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Sainsbury's Graduate Recruitment

The graduate recruitment market is fiercely competitive and organisations are under pressure to attract and recruit the best talent. A new graduate recruitment website, developed in partnership with Changeworknow, is enabling Sainsbury's to improve the number and quality of graduate applicants, reduce recruitment costs and cut down the time to hire.

"We currently recruit over 60 graduates each year to enrol on one of our twelve graduate schemes. These specific schemes cover key business functions such as store management, supply chain management, HR, finance and property," explains Jo Gidley, graduate recruitment manager for Sainsbury's.

"My first role following my appointment as graduate recruitment manager in April 2007 was to review and update our graduate recruitment process, starting with the attraction of applicants, the application process and continuing through to the delivery of assessment centres. The review ensured the business remained focused on recruiting the best people who share our passion for food and our desire to see the business grow and succeed," she says.

A key outcome of this graduate recruitment review was the decision to bring the management and administration of the graduate recruitment process in-house.

"This decision makes sound business sense and enables Sainsbury's people – who naturally have a better understanding of the type of people, personalities and skills the business needs to recruit and attract – to play an active role in graduate recruitment. After all, if the business can attract candidates who share our values and beliefs the successful graduates will have more fun at work, be content in their jobs and perform well, thereby rewarding the business with a positive return on investment," says Jo.

"Cost was also a key factor in our decision to move the graduate recruitment process in-house. The business had recently launched an HR shared service centre in Manchester that offered the capacity to manage the administration of the graduate recruitment scheme, thereby reducing pressure on other elements of the HR team," she explains.

The costs saved in the administration of the scheme were then available to be reinvested into developing new graduate attraction material. As a result Sainsbury's was able to invest in its recruitment marketing material which plays a key role in attracting candidates and communicating the spirit and values of Sainsbury's to candidates.

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Sainsbury's
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Changeworknow were brought in to get the project moving

"We recognised that it was important for Sainsbury's to provide candidates with a simple application and selection process. This would offer them a real understanding of what the graduate scheme actually involves and the

challenges faced by candidates once on the graduate scheme," comments Lisa Astbury, founder and director of Changeworknow.

"At first glance it might seem that the graduate recruitment process is quite far removed from getting baked beans on the shop floor but that's simply not the case, and it's essential that the process remains connected to the business," comments Jo.

"To achieve this connection I met with business and line managers from across the organisation, enabling me to understand what they need from graduates in terms of academic background and work experience, as well as the skills, attitude and competencies required of future managers. This was an important input to the initial screening tools developed by Changeworknow," she says.

Changeworknow worked with Sainsbury's to design an online recruitment process to meet their challenging business objectives.

Psychometric tools from SHL were incorporated into the online process to provide a seamless experience. Only those candidates who pass the initial screening criteria are invited to take the psychometric tests.

It was important to increase the quality of graduate applicants and reduce recruitment costs, whilst also putting candidates at the heart of the recruitment experience, thereby projecting a strong employer brand.

"As candidates take part in each stage of the online application process they are rewarded with immediate feedback on their match to the role selected, as well as Sainsbury's as an organisation. This has obvious benefits for both the candidate and the employer; if the candidate is a great match they can be told and motivated to continue and complete their application. However, if they're not, it's possible to suggest they consider an alternative role or employer," explains Lisa from Changeworknow.

"By creating a positive experience online and encouraging candidates to deselect themselves we are more likely to maintain a strong employer brand with these applicants and potential customers. This also takes away some of the administrative burden and means time is spent more productively because the graduate team only needs to process the candidates who meet all the requirements of the specific schemes and who are likely to be successful in the process," adds Jo from Sainsbury's.

The success of Sainsbury's new graduate recruitment system can be measured by the calibre of successful candidates who have already been offered roles within the business. Applications for many of the graduate schemes have closed up to two months earlier than expected and feedback from line managers demonstrates the positive change in the quality of candidates since previous years.

"In 2006 / 2007 we were making one offer to every five candidates attending an assessment centre but this year that figure has increased to one offer for every three candidates reaching this stage. It really shows how the online recruitment process is helping us attract the right people to make applications and that we can deliver people who match the needs of the business," says Jo.

The flow of the recruitment process has also improved. By bringing it in-house, and working with Changeworknow to design an online recruitment system that meets business needs, the team is able to take a closer, more personal look at candidates' work experience and academic background which will enable us to make better and quicker recruitment decisions.