

PharmaSUG 2014 - Paper CP08

Pick Me, Pick Me

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ABSTRACT

Currently we are experiencing an upswing in the market for hiring, particularly when it comes to programmers. Programming is one area where supply is lower than demand. The industry is not experiencing a recession in this field and while we are running into a fair amount of jobs that are being outsourced offshore the demand for qualified domestic candidates is higher than I have seen in the past five years.

INTRODUCTION

Hiring managers and programmers alike are experiencing the same conundrum. Managers want the highest quality programmers for the lowest price possible and programmers want the highest pay attainable with the most prestigious employer. Current market trends show high demand and low supply in a volatile market where CEO's are Outsourcing, Offshoring, or keeping the work In-house based on cost saving initiatives and forecasting of their pipeline. The hiring approach is slightly different for Sponsors and Clinical Research Organizations (CRO) however, both of these organizations typically want and need a flexible headcount model, which entails engaging programmers on an ad-hoc basis. Essentially, it all boils down to quality and pricing. The industry trend is to get and do more with less.

Some glaring challenges we repeatedly face include: Pricing Disparities, Client Rigidity and Candidate Flexibility.

- Pricing Disparities are evident when you have two equally desirable pharmaceutical companies located within 50 miles of each other and are seeking a contract statistical programmer with 5 years industry experience but have a 20% variance in contractor bill rates.
- Client Rigidity varies widely depending upon the client. For instance, a client needs a contractor who is proficient in R and S+ and now we find ourselves searching for the "purple squirrel" (a very rare candidate). Later we find out that R or S+ experience is acceptable.
- Candidate Flexibility is multifaceted including but not limited to: rate, location and/or telecommuting.

PRICING DISPARITIES

Currently the number one challenge we face among both our clients and candidates are pricing disparities. All things are not equal. Money is not everything but it is a key factor and will tilt the scales toward the higher paying client most of the time. Conversely it will tilt the scale toward the lower cost candidate.

We consistently run into major pricing differences amongst comparable clients. It is common to have multiple clients have the same requirements in the same geographical region who have very different expectations on pricing. All things considered, the companies are equally desirable with the exception of their pay rates.

Respectively, candidates have similar inconsistencies in their approach. Equally comparable candidates with identical years of experience, job tenure and educational background are demanding as much as a ten dollar difference in the price for their services. This is difficult to understand unless the candidate can articulate a compelling reason for the difference.

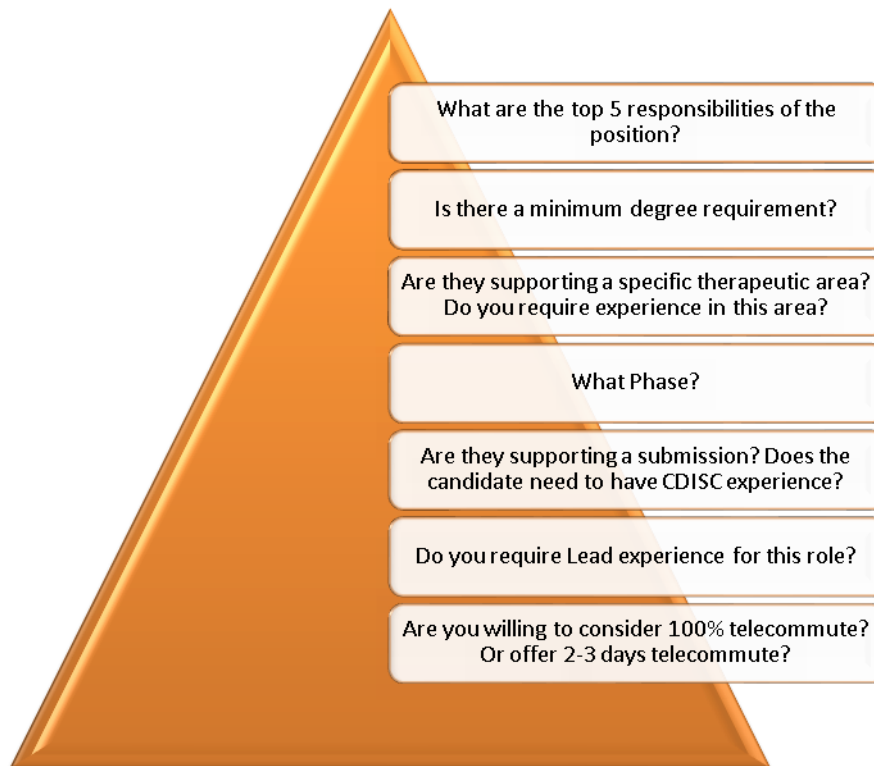
Our roles in these circumstances are to effectively communicate current market trends to both the hiring managers and our applicants. We are in the fray and know the current market and how it is trending. We are in a unique position to see both sides and can help navigate both parties in finding an equitable partnership.

