



RECRUITMENT INTERNATIONAL

# AUGUST 2010



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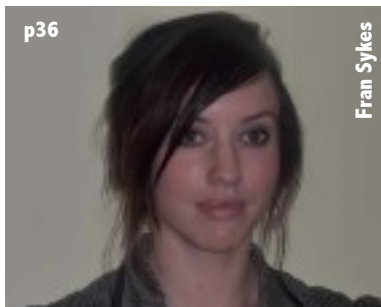
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For me, August is one of those pivotal times in the recruitment industry calendar. Many of us take the opportunity to take a week out and come back into the business re-energised and ready to push hard to the year end. For this reason I like to schedule what I believe is the industry's most influential event in early September. Suitably refreshed and with the motivation to embrace new ideas and concepts, the World Leaders In Recruitment Conference has a proven pedigree in helping any recruitment company owner improve their business.

This year there is an amazing line up, I would challenge anyone to come up with a more diverse and eclectic set of speakers. These are all documented in the centre pages of the publication. September 8th isn't really a day out of the office – its an essential part of building your business. Come along and join me.

August is also the month in which we complete our guide to the UK recruitment sector, The Top 250 Report. Listing recruiters with a UK turnover in excess of £10m, make sure you are included. Enjoy the holiday season.

David Head

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## 5 Ways To Build A Recruitment Website

Tristan Neagle, Director of Just Recruitment Websites



If you've ever looked into developing or re-developing a recruitment website, you'll know that there are HUNDREDS of different options, solutions, technologies and companies out there, all competing for your attention. With huge variations in functionality, business application AND cost, it can be difficult to know where to start looking and where your money is best spent. This guide aims to demystify the huge range of possibilities by grouping them into 5 different 'Approaches' for building a recruitment website. We hope this will help you make a more informed decision about any investment you make in your website.

### Introduction

Some time ago, we did some research into what other companies were charging to build a recruitment website. We sent out a quote request to 5 or 6 different companies for a fairly standard recruitment website and we waited to see what sort of response we got back.

We thought we'd asked all the companies for just about the same thing. So we expected to get prices which were at least in the same ball-park. You know what we got? We got prices ranging from around £500 to around £20,000. Now that's quite a big difference - in anyone's book.

At the same time, we did some searching on the internet to see what recruitment agencies might find if they tried to find either a toolkit or a supplier for developing recruitment websites. Again, we found a huge range of different options each with their own pros and cons.

To be perfectly honest, even WE were confused by the number of different options, approaches and prices that were out there. So this got us thinking "If it's this confusing for US, then what on earth must it feel like for our clients when they start to look at this?!"

To combat this, we decided to put this guide together to help recruiters make some sense of all the options, and to distil all those different possibilities into 5 main categories or approaches. Most importantly, we wanted to explain the advantages and disadvantages of each approach to help you make a better buying decision for your business.

Here, for your convenience (and perhaps bed-time reading!) are those different approaches in as small a nutshell as we could possibly manage:

### Approach 1: Extreme DIY

This is where \*YOU\* the business owner or recruiter (i.e. any non technical person with no previous web development experience) decides 'hey!, I don't wanna fork out loads of money for a recruitment website, I'm gonna build the thing myself - can't be that difficult'.

There are several different tools you could try using in order to build your website this way:

1. You could use a free (open source) tool like Wordpress (<http://wordpress.org/>) to build a basic site;
2. You could use a paid-for 'website builder' which is a service or tool offered by some web hosting companies and allow you to install and setup a website based on certain templates or layout styles;
3. You could use a slightly more advanced website building content management utility like Joomla! Or Drupal. These free code libraries enable you start putting together a website

using components or modules which have already been built and tested by developers of the framework;

4. You could learn how to use a fully-fledged website coding language like ASP.Net or php and buy the books/tools necessary to learn how to develop, edit, organise and/or compile these languages into a website.

The single advantage of this type of solution is: it's dirt cheap. At least, it won't cost you much from a FINANCIAL point of view. But the bad news is it will almost certainly cost you a fair bit of TIME.

Whichever way you look at it, the main problem with all the options listed above and this overall approach is that you would be a trying to do a job which is not really your specialism or in which you have no previous experience. The result? You'll spend countless hours trying to be a WEB DEVELOPER instead of concentrating the business of RECRUITMENT.

There are some other disadvantages to these methods too:

\* Unless you have some previous design experience, you'll need to rely in your own thoughts and instincts in terms of what the site should look like and how it should behave. This can be difficult. For a professional look, it's usually best to have the advice of a professional designer who's experienced in creating website concepts and who knows how to make colours work effectively with one another;

\* The templates or starting setups sometimes provided with the first 3 options listed above are often quite limited and/or inflexible - as soon as you want to do something which is outside the capability of the templates or framework you will run into problems whereby you need some additional technical knowledge to get things how you want

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them (or what you're trying to achieve may not even be possible at all);

\* In many cases, website builders and tools which enable websites to be built easily simply cannot support some of the more difficult or advanced functionality WITHOUT you knowing what you're doing on a technical level. Option 4 listed above would help you get around this, but in itself this would involve training yourself as a website developer to a fairly high level.

