



Hiring Database Marketers Is Tricky

December 04, 2000

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Continued strong demand and a shortage of experienced applicants are giving senior-level database marketers more job choices than ever. One senior candidate I recently worked with received six offers in two weeks. Even he was amazed.

No wonder it is difficult to find the right candidate when you consider the challenges employers face:

- Finding a senior-level database marketer with 10 to 12 years of hands-on experience is similar to finding someone who has spent years repairing DVD players: The number of applicants with deep experience has been limited by technological realities.

Successful database marketing relies on a robust, quality-controlled database containing easy-to-access historical data, rapid turnaround, statistical modeling and scoring capabilities. Only recently has this been within the technological reach of many organizations. Even with advances in technology, successful database marketing requires a long-term commitment.

- There is often a disconnect between what an organization expects database marketers to do and their actual skill sets. There is no standard definition of database marketing's responsibilities.
- The term "database marketing" is now used interchangeably with a plethora of other names and processes, including customer relationship marketing, strategic direct marketing, data mining, one-to-one marketing, decision support and knowledge-driven marketing. It becomes a challenge for employers to find the right candidate when they come from backgrounds that describe similar-sounding but entirely different processes.

The term also is something of an oxymoron. There's "database" and there's "marketing," and usually applicants have a preference for one or the other. Database marketing requires interest and expertise in both of these areas.

- Employers looking for applicants with detailed knowledge of specific software packages, database structures and quantitative techniques are often disappointed. Practitioners are simply unable to keep abreast because of the sheer speed of technological innovation.
- Database marketing is rapidly evolving. New processes, techniques and languages may be leaving many database marketers behind. It takes continual improvement in skills, training and business knowledge for database marketing to reach its true potential.
- Candidates who look good on paper do not always come through in person. It takes more than technological and marketing prowess to succeed as a database marketer. Leadership ability, excellent verbal skills, a strong strategic vision and intuition are just as important.

What core competencies should a company look for when hiring a database marketer? Four important skills stand out:

Communication skills. Database marketers are the conduit between marketing and systems. They work directly with marketing to discuss, advise, provide reports, develop requirements and shape campaigns. They also must work closely with information technology to translate specs, access systems, conduct analyses, pull lists, do acceptance testing and map business processes. This takes the ability to translate detailed business requirements into systems lingo and the ability to translate complicated systems concepts into simple English.

Logic skills. To make marketing decisions, database marketers must access systems, and to access systems they must run queries. To do that, database marketers must have the ability to think logically. Whether it's easy-to-use software or a sophisticated computer language, the ability to use systems tools to reason through a query is paramount to a database marketer's success.

Balancing skills. Database marketers are the conduit between marketing and management information systems. They have to understand the business needs of the marketing client and, at the same time; work with information systems to bring business solutions to the table. A database marketer's work is defined by how he leverages and acts upon information, and he must be approachable by both marketers and IT.

Leadership skills. Database marketers must have the leadership ability to get others to see their vision. They must have the vision of what customers should see in your company, and then form a working team involving all of the customer touch points. They mobilize the resources to implement that vision.

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