of information and analytical tools about financial services companies, strategies, revenue generation and means to improve performance.

"Global Sage is a mixture of a traditional financial services head-hunter, a management consultant and a risk consultant," says Wright. "We aim to be as informed about the financial markets and our select clients as possible because that's the sort of information analysis they themselves conduct. We want to be viewed as a partner of our clients, not just a service provider."

"We have just conducted an in-depth analysis of one bank's fixed income department, and discovered that certain countries that they operate in are significantly larger and more profitable than they have accounted for," he offers by way of example.

That sort of research can be vital to a global investment bank, allowing it to remould its business profile and capture opportunities that it might otherwise have missed.

FUTURE GOALS

Having weathered the global credit crisis in good shape, Global Sage is now perfectly poised to grow in Asia and across the globe.

"We've got tremendous expansion plans," says Wright. "But while we're doing well, we are nowhere near where we can get to."

He aims to transform Global Sage into a globally-renowned financial services consultant that can meet the detailed information requests of all financial industry participants, in addition to continually evolving its talent acquisition capabilities.

"In the next 12 to 18 months, we intend to create a broader appeal for our services. We want to be a company that can root through all the facts and information and come up with new perspectives on our client's strategy, its business model, and the people it needs to execute them."

And what is Wright's longer-term business objective for Global Sage?

"To become a US\$100 million revenue a year company within two or three years," he responds. "It is ambitious, yes, but I believe we have a genuine advantage here and that nobody is able to do quite what we can. Our technology is just too superior. We also benefit from being the market leader in the most exciting growth region of the world, Asia-Pacific."

The world's global financial markets are undergoing tremendous shifts, but with its impressive technological capabilities, and highly ranked search business, Global Sage looks well-set to ensure its clients have the sole competitive advantage.

"We want to be seen as the go-to firm for credible information and providers of verifiable money-makers," concludes Wright. "Whether we are looking to find an individual, a group, a cluster or an entire company is immaterial; we want to help our clients grow." ▲



GLOBAL SAGE
Leaders in Financial Services

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