In short, if you are serious about creating a website for your BUSINESS (as opposed to a hobby or basic personal website) we believe this approach is generally a bad move. There really is a lot to know about building a professional recruitment website and trying to build it yourself is, well, kind of like trying to build your own house: you'll put the foundations in all wrong which will cause problems later, you won't know how to build things so that they're future and intruder proof, you won't be able to put systems in place that tell you when something's wrong and you probably won't be able to do a high quality job (at least not the first time round). Most importantly of all, you'll spend WAY too much time learning how to build a website that would be far better spent working on your business or other areas of recruitment.

## Approach 2: Internal DIY

This is similar to the above, but in this case your IT team carry out the website build. This might be an option if you already have an IT team who look after other internal systems or databases.

But the problem is that building a successful website is a very specialised skill in itself. It's a subsector of IT and even if your IT team have some experience building websites, they may not have a great deal of experience building recruitment websites specifically.

The main disadvantage of this method is that in the long-run it is likely to cost your business much more than it would to outsource this option to a website development company, preferably one specialising in recruitment websites. They'll be able to offer you something for a fixed price, within a fixed time frame and they should be able to use knowledge and experience gained from other projects and clients in order to help your website perform better.

## Approach 3: 'Out of the Box' recruitment website templates

This is where the recruitment website is basically already created for you, top to bottom. These systems can be very tempting, reasonably cheap and yes, they can be useful in some (but we believe not many) situations. Companies who provide this type of website offer large amounts of functionality at a relatively low cost and provide one complete and fairly quick solution.

Initially, this option sounds really good. It's the natural route you might think of and it's kind of like choosing a new kitchen from a magazine and having someone bring it in and install it for you.

That's all very well, HOWEVER, there are a whole bunch of problems with this approach and you need to think very carefully about whether you're actually just cutting corners on your website by doing this or whether it's the right and sensible investment.

The disadvantages are:

\* These solutions often look very similar to one another which means that it's quite possible your website will look the same as 10, 20, or 30 other recruitment agency websites around the country – possibly some of your competitors;

\* These websites are often over-engineered with large amounts of functionality which is available to the

candidate and/or clients on your site, but due to the generic and formulaic way in which it's been implemented, it doesn't necessarily get used as often as might otherwise do i.e. it doesn't really work too well from a business perspective;

\* There may be some limitations on what either can or cannot be done with the website either now or in the future from a technical point of view i.e. it may not be entirely flexible in the long run;

Our belief is that this kind of approach to building websites can be a little slap-dash... but more crucially that it completely UNDERMINES the whole approach which a business should have towards its website:

In our opinion, the company website is one of, if not THE, most powerful and profitable marketing tool/tools available to any business. Most recruitment companies completely underuse their



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website as a means of attracting new candidates and clients. Using a template website solution means subscribing to a 'me too' approach for your website which will make it seem generic and standard. All businesses need to try to differentiate themselves from their competitors and a template approach to the company website will make it more difficult to do this.

In short, using template website risks making your company look like a template BUSINESS. I'd be very surprised if you'd be happy thinking of your business as a template business – it's important not to view your website like that either. Ultimately you'll probably be disappointed with results from a template website in comparison to what your website SHOULD be able to do for your business (more because of the overall approach and strategy than because of the actual product itself).

### **Approach 4: Ground-up development (from scratch)**

This (or something close to it) is often offered by website suppliers (both good and bad) who don't have much experience building recruitment websites. They'll agree a specification with you and build you an entire system, from scratch, that should be entirely yours from top to bottom.

Investing in this route will usually mean you end up with a website which doesn't have some of the drawbacks of the template website option mentioned above.

However, there are certain disadvantages:

- \* It'll be much more expensive (to get a good job done at least);
- \* It'll usually take longer;
- \* It'll mean the company are developing lots of un-tested, brand-new functions for you, from scratch: the company will

spend 90% of their time on development, but only 10% of their time with you understanding your requirements and getting things just right for you. This means your website will be the one and only guinea pig for the new code and you'll need to fully finance all future developments.

Ultimately, this method is quite inefficient and you're getting someone to reinvent the WHOLE wheel when really, you only need to reinvent the part of it that makes your business different.

### **IMPORTANT NOTES ON THIS APPROACH – BEWARE:**

Many web development companies who produce bespoke or customised websites CLAIM they will be building your website completely from scratch and so you would think their service falls within this category. The main reason why this is attractive is because it means that (unlike the next option) you are not tied to any specific company for a set of core code libraries or pieces of your website. HOWEVER: When the functional components of a website become remotely complicated, it is extremely rare for a website development company to write every line of code for a website from the top layers down through to the database, FROM SCRATCH, for any particular client. To do this (for anything like the complexity of even a fairly simple recruitment website) would take many hundreds of hours, and probably months of development time. It would be extremely difficult for any website development company to be competitive if they start each website ENTIRELY from scratch.