CLIENT RIGIDITY

Our client's unwillingness to be flexible in hiring requirements also tops the list of challenges in staffing. We understand certain skills that are absolutely non-negotiable based on current project need. For example, a SAS

Programmer needs to have experience with SAS and not C++. Depending on how urgent the need is you might also need someone who is experienced enough to “hit the ground running.” That being said, it is very helpful to utilize precise job descriptions that highlight required versus preferred skills; rather than the generic templates used for all programming needs. These generic job descriptions typically do not truly reflect the organizations staffing needs. This ultimately delays the hiring process since vendors present an initial round of candidates who are not the right fit, then have to switch gears once finally clarifying the true requirements for the position.

From a recruitment standpoint, sourcing has become even more challenging with the larger companies that utilize vendor management systems (VMS). The VMS strictly prohibits communication between vendors and hiring managers; therefore vendors are unable to ask specific questions that clarify the hiring need and help in identifying the “right candidate.” Questions such as:



This dialog assists vendors in matching the hiring manager’s needs with the appropriate candidate when job descriptions are lacking important details about the position and the organization’s culture. For organizations utilizing a VMS, it is recommended that hiring managers take the time to host conference calls with vendors to spotlight the position they are hiring for. These calls are an opportunity for hiring managers to clarify the qualifications needed for the role and for vendors to ask questions to help in the recruitment process. This ultimately helps in identifying the “right candidate” and speeds up the hiring process.

We also find that the gatekeepers (VMS) tend to be rigid in their screening process. They themselves do not understand what is required for the role and are screening candidates based on resume keyword searches often times disqualifying candidates who might not be the “perfect candidate”; albeit, one with really good potential. Vendor Management Systems help lessen the load of the hiring manager by prescreening candidates; however, it can be a hindrance to the hiring process in some cases. The hiring manager who is flexible with requirements might not be given the opportunity to review the resume of that candidate with “really good potential” and possibly making a decision to hire sooner than later to meet project deadlines, etc.

As mentioned, pricing disparities across organizations pose another challenge when sourcing candidates. However, we see that internal pricing is another important factor to consider. We see a trend of hiring managers wanting more for their money. For example, the job description lists a requirement of MS degree with 3-5 years of experience or PhD with 2 – 3 years of experience. The reality is that rates should align with the job description and requirements; however, more often than not we see that clients want more than they are willing to pay for. The job description implies that you would consider a MS degree with 3-5 years; but the reality is you want a candidate with a PhD and 3-

5 years with a capped bill rate for a lower level candidate. Hiring managers should be aware that although they have multiple candidates vying for their openings, those same candidates are considering other opportunities as well. In today's market candidates have options, and while an organization's reputation plays a major part in the candidate decision to accept an offer – compensation is equally, if not more important. We need to figure out a way to bridge that gap between paying candidates a fair market rate, while aligning the organizations budget and hiring needs.

CANDIDATE FLEXIBILITY

Rate - there is no exact science here. The goal is to submit a candidate at a rate in-line with their experience and one that they will be happy to accept upon receiving an offer, at the same time keeping them competitive with other candidates in the mix. Typically, our clients are looking for experience first and rate second, but everyone has a budget. This is a marathon, not a sprint. You have to think long-term. The more experience you can obtain, the easier you are to place and the more money you can demand. Don't base your rate on what other people are telling you they are getting.

