# Strive

# Creating for Scale: How to optimise your recruitment process for accelerated growth

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# Introduction

**It can be argued that a product is only as good as the person selling it.**

You have developed an innovative product - but if you do not have the correct Account Executives 'in the field' representing both your brand and your product, your company will not hit or exceed revenue targets and probably therefore fail to attract the next level of funding to continue accelerating its growth.

> **"Those who build great companies understand that the ultimate throttle on growth for any great company is not the markets, or technology, or competition, or products. It is one thing above all others: the ability to get and keep enough of the right people"**
>
> **Jim Collins,
> Good to Great**

Depending where you are at in your journey, you may have limited experience of recruitment as a whole and little to no experience of hiring Account Executives and Sales Leaders.

Our aim throughout this paper is to discuss some of the common errors we have seen others make, and signpost how you can avoid these in order to create the optimal interview process. But don't worry, it's not all bad news – we will of course shine a spotlight on the best practices and successes we have also seen!

**By optimising your recruitment process you will hire the very best person for each role, ensuring each hire adds the greatest value, maximises positive business outcomes and ultimately allows you to continue scaling your business in the most effective manner.**

# Why is it important to create a thorough interview process?

**To understand why it is important to have a thorough interview process, it makes sense to first flip the question and ask ourselves:**

### What happens if I don't have a thorough interview process?

The short answer?

You put yourself at a much higher risk of hiring the wrong person. You make a 'bad hire'.

And, ultimately, you put yourself at risk of not achieving your company sales plans and attracting your next round of funding.

> " The trouble is, throughout the world most companies do not have superior talent because they are poor at picking talent. They simply can't figure out how to solve the three huge problems in hiring. "

### What are the causes of bad hires?

According to '**Topgrading for Sales: World-Class Methods to Interview, Hire, and Coach Top Sales Representatives' by Greg Alexander and Bradford D. Smart**, there are three main problems that lead to a bad hire.

**They believe these three problems to be:**

- Rampant dishonesty by weak candidates who easily get away with fudging their resumes and faking their interviews.

- Insufficient information, because most companies use superficial hiring methods that enable candidates to control and hide what they share about themselves.

- Lack of verifiability, as most reference checks are practically useless. Since most reference checks are fact checks with Human Resources, not done at all, or conducted with the candidates' buddies as references, even the weakest candidates can get away with problem #1, dishonesty.

**So what is the cost of a bad hire?**

Let's look first at the most obvious 'cost' – and the thing that makes or breaks any company - the financials.

Interestingly, there seems to be a lot of discrepancy between what companies believe the cost is – versus what it actually is.

A whitepaper produced by CV-Library, based on research with 300 managers confirmed: **51% of HR Directors admit to not knowing their average cost per failed hire. More still said they didn't know how to accurately work it out.**

**Tip:**

**ThriveMap are a company who create assessments for volume hiring.**

**They have created a calculator which is a great starting point to understand what a bad hire could be costing your business.**

**The calculator can be found here.**

As we know, in the Enterprise Software Sales market, Account Executives and those more senior attract significant salaries – leading to the cost to the business also being significantly higher accordingly.

Looking again at the book 'Topgrading for Sales: World-Class Methods to Interview, Hire, and Coach Top Sales Representatives', Greg Alexander and Bradford D. Smart, calculate the total 'mis-hire' cost for a sales representative earning $100,000 a year to be almost $600,000! They break the cost down into percentages as per the pie chart to the right.

**Interestingly, it's not the hiring costs, or even the individual's compensation that are the significant aspects of this cost – it's the opportunity cost.**

This missed opportunity cost can of course show itself in different ways – from the lack of productivity of a bad hire; to the reputational damage created within target accounts by poor performance of previous bad hires.

This missed opportunity cost can also occur from the cost of not filling a role quickly enough. Without an optimal process, you may find yourself in a situation where you are unsure who the correct hire is. This could lead to no-one being hired or a significant delay in making a decision.

Where a revenue generating role remains unfilled, this represents significant lost revenue and opportunity.

**Mis-Hire Costs: Total of $563,000**



4%
18%
27%
45%
2%
4%
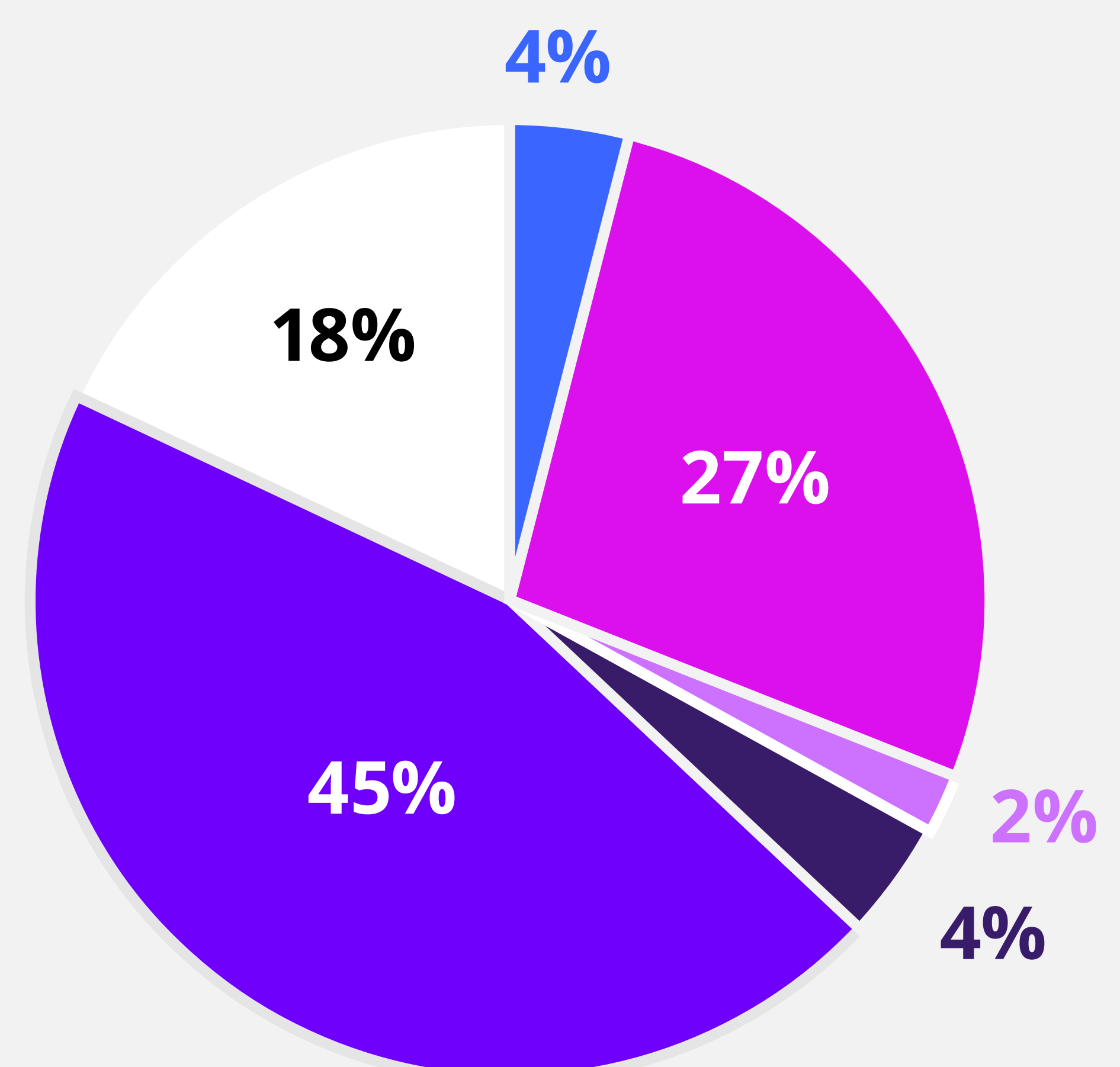
- Hiring Costs
- Compensation
- Maintenance
- Severance
- Opportunity Costs
- Disruption Costs