Instead, most companies tend to use certain code libraries or an existing base and they build their websites using that foundation (this is closer to approach 5 listed below). Irrespective of how the particular website development company might word it (within the fine print of their agreements etc), it is generally

the case that you are NOT buying the core system from the supplier. Instead, you are buying all of the bespoke work which they do for you as part of the project you agree with them. This will typically include: design work (copyright of which you will own), integration with the core system and any other custom code or logic which they may write for you specifically as part of the project. In addition to the work carried out for you, you may then need to pay a licence fee during the lifetime of your website for the base system upon which your website is built.

You must be careful here: many development companies will assign rights for the entire website to you UNAWARE that they are not allowed to do this: if they have sold a core system to one client, then they simply cannot sell it to a second client since it is no longer theirs to sell. Alternatively, they may simply not tell you that they in fact own a large piece of your website which you are not entitled to if you ever wish to move your website to a different supplier.

### **Approach 5: Bespoke website built upon on a Licensed Core System**

Having either tried or seen all other approaches first-hand, we believe this is by far the best approach for building recruitment websites currently (and it's the one we use for our websites).

In this approach, you pay for the development of the 'top layer' of your website – (everything that's specific for you) and the integration of that top layer with a core system which has already been built, tried and tested. You then buy a reasonably priced annual license to use that core system with your website.

Advantages:

- \* Your site can look and work exactly how you want (like ground-up development) but you don't have to pay for the expensive or risky task of creating

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all that code from scratch;

- \* Your site won't look or work like a template website – it can do anything you want and look exactly how you want;

- \* Your supplier will be able to spend almost all of their time with YOU and working on YOUR requirements instead of redeveloping basic functions from scratch;

- \* There's not much value in the core stuff for YOU (you only need one copy of it to run your website) so this allows you to have that copy without paying to develop it;

- \* You will be able to take advantage of existing core functions which are already tried and tested;

- \* The website will be much less 'buggy' (it'll be more stable and reliable);

- \* You'll have access to future upgrades and improvements as they happen and you'll only need to pay a fraction of the price for these because the cost would be shared across other clients using the same core functions.

There's just one main disadvantage to this approach: you won't own the entire system from top to bottom which you MIGHT do with approach (4) (but only if you've been very careful about the legalities and ownership of all the code).

But ultimately, why do you need to own the entire system? – The licensed core system approach enables you to get a highly functional, yet still unique and fully customised website without having all the code developed for yourself from scratch – It means you're not reinventing the whole wheel, just the part of it that really matters to you and your business.

## Summary:

So here are the key points to remember from this guide:

1. DIY websites can be cheap but will cost you a lot of time and will rarely give you the results you're looking for;

2. Having your own IT team craft a website for you is an option but outsourcing to a specialist supplier will usually be more cost effective and should in theory provide you with a better website as they will be leveraging experienced gained on other similar projects;

3. Template solutions can be tempting because they offer so much for relatively little cost. But be careful to work out whether this is the right investment for your business: are you simply cutting corners by not taking the time to develop a fully-fledged online strategy for your business and thereby missing out on a vast amount of opportunity?;

4. True ground-up (from scratch) development is usually prohibitively expensive and certainly not cost-effective for most businesses. But be extremely careful of agencies offering this kind of service when in fact they may be selling you some code which has already been sold elsewhere as part of a different website. Even if this is not the case, the time they have to spend developing code will leave much less time for them to give you their attention;

5. The licensed core system gives you the best of all worlds as you can have a website developed for your business which is:

- \* Unique;
- \* Fully customised from an appearance and functionality point-of-view;
- \* Aligned specifically to your current business goals and requirements;
- \* Tailored to your specific candidate and client audience;
- \* Built on a reliable and well-tested

underlying platform which is already in live use;

- \* Less expensive than true ground-up development;

When you're investigating different options for your website, try to work out which of the approaches listed in this document each option falls into. This should help you make a more informed decision about the type of website you are buying, how much of it you will really own, and the results you can realistically expect to see from it for your business.

We hope you found this guide useful and would like to wish you luck with your current recruitment placements and projects!

Just Recruitment Websites offer a FREE Strategy Guide for building successful recruitment websites: <http://www.JustRecruitmentWebsites.co.uk/Strategy/>

*Just Recruitment Websites offer a free report called '19 Essential Ingredients for a Successful Recruitment Website' which goes into further detail about the crucial aspects of running an effective recruitment agency website. It is available on request. Simply visit <http://www.JustRecruitmentWebsites.co.uk/Success/> or email [ri@JustRecruitmentWebsites.co.uk](mailto:ri@JustRecruitmentWebsites.co.uk) to receive a copy*