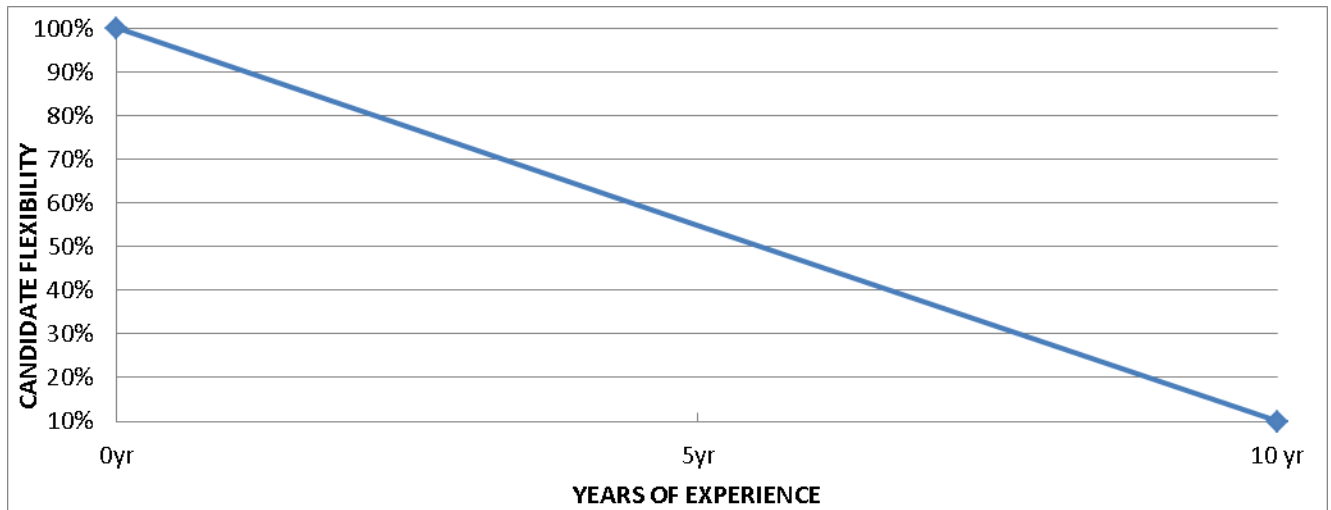
Location - for new graduates, and those who have limited experience, looking to build a career in pharmaceutical programming it is important to reside in a location close to a pharmaceutical hub such as CA, MA, NC, NJ, NY, etc. This will give you the best exposure to companies and allow you the opportunity to start adding experience to your resume. Living outside of these locations will drastically limit the number of opportunities you will have to explore. Again, the more experience you can add to your resume the more valuable you become in the industry.

Education - most of our clients will require a college degree and most will consider candidates with a bachelor's in a Computer Science or Statistics, but there is a growing trend towards master level degrees in Statistics. Experience will often trump this requirement. Regardless of your degree, it is important to get as much experience at the academic level as possible including internships and volunteering within university programs. Again, the goal is to build a strong resume with as much SAS programming experience as possible.

Certifications/Conferences - another goal is to stay up to date with industry trends by obtaining SAS certifications and attending conferences like PharmaSUG. This will allow you to learn and discuss new topics and keep you relevant within the industry.

Resume - be honest! Embellishing your resume will ALWAYS come back to bite you in the SAS. The goal here is to get "real life" experience to add to your resume. In many cases this will be from obtaining a permanent entry-level position with a pharmaceutical or CRO. Our clients typically look for long tenure in a position so staying in a role for two or more years is very important. This shows that you were valuable to your employer and the longer your stay in a role the more familiar you become with the systems a company is using. This makes you an expert in the eyes of a future employer because you have moved beyond "surface level" experience and it is clear that you understand the true "nuts and bolts" of SAS programming.

Candidates need to be flexible based on level of experience



CONCLUSION

If you do not want to be the last one picked for the team; you must:

Manager	Candidate
Pay Fair Market Price	Ask Fair Market Price
Be Flexible On Preferred Skills	Always Work On Gaining More Knowledge
Make Quick Hiring Decisions	Effectively Communicate Your Value
Provide Specific Job Descriptions Relative to Hiring Need	Increase Ability to be Flexible on Job Search Preferences

Remain relevant in your field by keeping your skills up to date, attend PharmaSUG, network and do not allow yourself to have long lapses in between employment. Communication and flexibility mixed with realistic expectations are key to a successful job search in this market.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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