



people power

Simon King polishes up his interview technique for an encounter with the headhunters

There is a shortage of quality people in the industry, according to recruitment firm Premier Prospects. Founded in 1996 by John Burrow (on the left in our picture, right), who had previously held senior management roles at Boots, Currys and the London Electricity Board, it headhunts sales and marketing personnel for brands and is reportedly busier than ever.

Premier Prospects is described by Mr Burrow as "the only specialist electrical headhunters in the UK".

He said: "There are 15,000 recruitment agencies in the UK and they are very much like estate agents – they have a terrible reputation.

"Around 98 per cent of all our business is from recommendations."

Earlier this year, Mr Burrow signed up Robin Sawyer (on right in picture), the former managing director of De'Longhi, to become Premier Prospects business development director.

Mr Sawyer said: "Our business is getting busier and busier. More and more companies are now using headhunters rather than advertising, because they can't afford the time and they want to get the right person."

Mr Sawyer said that usually the recruitment industry is quiet in the run-up to Christmas, while companies prepare for a peak in the spring.

However, this year, things have changed. Mr Sawyer said: "We have more jobs on our books at the moment than we have had for a couple of years at this time of year and I think this is borne out



■ ■ Companies want people who can hit the road running. We know the electrical market inside out. ■ ■

because of the tough economy, while the industry as a whole is struggling."

Mr Burrow said: "When I set up the business, everyone said to me that there was no way I could make a living just specialising in the electrical industry, but we are so busy.

"And all we do is specialise in any positions from sales representatives and demonstrators up to managing directors."

Mr Sawyer described Premier Prospects as "one of the best kept secrets in the industry".

He added: "We are very low-key. A lot of people in the industry would be surprised how many people we place.

"Over the years, we have placed some of the most senior managers in the

industry, including a chief executive at a major domestic appliance company and a chief executive at a small domestic appliances company."

Traditionally, Premier Prospects has served the major domestic appliances and small domestic appliance brands, but Mr Burrow said that it is looking to expand into the consumer electronics and housewares companies.

He said: "We know the electrical market inside out and people tend to use us because we know the industry and we are very quick.

"Most companies want people who can hit the road running. What they want is someone who is working for their competitor, but they don't want candidates with the three Us as we call

it – the unemployed, the unhappy and the unqualified."

Premier Prospects guarantees that once it has been given a brief, it can come up with suitable people within 14 days.

Mr Burrow employs a team of three researchers who are charged with finding the "movers and shakers" in the industry.

Mr Burrow, however, was keen to point out that employers are paying too much money for staff.

He explained: "They are not taking advice from people like us. By upping salaries to enormous figures – which is good news for the staff – they are setting unnecessary wage inflation."

However, Mr Sawyer claims that the industry is not in the best of shape.

He explained: "There were brands in the past that had field sales forces and your career progression was mapped out by promotion within and it was easy.

"Today, because sales forces are smaller, brands invariably want people who already have the contacts."

According to Mr Burrow, Premier Prospects has an average success rate of 70 per cent, while the average success rate for more general recruitment companies is around 40 per cent.

On successful placement, Premier Prospects works on a fee of 20 per cent of the first year's salary.

Mr Sawyer predicts that Premier Prospects will be even busier in 2008.

He said: "This is partly due to uncertainty in the market, but also our reputation in the market is growing – and we have just picked up a major white goods company." ■