**Now we better understand the immediate financial implications of a bad hire, we should also consider the wider impacts on the team and business too.**

> **While the financial impact is quantifiable, Chief Financial Officers actually rank a bad hire's morale and productivity impacts ahead of monetary losses. Why? A bad apple spoils the bunch, so to speak. Disengagement is contagious, which may be why employers can't seem to defeat it.**
>
> Falon Fatemi,
> CEO and Founder of Node

### Team disruption

Ultimately an Account Executive who struggles to meet their target and as a result requires additional support, will often lead to their team members picking up extra work or needing to compensate the individual's under-performance with their over-performance to ensure the team still hits its targets.

The impact of having someone who consistently fails to reach their numbers can be devastating not only to your business, but also the morale of their fellow team members. This can of course result in resentment and disruption – and ultimately could lead to your top Account Executives leaving.

'A players' want to work with other 'A players' – and ultimately if they feel you are instead hiring 'C players', they will start to look to move on to find a team they are proud to be part of - they want to be challenged and not work for a company who is seen to accept the mediocre.

As we know, sales professionals also enjoy the challenge of a competitive environment – and where this is not perceived, it will cause a lack of

continuous improvement and ultimately a dip in performance of some of your better performers.

**More than 1/5 of UK businesses who responded to a survey ran by CareerBuilder, reported a negative impact on team morale as a result of hiring the wrong person.**

### Impact on employer brand

As we have mentioned, 'A Players' attract other 'A Players' – so in what is a highly competitive market, if you want to attract the best Account Executives to your company, you need to have some of the best Account Executives already working for you.

As we know, the importance of building, and maintaining, a positive Employer Brand is hugely important if you want to maintain a competitive edge against your competitors when it comes to hiring.

With tools such as Glassdoor, unhappy employees or interviewees can now also easily share their negative opinions in a public way.
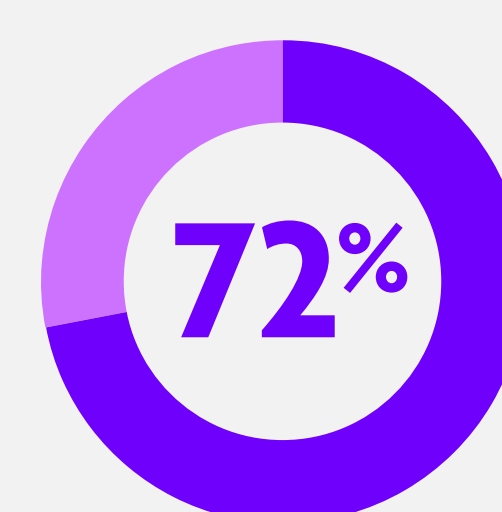
**72%** **of job seekers that had a bad experience told others about it, either online or in-person.**
Source: CareerArc

At Strive, we head-hunt the top tier of Enterprise Software Sales professionals globally – and objections we can encounter when taking a role to market can be:

- The Sales Leader at the company is not inspiring
- The company culture is known to be poor
- Account Executives are known not to be hitting their targets
- The company is known to have high staff turnover

Where we experience any negative feedback such as the above, we pass this market intelligence onto the client as part of our Market Report and offer recommendations to ensure we support them in improving their brand.

**Now that we better understand the issues caused by a bad hire, lets flip the question back to understand the benefits a thorough recruitment process will bring.**

### An improved sales strategy

A key task early on in your company's journey is to move as quickly as possible towards your optimal 'product market fit' and at the point of hiring your 'first person on the ground', you may still be working towards this.

A first sales hire or a first hire in a new region is a key strategic hire – and the right person in the role can help you to transform and grow your business on a deeper level than just immediate revenue.

In these early stages, your first sales hires are key to your business strategy, as they should be assisting with aspects such as:

- Helping to develop the market price of your product

- Feeding back to your engineering teams with relevant client feedback, to assist in the continued development of your product

- Creating the sales methodology for how to sell your product, which can be rolled out to future hires

- Helping to develop ideal client / buyer personas to drive marketing activity, and establishing what specialities, and whom, the product is best to sell into.

- Developing growth strategy and tactics, including understanding what key territories should be targeted as the next growth areas and what resources are needed accordingly.

- Helping calculate when these next hires are required – ultimately if your business hires too much too quickly, there is a cost to the business. If a business doesn't hire quickly enough, there is missed opportunity.

- Helping to develop the compensation package for new team members based on their knowledge of what realistic quotas are.

- Setting the company standard for what 'good versus great' looks like and corresponding metrics and conversion ratios.

The strategic aspects and corresponding benefits of what an A Player hire can bring is clear – and can help accelerate your company's growth to improve your product, its sell and ultimately reach your next round of funding quicker.

A thorough process will allow you to explore this element of a potential hire's skillset and also ensure you are hiring someone who is not only fit for the role as it stands, but able to grow in the role as your company grows.
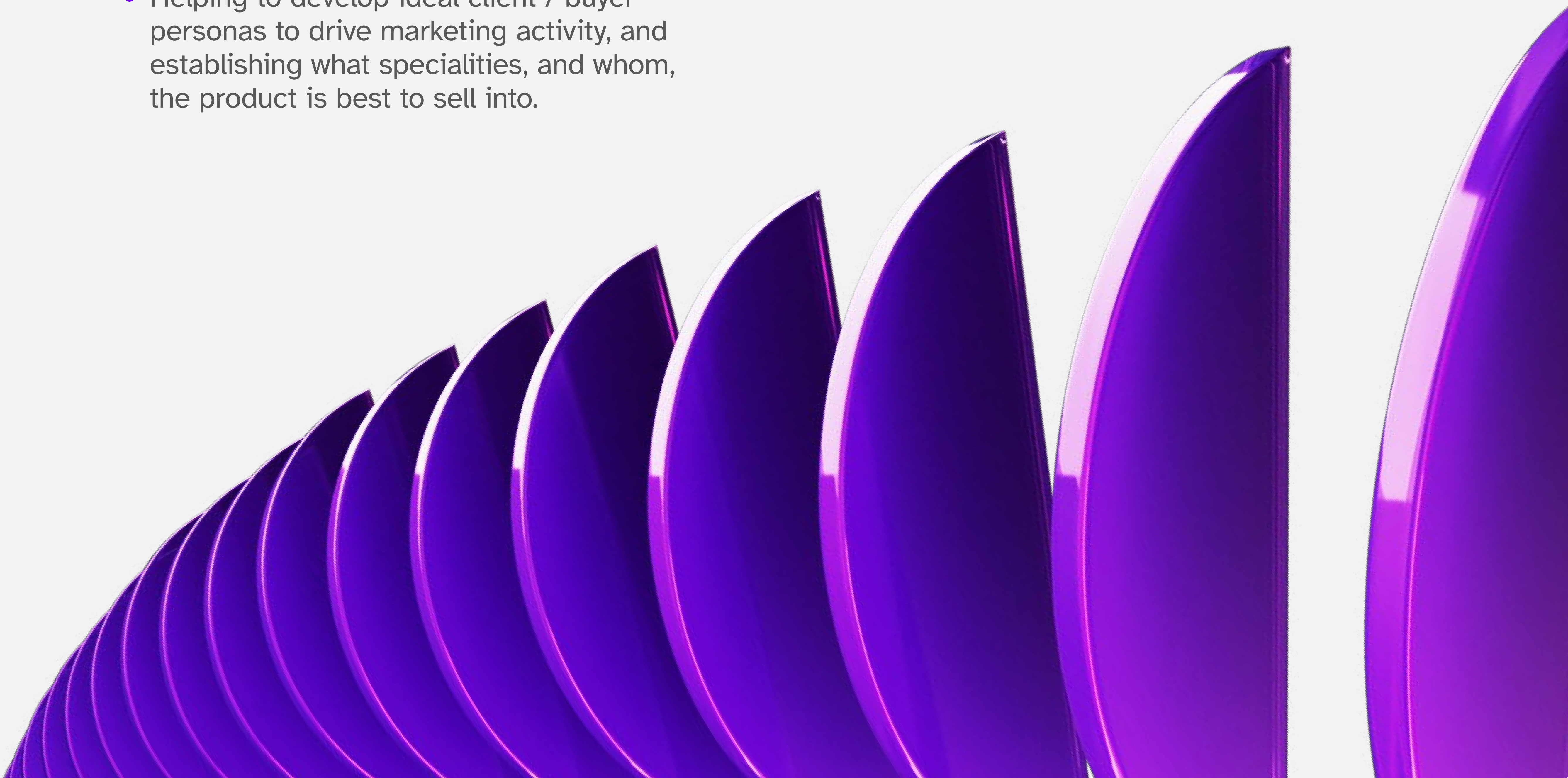
## Reduction in staff turnover

