



Choosing the *Best Service* for Your Temporary Staffing Needs

For many companies, bringing in a temporary employee to fill an open position makes good business sense.

There's no need to wade through hundreds of résumés; no payroll taxes, unemployment insurance, or benefits to pay; and no hard feelings if the person doesn't work out or the position gets eliminated. But before you randomly call a temporary placement agency from the phone book or an online listing, you need to know how to work with a temp service to get the best talent possible.

Working with the wrong temp firm can be costly. If you have to go through numerous temps before finding the right one or waste time with an inexperienced placement professional, you'll spend more money and experience more frustrations than you'd like.

Whether you've worked with a temp service in the past or trying one for the first time, follow these guidelines to ensure that you will not only find the best service for your needs but also work with the company effectively, building a long-term relationship and saving time in the future.

Know the company you're working with

Try to choose a temp service referred by another business professional you trust. If

you can't get a referral, then do your own due diligence. The internal workings of temporary placement firms vary. Unless you are working with a franchise, the only way to find out how the firm works is to ask. Therefore, contact some local temporary help companies and ask them:

- How long have you been doing business in the local market?
- Do you belong to a national association?
- What kind of testing do your temps go through?
- What kind of reference checking do you do?
- What's your firm's area of specialization?

Be honest with the company: If you have called other temp services or have had a bad experience in the past, let them know. And consider the specialist you speak with. Does the person seem knowledgeable and caring, or just trying to sell you on the idea of working with them? The person should be listening twice as much as they talk. True professionals are as interested in getting a feel for your credibility as you are theirs. Since the goal is to create a long-term relationship, you want to feel comfortable with your main contact.

Beware of pushy salespeople

Some temp companies may not give you the initial information you request via phone or email but will want to send a salesperson to your office. While this is not always a red flag, it is something to take note of. If the sales meeting goes smoothly, with the salesperson asking you many questions about your needs and not being pushy, that's fine. However, if the salesperson spends the entire time telling you all the reasons you should choose them and doesn't seem interested in your needs, look for another service.

After that initial sales meeting, you'll probably never see the salesperson again and will instead be talking with the internal specialist who interviews and screens the candidates. This is the person you want to build the relationship with. Some companies have their branch manager doing the outside sales, providing ongoing customer service, and directly supervising the person who does the screening and placement. Some smaller companies have one person doing sales, screenings, and placements. Unfortunately, some companies pay more for the pushy salesperson than they do the person doing the placements. If a salesperson makes you feel pressured or rushed to use their services, call another service.

Don't base a decision solely on price

All temp agencies have a markup, which is the difference between what the temp actually earns and what you pay the firm for the temp's services. In general, markups run from 30 to 60% — a huge spread. But as with all things in life, you get what you pay for. The companies with the lower markup generally don't do the same kind of rigorous screening as those with the higher one.

Rather than choose a temp agency based on price, choose based on your need. If you're filling a job that requires you to invest only four hours or so to train the person, you simply need someone to do a specific task and the lower markup company is fine. However, if the job requires discretion and critical thinking skills, seriously consider a higher markup company. After all, if you go with a lower markup company and then have to replace the temp three times before you get the right person, you might as well have paid the higher markup to get a better screened person and avoid all that frustration.

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Know the nitty-gritty details

Each temp agency has different policies, and it's important that you find out these details before you decide to work with one. In addition to the current markup you pay for the temp, what's the fee if you decide you want to hire the temp full time? Some companies simply transfer the person to

your payroll after a certain timeframe, while others will require that you pay an additional transfer fee.

Also ask about a guarantee. How long do you have to decide if the temp they send you is working out? If the person is not working out, what's their policy for replacement? If the temp agency doesn't offer any kind of guarantee, that's a red flag, so find out why. And find out the level of experience and education of the person who is actually doing the selection. The more education and experience, the better.

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Note how the first temp order goes

Once you decide on a temp agency, your decision process is not yet 100% complete. Use your first temp request as the final test of the agency's professionalism. If you call in a temp request, a person who spends only 10 minutes on the phone with you doesn't have enough information to give you a quality temp. Any temp request conversation should take 20 to 30 minutes, unless the salesperson has already obtained key information. The person should ask you such questions as:

- Who will the temp report to, and what is that person's personality?
- What will be the temp's main duties?
- How will you know if the temp is successful?
- How will you measure the temp's performance?
- Why is this position vacant?
- What's the culture of the department the temp will be working in?
- Will this role go to direct hire, or do you want a long-term temp?

If you call in a temp request and the agency doesn't respond within a day to tell you the progress on that order, that's not a responsive temp service, and consider looking elsewhere.

Temporary Solutions for Great Results

Using temporary employees is a great solution for many companies. Fortunately, temps can be just as skilled as your full-time employees. The good ones though are in high demand. To ensure that you get the best, you want to find a service that targets and attracts the top 20% of the unemployed talent available. Such temp firms are usually staffed by referrals and do very little advertising to recruit their temps; they are so effective that people tell their friends to go apply, and therefore they get the very best of the unemployed.

Ultimately, any temp service is only as good as the people it places. If you have a job to be done, you want someone who not only is technically qualified but also has a positive outlook, works well with others, and is a self-starter. So do your due diligence before working with any temp agency. When you do, you'll find great people to work with who will help your work go smoothly and add to your company's success.

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