



Skill shortages are evident. Companies will need to adopt different tactics to attain and retain talent. John Burbidge discovers that 'at the coalface', recruitment agencies are adapting too as the resourcing market becomes more candidate-led

Serocor: Wide-ranging support for successful recruitment

SOLENT 250 SPOTLIGHT

Solent 250 No.15: Serocor Group

Scale: Growing. £76 million sales in 2012, currently c £120m

HQ: Havant

Offices: London, Bournemouth, Aberdeen

Staff: 205

Scope: Specialist recruitment support group of niche companies

Founded: 1996, as ARM (Advanced Resource Managers); Serocor Group formed 2013.

Your recruitment business has survived the recession well. It's leaner, more efficient, and making healthy year-on-year profits. What do you do? Carry on doing the same, surely? Well, not if you are in the Serocor boardroom. Instead, you dive into a bold company restructuring strategy and adopt a different business model.

"We realised it was challenging and a risk, but it was bigger than we expected. In hindsight we tried to transform too quickly. It was a bit like trying to change the tyres on a moving car," explained Mike Gawthorne, the CEO of Serocor* Group.

"It's been an extremely difficult two years. We made a strategic decision to take the hit to our P&L, but we are now better set for growth than ever before."

So, why did Gawthorne and his boardroom team of industry-proven directors make the radical move from a successful UK technical recruitment business to a specialist technology and engineering-focused human capital management group, involving several complementary recruitment-linked companies?

The short answer is because Serocor recognised the recruitment world was changing and wanted to survive the challenges, grasp the opportunities of the evolving market.

Diversifying with separate branded entities, actually de-risked Group income, and importantly allowed individual management teams and succession planning to develop, releasing

Gawthorne and his experienced board colleagues to forward-think strategically, and become consultant advisers to corporates and mentors to fledgling recruitment companies.

New niche companies have been established within the Group: Bournemouth-based **Bloc** a digital and IT talent specialist recruiter; **Hawker Chase Executive**, providing specialist executive appointments in the defence, security, cyber, and engineering sectors; and **Optamor**, providing blended talent solutions for growth and performance improvement.

Specialist technical recruitment consultancy **ARM** remains the largest Group income provider, but Gawthorne is confident of growth within Optamor – "A hugely energetic market. We have 10 major clients now but will have 30 within three years". Digital and IT recruitment, not least for cyber security, is becoming high priority, says Gawthorne, and significant demand is being experienced across the group.

Additionally, **Serocor Solutions** has been established, which provides centralised back-office services such as legal, compliance, marketing, finance, IT, HR and project management, allowing entrepreneurial recruiters to focus on growing their businesses.

Serocor is enhancing its London operations. Clients and the Internet's scope are leading the company towards greater international recruitment activity. Partnerships with European recruitment specialists are on the Serocor agenda.

Soon, Serocor Group will add another complementary operation – as yet unnamed, but "focused on talent attraction for the digital age".

Why? Because digital age employees have a different mindset. Millennials care less about hierarchic promotional structures and single-company careers, preferring sociable transient workstyles, serving 2-3 years with several different but interesting companies, while becoming 'well-rounded, multi-skilled' individuals.

Social media, virtual job boards and peer grouping such as LinkedIn have also become alternative and viable recruitment channels. Markets are becoming candidate-led rather than client-led.

Hence, attraction, retention and employee engagement solutions have become key components of the recruitment services being offered by modern human capital management companies, such as Serocor.

Unsurprisingly, Serocor has engendered that employee engagement within its Group companies – each with a similar corporate focus on 'professionalism, partnership, passion' but with differing cultures and flexible workstyles to suit their needs.

For instance, the 12,500 sq ft open-plan Serocor office at Langstone Technology Park has gym facilities and chillax areas. Individual work performance is recognised by trophies and rewards, and Serocor actively supports staff charity fundraising and volunteering.

The Serocor Group also has a management equity philosophy. It not only invests in its constituent companies, but has an established Enterprise Management Incentive Scheme.

In many ways, the Serocor Group business model today resembles that of a PE house offering financial investment, board-level input, experienced business advice and outsourced support, partnership opportunities and international links – without the time and payback constraints. That's some change.

Advice from Gawthorne

- Be wise in decision-making, bold in action.
- Appoint the right people, empower and support them.
- Be flexible, understanding, and stay close to your people – your biggest asset.
- Make your business attractive and interesting for employees and clients.
- Ensure employees know their job and worth within the business.

*Serocor derivation:

Sero – Sow, seed, plant, grow.

Cor – Heart, mind, judgement.

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