Reports place staff turnover within the Software Sales space as anywhere between 17% to 31% and average tenure in role for an Account Executive is 18 months.

Training and ramp-up timescales for Account Executives is typically around six months.

This means of course that whenever an Account Executive leaves, as well as the loss of associated income during their notice and subsequent hiring period for their successor – there is also a further six months where they are not generating the expected level of income.

An optimised hiring process should enable you to hire the A Players and ultimately reduce your turnover – to allow you to grow and scale your team quicker, instead of 'fire-fighting' and refilling roles with no growth.

> "The ideal sales formula is different for every company... When the unique strengths of a salesperson align with the company's sales context, it is a beautiful thing. When they do not, it becomes an uphill battle
>
> Mark Roberge,
> The Sales Acceleration Formula

## The right A Player for YOUR business

A thorough and thought-out process will be personalised to your company – ensuring you are recruiting the right person for where you are at in your company journey.

A start-up company needs a very different type of Account Executive to an established player, as the roles themselves are in essence very different and naturally therefore require

a very different type of individual to excel at them. A big mistake is made when a company doesn't recognise this and doesn't tailor accordingly when hiring - there is no 'one size fits all' methodology when it comes to recruitment.

It is very important to recognise that an 'A player Account Executive' in one organisation won't necessarily be an A player elsewhere. Whilst previous experience can be a key indicator of future success, having a robust hiring process will also take into account the fact that every sales organisation is different – to name a few:

- The sales process and methodology
- Volume and value of deals
- Transactional nature versus complexity of the sale
- Sales cycle
- Type and sophistication of the buyer
- Product and stakeholders sold to
- Essential Versus Non-Essential software
- Expectations and compensation model of the business
- Culture and values of the business

It is also important to remember that A players want to be challenged – in their role, but also starting with the interview process. A challenging process will ensure the opportunity is perceived as high value to your candidates – therefore personalising your approach will ensure you are positioning your opportunity accordingly.

## Increased revenue

Hopefully we have demonstrated so far, the importance of hiring the right people to your company.

We have shown the costs of making a bad hire, but of course, on the reverse, if you recruit the right 'A player' Account Executive, this should show positively in your revenue.

SUGGESTED READ

HubSpot

### The Sales Acceleration Formula: Using Data, Technology and Inbound Selling to go from $0 to $100 Million by Mark Roberge

Mark Roberge joined HubSpot when it was a start-up and took it past the $100 million revenue mark. In this book he discusses how he did this, and his first chapters focus on the creation of a 'Sales Hiring Formula'.

The book offers great advice on how to build a thorough hiring process - from someone working in the same industry with proven results.

"To this day I am glad I prioritised sales hiring excellence. Even if I was world-class at sales training, managing, coaching and forecasting, it would not be enough to offset a team of mediocre salespeople. On the other hand, a team of top performers will find a way to win under any circumstances."

## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

**1** The financial cost of a 'bad hire' can be significant from a financial perspective for a company – the cost can be calculated via a useful calculator here.

**2** A company should also consider other impacts of a bad hire – such as the impact on the wider team, client relationships and employer brand.

**3** Creating a robust and through interview process will lead to the right person for where you are at in your company journey.

**4** A thorough process will also reduce the possibility of 'no-hire' which can cause as many financial and internal issues as a bad hire.

# Common issues & errors in an interview process

**We now understand why we should take the time to create an optimal interview process, but where do we start?**

**83% of talent say a negative interview experience can change their mind about a role or company they once liked.**
Source: LinkedIn

> **"World-class sales hiring is the most important driver of sales success**
>
> **Mark Roberge, The Sales Acceleration Formula**

As experienced recruiters, we have seen a number of common mistakes made by clients over the years and have collated a few of the most common pitfalls to avoid below.

**No clearly defined job brief**

Just as you wouldn't start a project without a clear goal in sight, you should never start a recruitment process without fully understanding the role you are recruiting for and its performance objectives.

By documenting a job brief clearly, you can then ensure you are recruiting someone with the technical competencies, behavioural drivers and aligned values needed to perform well in the role.

How can you recruit the right person if you don't have a clearly defined job brief and understand what success looks like in the role? This is important for any role within a business, but particularly quota carrying Account Executive roles where the financial aspect of a bad hire is more costly – and even more important for 'first person on the ground' roles where a team will be built around this key hire.

Whilst the tempting thing is to jump straight into a hiring process, taking time at the start to fully understand what your role entails and therefore what individual you are looking for, will prove worthwhile as you work through your hiring process and beyond.

**We will cover how to build a robust job brief in our next white paper but if you require assistance with this in the meantime please contact us at hello@scalewithstrive.com.**

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## The assessment or process is not fit for purpose

Even if you have a clear idea of the ideal profile you are looking for in a candidate, if your hiring process and assessment methods aren't tightly aligned to the brief, you will still struggle to find that profile.

For any assessment to be fit for purpose it must show both validity and reliability:

### Validity: Refers to the quality of the measurement.

If an assessment has poor validity then it does not measure the job-related content or competencies it ought to.

### Reliability: Refers to the consistency of the measurement in the assessment.

In other words, the repeatability or replicability of the measurement so that when, for example, an assessment is conducted on two occasions, the two sets of results would be the same.

Validity will tell you how good a test will be for a particular situation whereas reliability will tell you how trustworthy a score on that test will be.

When setting up a new hiring assessment / reviewing those already in place, ask yourself:

- Is the assessment fit for purpose?
- Will it do what it is supposed to do?
- Will the organisation get the right candidate as a result?

