

Plug the gap

Vast changes in the market for interims have led to growth in purchasing's responsibility for this area of recruitment. Here some suppliers offer advice on points to consider

GARETH ELWIN, DIRECTOR AND PROCUREMENT SPECIALIST AT MORGAN LAW (WWW.MORGAN-LAW.COM)

Interim positions tend to be caretaker roles covering maternity leave, sick leave etc; specific project management roles with a defined timescale or delivery time; and crisis management or turnaround situations.

Interim 'careerists' are experienced or have specialist knowledge and enjoy the buzz of going from one contract to the next, meeting specific objectives in a short time.

With the market flooded, 'specialist' is the operative word. Hire those with interim experience, not former permanent employees with specialist skills. Interims quickly assimilate into organisations but usually know not to get involved in the politics. Often they are external catalysts to change – skills probably not developed by a permanent employee embarking on an interim role for the first time.

TONY EVANS, INSTITUTE OF INTERIM MANAGEMENT (WWW.IOIM.ORG.UK)

Have a specialist supplier discussion when meeting a prospective interim. Agree clear objectives on what you'd like them to achieve, ensure this is understood by all parties, and involve key decision-makers in the appointment.

Perform basic background checks (eg, are they independently accredited?) and check their career history for experience. Allow your interim to shake things up – they

should be a loose cannon! Be realistic on timescales (a good interim will be honest if timescales are unachievable) but give them space to deliver. A good interim will have a significant influence on the firm's direction.

Don't: treat it as permanent recruitment; choose a shrinking violet or yes-man; be over-prescriptive; just rely on the "we vet interims ourselves" statement from agencies; dump your interim on the firm without warning.

PAT LAW, MANAGING DIRECTOR, HAYS PROCUREMENT (WWW.HAYS.CO.UK/PROCUREMENT)

To reap the full benefits of hiring a procurement interim the employer needs to be clear about the specific project requirements from the outset. There must be transparency and honest dialogue beforehand so the interim can hit the ground running.

The organisation should ensure the individual is welcomed into the organisation and that they have all the resources at their disposal to carry out their assignment.

They will need to demonstrate a capacity to adapt to different company cultures, possess strong communication skills and must have a defined exit strategy in place to ensure that the transfer of knowledge takes place seamlessly.

STEVE DENGEL, DIRECTOR OF BIE INTERIM EXECUTIVE (WWW.BIEINTERIM.CO.UK)

Personal recommendations are the best place to begin. Ask colleagues and associates their view of a potential supplier. Under time pressure, it's tempting to resort to an internet search but while many providers make similar sounding claims, they offer different levels of experience, service and delivery.

This isn't just another branch of recruitment. Interims have focus and pace, so be wary of those who offer 'try before you buy' recruitment as an alternative. No induction period or close management is required.

Can the provider demonstrate a history of successfully placing interims within your type of company? Can they readily offer a wide range of high quality references of past assignments?

Meeting the provider to agree the interim profile, timescale for delivery and ultimate cost is essential. Ensure they have a known and trusted portfolio of interim managers and don't just select from a database. Make sure they complete 'front end' screening and briefing that allows you to have candidates presented to you in two to 10 days. The emphasis should be on relevant skills and personality, which cannot be judged over the phone or from a CV.

Experienced providers should add value by keeping in regular contact with the client and interim and 'sign off' the project with an end of assignment audit from the client. Be wary of an 'all inclusive' invoice covering both the interim and provider's rate combined – you can never be sure who is getting what.

WAYNE BROPHY, MANAGING DIRECTOR, CAST UK (WWW.CASTUK.COM)

Is an interim what you need? They are preferable for managing change or a turbulent situation. A good interim will carry out a rapid diagnosis and act without being drawn into office politics.

Discuss expectations – if they're undertaking a project, set targets and clearly identify what you expect them to achieve. Then induct, incentivise and appraise. You can pay part of a fee when certain deliverables have been achieved. Appraise them and you'll both get more from the relationship.

Use a professional recruitment provider - of course I'd say this, but a specialist firm will take time to understand the precise nature of your

project. Personality doesn't jump out of a CV, so you'll have to trust a recruiter. Get the interim's true opinion of the business, they can offer a level of expertise and objectivity that those at 'the coal face' often can't.

Don't think the little black book is easier – a former staff member may not have the skills for the job. Don't be put off by a disorganised CV, most interims take this path as a conscious lifestyle choice. Don't hire if you doubt their experience; don't let pride get in the way (accept you don't have all the answers); and don't forget the exit process to ensure an interim's knowledge is kept within the business.

GAVAN BURDEN, MANAGING DIRECTOR, BURDEN DARE (WWW.BURDENDARE.COM)

Interims provide a better way to handle redundancies. Those with experience, legal knowledge, an awareness of the vital human aspects and no personal history with employees can act with compassion and efficiency and leave the company once the programme is finished. They provide action often at half the cost of consultants.

Daily fees for an interim manager range from £800 to about £1,750; most are £1,000-£1,400. Similar management consultants' fees are around £1,400 for a graduate entrant, over £4,000 for a partner, and around £2,000 to £2,500 for a manager. Remember many extraordinary managers choose interim management as their career so they can spend most of their time at work doing what they like and can do best.

Three reasons why you shouldn't hire a friend of a friend: employment law; references; they could be looking for another job and might leave suddenly.

For longer versions of some of these responses go to supplymanagement.com