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RECRUITMENT

Recruitment is back!

Want to separate the wheat from the chaff? Use a specialist recruitment agency. There's plenty of talent about if you let the professionals take the strain.

Lisa Arcangeli reports.

When you are a leading consultancy that specialises in the recruitment of sales and management personnel exclusively within the building industry, you have to have a knowledgeable team that understands both the market and its people.

The worst downturn since 1974 has left the employment market in tatters, but now it is coming back with a vengeance.

Says Tony Smith, director of the Hertfordshire-based Courtney Smith Group: "We are 70% up on our vacancies when compared to this time last year. From January to May 2009, there was a great deal of uncertainty. Confidence levels were low.

"Now, the level of confidence is returning and companies are starting to recruit salespeople once more," he says. Since October 2009, the agency has itself recruited four more full-time staff to meet demand.

"January and February saw an explosion in demand," Mr Smith relates. "Companies that had cut back to the bone now have to ensure that their service levels don't drop.

Mr Smith's advice to manufacturers and merchants is not to take staff for granted. "They need to be developed and trained. Employers must give confidence to their staff and have a clear strategy for the future.

"Employers must start planning their staffing levels now, or they will be left behind," he adds.

The merchant sector has been hit harder than the manufacturing side, in recruitment terms. "It is much harder for merchants to find other jobs," he says, "because it is a shrinking sector."

Mr Smith's optimism is backed by the Recruitment & Employment Confederation's JobsOutlook survey in February. It stated that 94% of employers expect either to maintain or grow their permanent workforces in the next 12 months.

The survey also reported that one in four employers are planning to increase their temporary workforce this year. This highlights the important flexibility that contract and temporary work provides to employers and job-seekers.

JobsOutlook also shone a light on the specific attributes that employers are looking for from new recruits as



■ **Tony Smith: the signs are that good things are happening in the market.**

they start to lift their recruitment freezes. Communication and interpersonal skills were top of the list.

"Those companies that shed so many staff will find that there is now a shortage of quality candidates," he says. "Good people are always in demand."

Courtney Smith scrutinises its business clients carefully. Mr Smith wants prospective employers to provide assurance that if a candidate is moving job, it won't just be for a short-term stop-gap.

"We make sure that our business clients tell us the right things in terms of their growth and their company. Otherwise, why should an individual leave a secure job to enter the unknown?"

Candidates, he adds, are also starting to wise up. "They are researching prospective companies; they are asking more detailed questions. The standard of interviewing has got better. People work harder to find out what they will be letting themselves in for."

Merchants, he adds, should not underestimate their websites. "Do you have a vacancies section which is updated regularly? Do you provide up-to-date news about your activities?"

"This gives prospective candidates access to what your company is all about."

The Courtney Smith Group has a team of 10, with plans to hire more. The agency interviews in regions throughout the UK - Scotland, Newcastle, Manchester, Leeds, Bristol the South West and London.