## The process isn't scalable

If you are looking to recruit your 'first person on the ground', when setting up an assessment process, it is natural to be focused on that one role. What is right for this one role, might not be right however when you move onto recruiting a whole sales team.

Just as when you are setting up a company, it is much easier to create scalable processes from the start, rather than having to keep re-inventing the wheel each time you hire. It will also lead to more consistency in your hiring outcomes and of course, save you time.

As with any process, you should aim to make it as 'lean' as possible whilst still being effective. Whilst the 'Five Lean Principles' originated in manufacturing, there are many lessons that can be learnt for both sales and recruitment processes in order to 'eliminate waste' and ensure your process is timely and continually improving.

**SUGGESTED READ**

### Traction – Get a grip on your business by Gino Wickman

'Traction' discusses the Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS) and how focusing on six key components of your business will help increase scalability and profitability.

Unsurprisingly, one of the six key components is 'People' and another is:

**Process.**

This is the secret ingredient in your organisation. This means "systemising" your business by identifying and documenting the core processes that define the way to run your business.

You'll need to get everyone on the same page with what the essential procedural steps are, and then get everyone to follow them to create consistency and scalability in your organisation.

## Inconsistency across interviewers

> " The ability to make good decisions regarding people represents one of the last reliable sources of competitive advantage, since very few organisations are very good at it "
>
> **Peter Drucker**

Most people aren't very good at assessment and selection, yet paradoxically - most think they are. This is a very common bias, i.e. we all think we're "better than average" and is particularly prevalent within interviews as we all like to think we're good at reading and assessing people and trusting our 'gut instinct'.

Without an effective process and scorecard, hiring panels can be seen to increase rather than alleviate the problem, as each person has their own subjective criteria of what they're looking for from a successful hire – leading to a different perception of what they're looking for and how the candidate should be assessed (questioned) and graded (selected).

It is therefore important that your process offers an objective approach rather than individuals 'trusting their gut'.

It is also important to remember that interviewing is a skill, and that, as with any skill, practice increases performance - and

requesting training and support where required should be seen as a route to improvement, rather than a failure.

## Interviewer bias

The key to a successful interviewing process, is to remain objective throughout the process, fighting the impact of first impressions, biases, intuition, and preconceived notions of success - and to demand evidence before you accept gut feelings.

**According to Willis and Todorov (2006) it takes only 0.1 seconds to make a judgement about a person's competence, likeability etc.**

As a result, it is unfortunately common for the most suitable person not to get the job.

Rather the person with the best interviewing and presentation skills (attractive, affable, articulate and assertive) does. This can be particularly prevalent with salespeople, who are highly skilled at presenting themselves effectively.

Putting your emotions aside and implementing an evidence-based assessment process will help reduce this bias.

Also remember that the interview is there to collect information, not to make a final decision - the decision should be made later in a formal meeting where all the interviewers involved in the process share their collated unbiased information, in order to reach an evidence-based consensus.
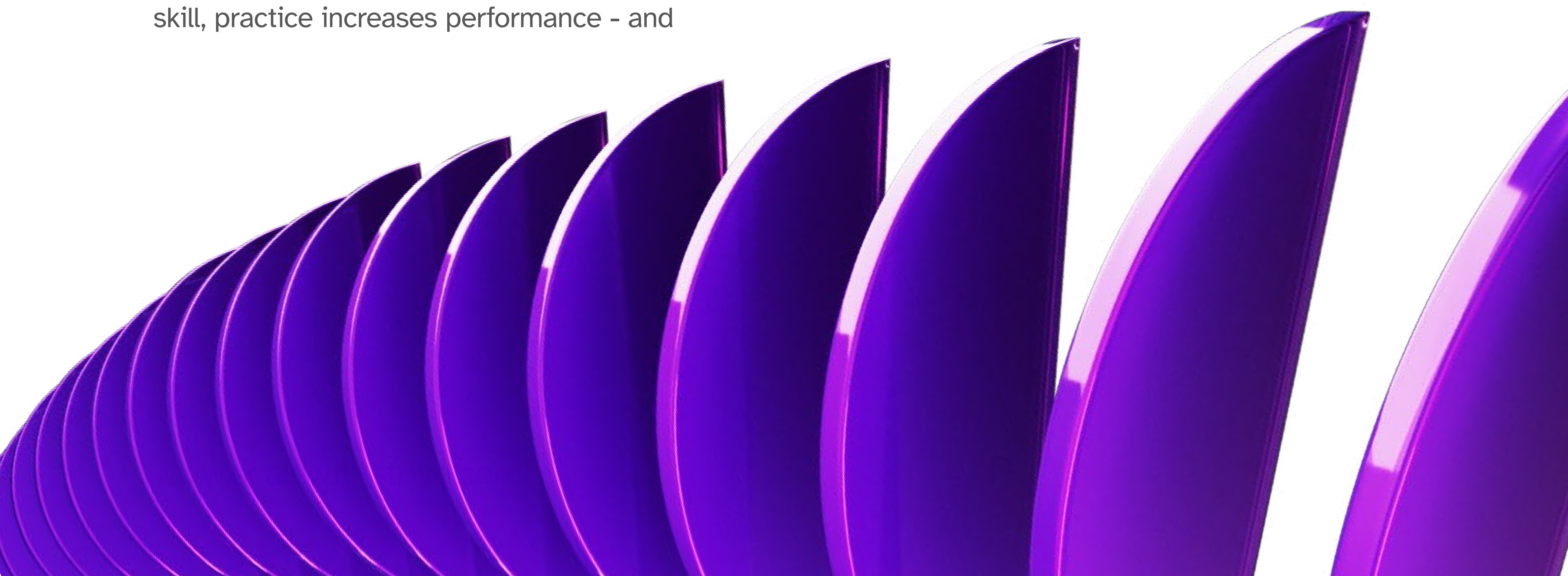
## Interviewer fatigue

Interviewing can be exhausting – especially if you are holding a day of back-to-back interviews.

'Interviewer fatigue' can however cost both the candidate a positive experience and the company the perfect candidate.
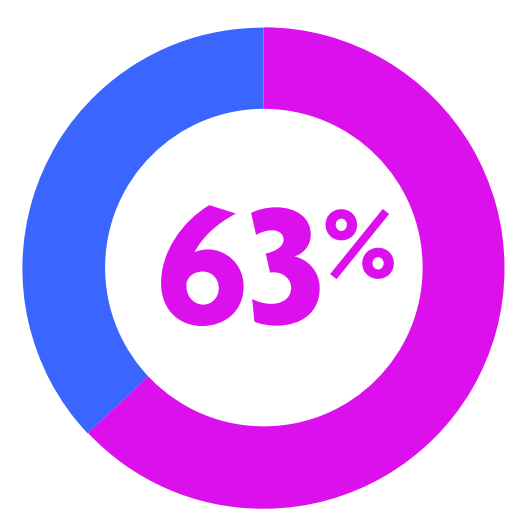
**63%** **of job seekers will likely reject a job offer because of a bad candidate experience.**
Source: Software Advice

As interviewers, if we display a lack of enthusiasm or our tone seems disinterested, the candidate will mirror us, and their answers will ultimately become shorter and less detailed.

Recruiting can be a timely process, and depending on the stage you are at in your company journey, you may not have the luxury of an internal Talent Attraction team - and even if you do, there will still be time commitments placed on Sales Leaders who ultimately still need to be involved in the hiring process, even if only at later stages.

