BD guide

FOR RECRUITMENT AGENCY OWNERS

11 BD mistakes that cost recruitment agencies mandates

What agency owners told us on sales calls this year, and the fix for each one. No software needed.

14 pages · about 10 minutes

Start here

Who this is for

Owners, MDs and BD leads of recruitment, staffing and search agencies whose new business depends on whoever has a spare hour.

How to use it

- Read the 11 mistakes. Each one is a page.
- Every page has what we heard, why it costs you, and what to do this week.
- Mark the two that made you wince. Fix one this week and one next week.
- The quotes are paraphrased and anonymised. No names, no agencies.

Mistake 01 of 11

Waiting for the job ad

WHAT WE HEARD

> *An owner told us they wait until the jobs are posted before reaching out.*

WHY IT COSTS YOU

The day an ad goes live, every agency with a job alert sees it too. You arrive in a queue, and the client is already sorting agencies by speed and price.

FIX IT THIS WEEK

1. Pick two signals that usually come before an ad: a role still open after a couple of months, a new head of department, a funding round.
2. Every Monday, spend 30 minutes checking those two signals for your top 20 target companies.
3. Message on the signal, not the ad.

Mistake 02 of 11

The owner is the whole BD team

WHAT WE HEARD

> *Founders told us they do the business development themselves, on top of running the agency. One director said plainly they don't like doing it.*

WHY IT COSTS YOU

BD only happens in the gaps between delivery. In a busy month there are no gaps, so the pipeline for two months later quietly empties.

FIX IT THIS WEEK

1. Put two 45-minute BD blocks in the diary every week and treat them like client calls.
2. Hand the parts that don't need you (list building, finding contacts) to someone or something else.
3. Keep the conversations for yourself.

Mistake 03 of 11

Building lists by hand, every day

WHAT WE HEARD

> *A team lead estimated most of a consultant's day went on list building. An IT agency co-owner put it at about two hours a day from job boards.*

WHY IT COSTS YOU

Hours spent copying names into spreadsheets are hours not spent talking to anyone. And a list built in a rush is usually the same list as everyone else's.

FIX IT THIS WEEK

1. Build the list once a week, not every day.
2. Keep it in one shared place with the source and the date next to each company.
3. Cut any company you can't name a reason for contacting this month.

Mistake 04 of 11

Hire, fire, hire BD

WHAT WE HEARD

> *A search firm director told us their SDRs lasted six months to a year, then burnt out when results didn't come. They wanted out of the hire, fire loop.*

WHY IT COSTS YOU

Every new BD hire pays for a ramp again: learning the market, the scripts, the clients. When they leave, the target list and the half-warm conversations leave with them.

FIX IT THIS WEEK

1. Keep the process outside the person: who you target, what each client said last time, which follow-ups are due.
2. Write it down in one place the next person inherits on day one.
3. Judge a BD hire on conversations started, not activity.

Mistake 05 of 11

Fixing low replies with more emails

WHAT WE HEARD

> *Owners told us they weren't sure their emails were even landing. Others described reply rates of one or two in a hundred and sending more to make up for it.*

WHY IT COSTS YOU

More volume to a cold list damages your sending domain and trains inboxes to ignore you. Replies usually get worse, not better.

FIX IT THIS WEEK

1. Check your domain set-up and warm-up before you send anything at volume.
2. Send fewer messages to companies with a real reason to talk now.
3. If a message can't mention something specific about them, don't send it.

Mistake 06 of 11

A first message anyone could have sent

WHAT WE HEARD

> *One founder described decision-makers seeing the same automated CV from agencies every day, and simply blocking them.*

WHY IT COSTS YOU

If the first line could be sent to any company, the reader can tell. Pitching your agency before there is a conversation gets you ignored.

FIX IT THIS WEEK

1. Open with one line that is only true of them: their signal, their new role, their open vacancy.
2. No pitch, no link, no meeting ask in the first message.
3. Ask one question that's easy to answer.

Mistake 07 of 11

Two touches, then silence

WHAT WE HEARD

> *A solo recruiter told us they sometimes make two touches for one client and then stop, because there is no proper system.*

WHY IT COSTS YOU

Most clients don't reply to the first or second message. Not because they're not interested, but because the timing wasn't right that week.

FIX IT THIS WEEK

1. Set a follow-up rhythm before you send the first message.
2. Make every follow-up add something new: a candidate, a market point, a question about their team.
3. Never send "just bumping this".

Mistake 08 of 11

Letting every "not now" die

WHAT WE SEE

> *A client says "not now". The note sits in someone's inbox. A few months later another agency asks at the right moment and wins the search.*

WHY IT COSTS YOU

"Not now" is a fact about one week, not a no. When nobody comes back, the next agency that asks at the right moment gets the mandate.

FIX IT THIS WEEK

1. Give every "not now" a date to come back and a reason to come back with.
2. Put it somewhere it will remind you, not just a note.
3. Before Christmas, go back through this year's "not nows".

Mistake 09 of 11

"I'll update the CRM afterwards"

WHAT WE HEARD

> *A search firm co-founder told us the update never happens, because there is always something to deliver right now. Much of their data never made it into the system.*

WHY IT COSTS YOU

When nobody knows what was said on the last call, the next call starts from zero, and the client notices.

FIX IT THIS WEEK

1. Write the note straight after the call, while it's fresh. A call recorder or a two-minute rule both work.
2. Keep one place for client history. Not a CRM plus a spreadsheet plus someone's inbox.
3. Add the next step and its date before you close the note.

Mistake 10 of 11

Tools nobody connected

WHAT WE HEARD

> *Owners told us about too many clicks, too many exports, and two CRMs doing the same job.*

WHY IT COSTS YOU

Every manual hand-off between tools is a place where a lead goes cold or a follow-up gets missed.

FIX IT THIS WEEK

1. List every tool in your BD process and what each one actually does.
2. Pick one place that holds the client record. Everything else feeds it.
3. Cut or connect one tool this month.

Mistake 11 of 11

Living on referrals and one big client

WHAT WE HEARD

> *One owner told us most of their business still comes through account management and referrals. Another said the vacancies they get are the ones other agencies couldn't fill.*

WHY IT COSTS YOU

It feels safe until that client freezes hiring or changes supplier. Then there's no pipeline behind it, and it takes months to build one.

FIX IT THIS WEEK

1. Spend 30 minutes a week on new accounts, even in your busiest week.
2. Keep a list of ten companies you'd love to work with and why.
3. When a big client is happy, ask who else they know.

Where to start

Fix one this week

The common thread: BD only happens when there's time, and there never is.

If you only do one thing: go back through this year's "not nows" before Christmas (mistake 08). It's the warmest list you have.

> Reply to the message this PDF came with and tell me which mistake sounds most like your agency. I'll send you the one thing I'd do first.