Whilst ensuring you keep your process timely, be realistic about booking in your interview slots to ensure you are able to give your best to every candidate.

Depending on the length of your process, you could also consider use of video screening as a first stage assessment.

At Strive, we use a specialist video platform which allows our candidates to complete 'Solo Interviews'. This is in essence a one-way interview, with our candidates answering questions pre-set by the relevant Client.

This ultimately cuts down hiring time and reduces interviewer fatigue by allowing the candidate to interview without the recruiter having to be present and also allows the client to assess the candidate's 'executive presence' when presenting themselves.

Time pressure has never been felt more by Sales leaders. We all need the best talent in our business, but with so much to juggle, dedicating the time to a proper process is often overlooked.

> **Early hires are an integral part of the growth formula, and the wrong hires at this stage can have a significant impact on Revenue growth trajectory.**
>
> **Utilising video as an early stage assessment tool has not only saved an average of 7.2 hours in a typical hiring process by reducing time spent on unsuitable candidates, but it also gives a significant insight into the personality and individual behind the CV.**
>
> **With seeing a mass migration to video based platforms during the Sales Process, a candidate's ability to present over video is now seen by many SaaS leaders as an integral part of the hiring process and has led to an average of 71% of candidates who pass the video round via our platform receiving an offer of employment.**
>
> **Dougie Loan, Client Services Director, Odro**

## Slow / no follow up with candidates

As we know in the sales industry - time kills deals.

This is no different when recruiting – if your process is too elongated or you are too slow to follow up with your candidates, you will lose your best candidates to competitors who can either move faster, or communicate better and signpost the process and timescales clearly (and stick to them!)

Whilst we appreciate that feedback takes time, consider the time a candidate has put into preparing their application and attending an interview – not giving feedback to all candidates gives them a very poor impression of your company and will impact your all important employer brand.

**An overwhelming 81% of candidates that the one main thing that would greatly improve their overall candidate experience is employers continuously communicating status updates to them.**
Source: CareerBuilder Survey

The longer you make your process by delaying following up with candidates, the longer of course it will take you to fill your role. During the hiring of an Account Executive, as well as increasing the risk of losing candidates, this is also costing the company significant amounts in lost revenue.

## Lack of knowledge about a competitor's employee value proposition

In the sales industry, knowledge of your competitors' product offering, features and benefits and pricing is key, so that you are able to best highlight your product's USPs and ensure you are offering a competitive price point whilst solving your client's issues.

Recruitment is no different. Always know your competition.

Interviews are a two-way process – whilst you are assessing your candidate, they are assessing you equally to understand if your company is the right fit for them. Ultimately when recruiting A Player Account Executives, they can be picky as they know they are in demand!

Do not assume every candidate will automatically want to join your company – how can you position and sell yourself and the company?

Remember also, that of course whilst salary, OTE and overall monetary package is hugely important to top salespeople (and it certainly should be!), don't lose sight of the 'other things' that make up your Employee Value Proposition – including things such as career progression, working environment, a supportive manager, working with other A players etc.

Ensure you understand the features and benefits of your competitors – what is their hiring process, what are their targets, how does their commission structure stack up? How many times out of 10 do you win or lose against your competition when pitching to a candidate?

Ensure that you can clearly articulate your USPs. Understand what is important to a potential candidate and how you can position yourselves as an employer of choice.

### Not asking for help

No-one can be an expert at everything. And even if by some chance you are – you certainly don't have the time to do everything!

As with any problem or situation that is not within our specialised skillset, asking for help / looking for a supplier should be considered – especially where demonstrable ROI can be achieved.

Partnering with a specialist Software Sales recruitment partner such as Strive, gives you an expertise that you may not have internally in your company so far. It can ensure you can maintain focus in your speciality areas, whilst having the reassurance that you have specialist support in attracting and securing those A Player Account Executives.

Too often, clients come to us who have spent months trying to fill a role – with our average time to hire of 5 weeks, we can support a client in not just filling a role quickly, but filling it with an A Player.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

1 A company should be aware of common pitfalls when creating or modifying their interview and assessment process.

2 The best companies will ensure they are aware of their competitor's Employer Value Propositions and understand how to sell themselves to A Player candidates.

3 Creating a scalable and lean process will support a company's growth and create an excellent candidate experience.

4 Recruitment, like all things, is a skill and seeking external support should be considered, especially where demonstrable ROI can be achieved.

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# Bias in the interview process

**A common issue we uncovered in an interview process was interviewer bias – in this section we will explore that further and understand what biases are likely to occur and what actions we can undertake in order to minimise their impact on our hiring decisions.**

## Tip:

**As well as being aware of bias in your interview process, you should ensure you are familiar with Discrimination laws in place in your country.**

**For members of the EU, this means that a person cannot be discriminated against on the grounds of a Protected Characteristic – namely: Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation.**

**Please reach out to Strive if you would like a copy of our training slides on Protected Characteristics.**

A key thing to point out is that Unconscious Bias is entirely separate to a conscious discriminatory decision, and it is key that you are aware of the governing rules in the country you are hiring in to ensure you are not breaking legislation.

Many hiring decisions are overly influenced by unconscious biases developed early on in the process – often in the first few minutes. Different people are more susceptible to some than others, but ultimately all people are susceptible to biases of some kind.

The more aware you are of the different forms of bias, and self-aware of your own 'optics' and natural biases, the more effective you can be at identifying, labelling, and managing them internally. This is essential for effective assessment & selection.

Removing as much bias in your process is of course completely the correct thing to do – but we will also cover off later in this section, the commercial benefits to your company too. Ultimately as well as the right thing to do, it is also better for your business.

### Unconscious / implicit biases

These are underlying attitudes and stereotypes that people unconsciously attribute to another person or group of people that affect how they understand and engage with a person or group. Experts have identified over 100 cognitive biases that shape how the human mind thinks.

Some common examples of this are:

### Halo and Horns bias

First identified by Edwards Thorndike in the 1920s, he showed that we tend to form positive impressions of a person in one area and allow this to influence how we feel about them in other areas.

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In a hiring process, this could lead to a hiring manager favouring a candidate because they went to the same school, support the same sports team, are from the same town etc. This commonality can also lead to the hiring manager and interviewee having more to talk about – leading the hiring manager to feel the interview went more favourably.

On the reverse, Horns Bias refers to when we allow a negative impression in one area to influence all our viewpoints on a person.

**Primary and recency bias**

This leads to us focusing more on the first and last pieces of information we see, meaning the information in the middle is harder to recall.

In a recruitment scenario this can lead to the first or last candidates being favoured as we remember more about them.

# Industry Example:

**Ben Horowitz gives a very relevant example of bias in the hiring process, in his book "The Hard Thing About Hard Things".**

He spoke about the challenges in hiring a VP of Sales when he was the CEO of Opsware. After interviewing around 24 candidates, he had not found anyone with the strengths he sought.

Then Ben interviewed Mark Cranney.

Mark did not have the stereotype of a hard-charging sales executive. He was not tall and he went to a school that Ben never heard of — Southern Utah University. Mark also made people feel uncomfortable. However, after Ben spent more time with Mark, he is convinced that he was the one. Mark is knowledgeable about sales. He knew more about the deals that Ben's sales team was working on and the deals that Ben didn't even know about.

But every member of the executive staff (with one exception) and every member of the board of directors were against hiring Mark Cranney. As the company was fighting for survival, Ben needed someone like Mark to motivate the sales team. To make the hire, Ben needs to get Marc Andreessen's buy-in, as Marc is a co-founder and chairman of the board. Marc's opinion carries a lot of weight and he was still not comfortable with Cranney. After hearing Marc's feedback, here is what Ben said to him.

> " I agree with every single one of those issues. However, Mark Cranney is a sales savant. He has mastered sales to a level that far exceeds anybody that I have ever known. If he didn't have the things wrong with him that you enumerated, he wouldn't be willing to join a company that just traded at thirty-five cents per share; he'd be CEO of IBM. "

Marc's response - "Got it. Let's hire him!"

**Mark Cranney went on to drive the growth of Opsware to $150 million in sales and its sale to HP for $1.6 billion.**

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# Other common biases are:

## Similarity Attraction Bias

The similarity-attraction effect refers to the widespread tendency of people to be attracted to others who are similar to themselves in important respects.

Attraction in this instance, does not always mean physical attraction but, rather, liking for or wanting to be around the person.

## Affinity Bias

Affinity bias is the unconscious tendency to get along with others who are like us.

It is easy to socialise and spend time with others who are not different. It requires more effort to bridge differences when diversity is present.

## Beauty Bias

Broadly speaking, the beauty bias concerns the favourable treatment that individuals receive when they are deemed more attractive, regardless of whether this happens consciously or unconsciously.

## Cultural Bias

Cultural bias is related to interpreting and judging situations / others by standards inherent to your own culture.

## Confirmation Bias

Confirmation bias is the tendency to search for, interpret, favour, and recall information in a way that confirms or supports one's prior beliefs or values.

An example would be where an interviewer makes a quick decision about a candidate and then spends the rest of the interview collecting facts to support their initial opinion.

## Affects Heuristics

Heuristics are mental shortcuts we use to make problem-solving and decision-making easier.

One type of heuristic is the Affects Heuristic, which specifically refers to how we can rely on our emotions when making decisions, which allows us to reach a conclusion quickly and without much effortful thought.

**SUGGESTED READ**

### Thinking, Fast and Slow
### by Daniel Kahneman

Kahneman is a Noble Prize winner and this book offers some great insight on how the brain misleads you (due to evolutionary reasons) and how to manage accordingly.

The answer lies in the two ways we make choices: fast, intuitive thinking, and slow, rational thinking. This book reveals how our minds are tripped up by error and prejudice (even when we think we are being logical), and gives practical techniques for slower, smarter thinking.

# If we are now more aware of the potential bias in our process / within ourselves, why should we consider removing it?

As well as the legal implications discussed earlier:

## You could miss out on the best candidate for the role

By treating a candidate more favourably than another due to a bias, you could risk not hiring the right person for the role in question.

## You could hinder innovation and creativity within your company

This would be particularly relevant under bias such as Halo, Affinity and Similarity – i.e. where we are only hiring people who have the same opinions, views and background as those hiring.

This lack of diversification in opinion and beliefs can mean that no new ideas / no new ways of thinking are brought to the table and could stifle growth as a result.

Having a variety of different perspectives on an issue or situation will lead to faster problem solving and better decision making. This ultimately leads to increased profits.

## Company reputation

If your company becomes known for only recruiting a certain profile, it will automatically stop good candidates who do not fit this profile from applying. By limiting the number of people who want to work for you, you are of course limiting the ultimate success of your hiring process.

So how can you now move on and try to reduce the effects of bias in the process?

## Assess yourself

Bias is built into almost everything we do, but we don't see it until we look for it. If you are involved in the interview process in your company, assess yourself and recognise these ingrained opinions so that you can work on them.

This is of course a difficult task if simply 'self-reflecting' – the building of a scientific methodology in your recruitment processes will ultimately draw out any unconscious biases that you were not previously aware of. Considering the use of tandem interviewing will also assist this.

## Clearly define your job brief and build an evidence-based scorecard

We have discussed the importance of having a clearly defined job brief previously, but another benefit is to help remove bias from your process. By clearly defining the skills, attributes and experience required for someone to successfully do the role you are recruiting for, you are able to create a corresponding candidate scorecard to ensure you are only assessing against these core areas.

**We will explore the creation of both a job brief and a candidate scorecard in our next white paper.**
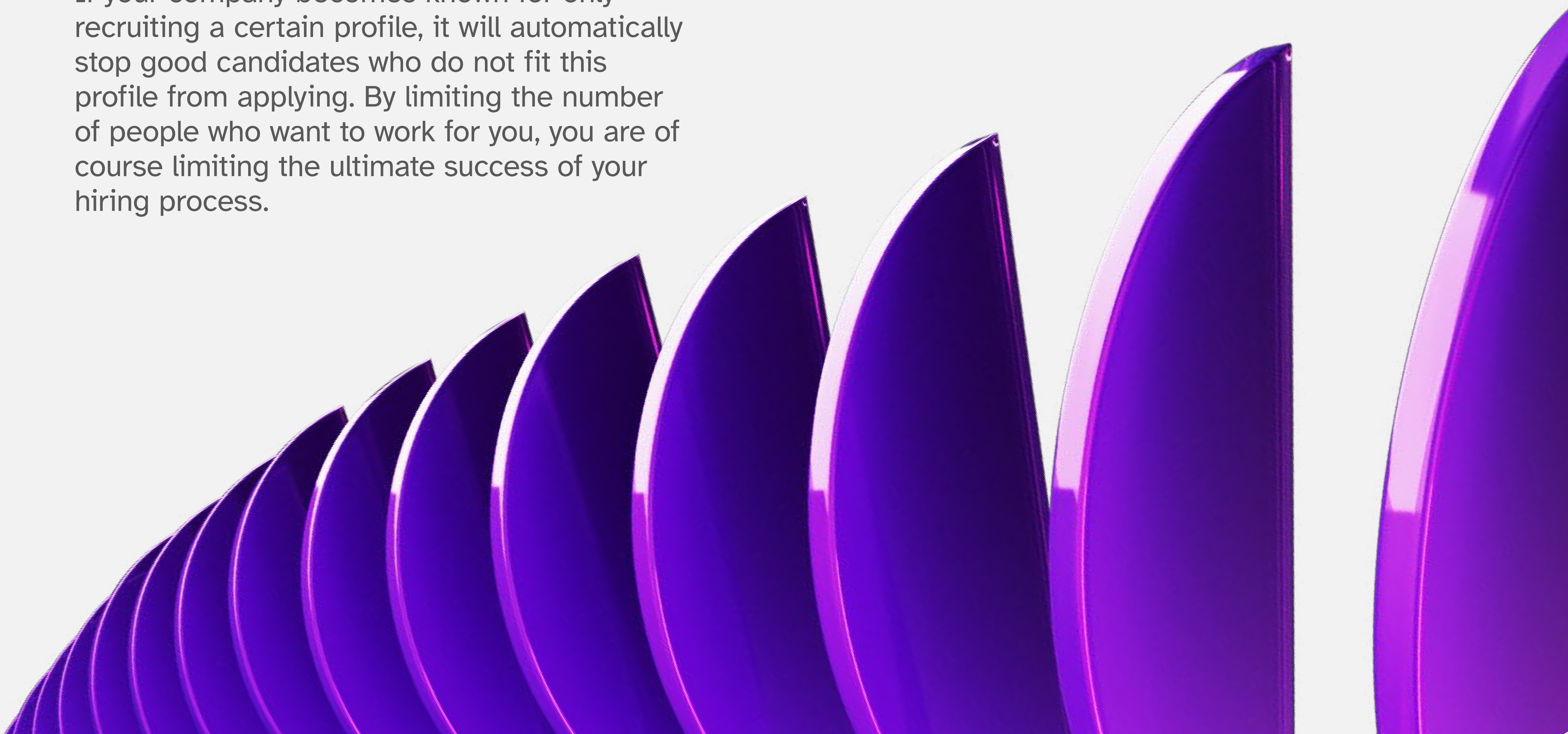
## Use objective information such as psychometric assessments

We are slowly starting to see an increased use of psychological assessments in recruitment processes – and are something we use ourselves for our own internal recruitment. The term 'psychometric' is from the Greek words for mental and measurement.

### These types of tests will explore a candidate's:

- Capabilities
- Aptitude for the role
- Personality fit for the organisation

Assessments are more objective and impersonal, allowing candidates to be compared in ability terms without a concern for unconscious bias. They are also proven to be reliable indicators of future job performance.

At Strive, we use the Thomas International platform for assessments and also work with a Psychometric testing expert, both for our own internal recruitment, as well as offering this service to our Clients under our Focus Solution model. Tests that we are able to provide include Personality Profiling, Emotional Intelligence and General Intelligence.

"Including psychometric assessments as part of the recruitment process brings rigour and objectivity to the procedure, helping businesses more accurately match the right candidates for the roles they need to fill.

Assessments will also be blind to demographics, such as race, gender, age, religious affiliations etc… so negating any bias that could creep into the procedure.

In turn this can lead to a more diverse workplace with an increased behavioural and culture fit and lead to an environment where employees will feel respected and engaged."

**Saul Corrigan**
**Saul C Consultancy**

Saul Corrigan has over 10 years of experience in this field, providing support to organisations throughout the employee lifecycle from recruitment through to the management, development and retention of their people. He previously worked as an Account Director for Thomas International, who are a market leader in providing psychometric testing. Thomas International work across 60 countries, supporting over 50 different languages and have seen their clients use their psychometric profiling solutions for over 23 million tests worldwide.

## Hire external support

If you worry about bias being an issue within your company's hiring process, consider the use of an external recruitment agency, who will be trained in both the legalities and how to avoid common bias issues in their process – so you can be assured you are being sent the best candidates for your position, rather than a reduced funnel of candidates that you may feel you are seeing currently.

**SUGGESTED LISTEN**

**Episode 13 of the Digital HR Leaders with David Green Podcast,** is an interview with Frida Polli, CEO at Pymetrics and covers 'How AI and Behavioural Science can Reduce Bias in Recruiting'

**The podcast can be found here.**

## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

**1** A company should always be aware of the discrimination laws for the country they are hiring in. Please reach out to us at Strive if you would like a copy of our training slides around this.

**2** All those involved in the hiring process should be aware of the different types of bias (conscious and unconscious) and how they might be affecting their interview style and decision making

**3** All those involved in the hiring process should be aware of the different types of bias (conscious and unconscious) and how they might be affecting their interview style and decision making

**4** Whilst it is impossible to reduce all unconscious bias in an interview process, we can eliminate as much as possible by adding more objective and robust testing to the process.

# How to attract the right person to your role

**We have now explored why we need an optimised interview process. We have explored the common mistakes that companies make in their process. And, finally, we have discussed the types of unconscious bias that all humans are susceptible to and how we can try to manage these during a hiring process.**

So, in short, we are working towards a process that will ensure the very best person is recruited. We will dig deeper on creating the job brief, candidate scorecard and full process in our next white paper.

However - we have not yet covered one key area – how do we ensure we are attracting the right people to our role? We can have the best recruitment process, but if are not able to attract the right candidate to start with, no matter how good our process is, we are not going to make the best hire.

Attracting the right candidate to your role is absolutely key for a successful hire – so how can you open up your talent pool in order to ensure that you are recruiting the best person

there is for the role, not just the best person you happen to interview?

## Passive candidates

We all know that the best candidates are not always the ones actively looking for a role – due to their reputation in the market, A Players do not typically need to apply to roles.

So how can you start to contact more of these passive candidates?

LinkedIn is a great tool for completing searches, connecting and making contact with A Players who you think could be a good fit for your role.

## Tip:

**LinkedIn is a great tool for searching for passive candidates and making an approach.**

**By using a Boolean search, you can narrow down your search to a more targeted list – more information on how to do this can be found here.**

**Referrals** – Consider the use of an internal referral scheme or speaking to your own network to understand who the top players are in the market and how you can get a warm introduction to them.

**External Support** – Approaching passive candidates is of course more timely a process and if you are at the earlier stages in your journey and looking for that all important 'first person on the ground', whilst appreciating how important this approach is, you might simply not have the time and resource to do this.

At Strive, we approach only the top tier of Enterprise Account Executives using innovative attraction tools, meaning we can access more of these A Players – to ensure our Clients receive the best talent in the market and ultimately save their resource also.

**Employer brand**

We have discussed the importance of your Employer Brand numerous times already, but that is because it is so important!

**75% of candidates will research a company's reputation before applying for a job opening.** Source: LinkedIn

**75% of Americans would not take a job with a company that had a bad reputation, even if they were unemployed.** Source: Corporate Responsibility Magazine

At any point of your journey, but especially when you are a smaller company looking for your first Account Executives and Sales Leaders, it is important you are seen as a diverse and forward-thinking employer.

# Industry Example:

**HubSpot's Mark Roberge shared the following approach:**

> " **I call this the referral. When a new rep has been in the role for three to six months, I tell them tomorrow we are going to sit together for twenty minutes. And that tonight, I'm going to go through all their LinkedIn connections and find people that are early on in their careers and at good companies. I'll build a list that we're going to go through together.** "

At the meeting, Mark will show up with a list of names to review with his reps. He shared that,

upon seeing the list of names, his reps would exclaim, "Why didn't I think of those people?"

Your reps have a perspective that you can't get from LinkedIn or a resume. That inside scoop can separate "That candidate would be awesome!" from "Let's not go there with this person, as he is a bit of a nightmare."

Either way you walk out with intel you couldn't gain otherwise. The value is in the employee referral, but the referral meeting is what primes the pump.

Take action to get the most from your employees' networks. Prompting referrals – I prefer that over calling them forced – may just become your best source of candidates.

**This example is taken from "The Sales Development Playbook: Build Repeatable Pipeline and Accelerate Growth with Inside Sales" by Trish Bertuzzi**

## Job adverts

Our experience shows that most job adverts are very one-sided, meaning they talk almost exclusively about how great the company thinks they are and what the company wants, including a checklist of all the skills and attributes that the candidate must have to even consider applying – many of which aren't actually necessary. **We call this 'top-down' language**

The job adverts that perform the best are those that speak directly and explicitly to the self-interests of the target candidates – in the same way that all the best B2B and B2C marketing messages do. **We call this using 'bottom-up' language.**

Whilst of course informing the reader about your company and the job is key, the job advert isn't the best place (or time) to do that.

If the job advert carries your company's name and/or appears on your own website, the reader is only a couple of clicks away from getting this information for themselves - once they've read the advert and decided it's a career move they might be interested in making.

A tip that we use at Strive is to write the advert in a way that speaks to the key motivations of the type of person we're trying to attract. This means us putting ourselves in their shoes and reviewing every sentence and asking ourselves:

> » **So what?**
>
> » **Who cares?**
>
> » **Which means what?**

If a sentence cannot answer these questions, it is removed or reframed accordingly. We also ask questions in our adverts to evoke an emotional response – especially near the start of the job advert - with questions such as:

> » **How would you feel...?**
>
> » **Would you like...?**
>
> » **Have you ever wondered...?**
>
> » **Still not getting what you want from...?**

Another consideration for a successful advert, as well as the structure, are the actual words themselves.

The words you choose to put in your advert can have a powerful impact on the people that apply for your job.

Using pro-diversity language will generate a wider range of applications.

Words like 'ninja' and 'rockstar' are very commonly used when recruiting for Enterprise Account Executives, but according to a variety of studies, they also tend to prevent women applying for roles.

Excessive use of 'dog words' can also be a turn off for potential applicants.

Ask yourself, how many times do you see 'market leading' or 'fastest growing' written in a job advert?

Phrases like this are used so frequently, they have no impact. We advise against this kind of content.

Instead focusing on quantifying the quality. For example, rather than saying 'fastest growing', show how you have grown Year on Year – giving examples of financials, funding rounds, staff growth etc.

**Mitch Sullivan** is probably the UK's foremost expert on job advertising. Here's what he has to say on the subject:

> **If a job advert doesn't quickly start to answer the question 'How might this job make my life more professionally rewarding?' then it's not only going to not attract enough qualified candidates, it's probably not even going to be read past the first one or two sentences. It may be skim read at best.**
>
> **This is particularly true for those jobs where there aren't lots of potential candidates who are actively looking.**
>
> **Studies have shown that around 60% of all job board traffic comes from people who are looking to improve their situation in some way, so it's illogical to expect these people to respond to job ads that don't tell them how they'd be better off.**
>
> **Most skilled people's primary motivations for changing jobs are things like training, learning, bigger challenge, more influence, greater autonomy and flexible working.**

In short, we believe adverts need to be about the customer / candidate, not the company – and that this should be especially true of job adverts given how important changing jobs is to most people.

Some examples of how Strive attracts the very best passive candidates using creative writing techniques can be found **here**.

> ## Tip:
>
> **Textio is an online platform which (amongst other things) uses machine learning and language analysis to analyse job postings.**
>
> **According to them, there are more than 25,000 "problem phrases" that indicate a gender bias in job adverts!**
>
> **Try running one of your adverts through here and see whether you're using any of them.**

### Advertise in the right place

As we have mentioned before, you can have the best process or product in the market, but if no-one knows, you will still not be successful.

The same applies to your role – it might be the most exciting opportunity in the market currently (with an amazing advert to match!), but if no-one knows about it, you will not attract candidates. Most company websites now have some form of job board capabilities, and there is of course a multitude of job boards readily available to advertise on.

LinkedIn is of course a great tool for recruitment and a search on any day for Enterprise Account Executives will always bring up a number of results. Ultimately however, if you are using the same sources each time – and the same sources as your competitors, you are always 'fishing in the same pool' and the supply of A Player Account Executives will ultimately dry up.

**Consider the below:**

Ensure all your jobs are optimised for Google For Jobs to increase the likelihood of them being found via a Google search, opening your network up further.

As mentioned previously, ask for Referrals from your network / ensure your company has an attractive referral scheme in place. A phrase we frequently use at Strive is **"The best sales people know the best sales people."**

Tap into this network and open up a wider pool of A players. Optimise your Social Media platforms as a recruitment tool. Some of our clients have completely separate social media pages for recruitment, some combine with their standard pages. Either way, do not miss this opportunity to attract more candidates.
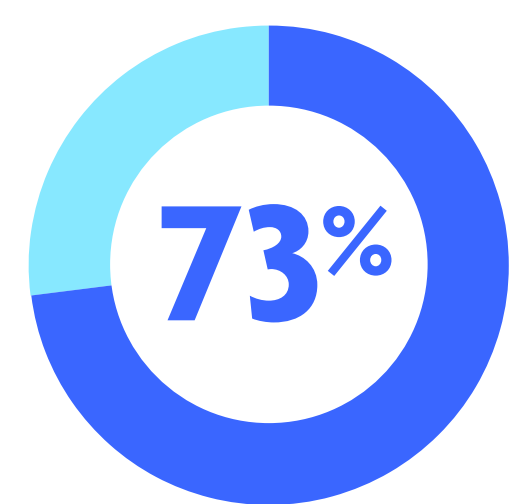
**73%** **of millennials found their last position through a social media site.**
Source: Aberdeen Group

**Nearly half of all professionals (49%) are following companies on social media with the intent to stay aware of their jobs.**
Source: LinkedIn

**Application process**

Now you have successfully obtained someone's interest in your role, ensure your application process does not deter them from applying!

Whilst having some 'barriers to entry' is key to ensure the opportunity is seen as high value this should be balanced out with the level of administration you expect your applicants to do.
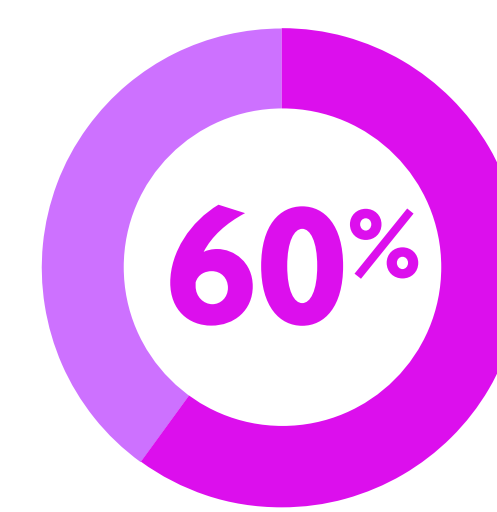
**60%** **of job seekers quit in the middle of filling out online job applications because of their length or complexity.**
Source: CareerBuilder

Review your current application process – is a lengthy process putting people off even applying to your role, therefore restricting the number of people applying?

If you currently expect an application form to be completed, could this be reduced to a request for a CV?

If you currently request a CV, could the option of an initial exploratory call be considered first?

# KEY TAKEAWAYS:

**1** Passive candidates are often the best candidates – especially for a 'first person on the ground' role – review how you can present your opportunity to more of these A Players.

**2** A well written job advert is key to attracting the best applicants to your company – consider how your current adverts appeal to the A Players and consider reviewing them.

**3** Ensure your adverts will attract a diverse range of applicants, and that the language used is not deterring any particular gender or ethnicity from applying.

**4** Where you advertise is as important as what you say – consider where you currently advertise and where else you can do so in order to increase the applications to your role.

# Contact Us



**Adam Richardson** is a Co-Founder and Director of Strive. An experienced Recruiter, he has over 12 years' experience in sales and recruitment - 8 years of which have been spent running his own companies from start-up stage through to multi-million turnover.

Founded in 2017, Strive is a specialist go-to-market talent partner whose network spans the globe.

With offices in the UK and US and a headcount of 30, Strive has the size to offer talent acquisition services at scale, whilst also the capability to deliver on strategic hires.

Working with leading VC's, Strive has helped scale their portfolio of B2B SaaS companies, placing key hires within the go-to-market function.

**Scaling go-to-market teams for the world's leading, VC-backed SaaS companies.**

## Adam Richardson
Co-Founder and Director

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**Book a Call**

Powering Hypergrowth™