

Talent ATTRACT

In 2014, **Abunayyan Holding**, a leading KSA-based solutions provider in the power and water sectors, launched an initiative to attract Saudi talent across all its businesses. This led to the complete turnaround of the company's recruitment function. **Saeed Al Mabrouk**, the company's head of strategic human resources development, tells **Guy Rickett**, CEO of **Cazar**, how they tackled this strategic project.

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Taking a new approach to recruit gifted candidates



➔ Headquartered in Riyadh, Abunayyan Holding is one of the longest-active companies in the power and water business. More than 60 years ago, when Saudi farmers irrigated their lands using camels and other livestock to extract water from wells, Abdullah R. Abunayyan introduced the first ever diesel-powered turbine pump to his country, forever changing the way agriculture is practised in Saudi Arabia.

Today, it has more than 5,000 employees spread across subsidiaries throughout the Kingdom, the Middle East and North Africa.

What were the main challenges you faced when it came to attracting top talent?

Attracting the best candidates is problematic for most organisations in Saudi Arabia. In Abunayyan Holding's case, we had three main challenges.

1 TECHNICAL TALENT

Lack of technical talent made it hard for us to fill specialist posts. Even during high unemployment, technical and technology-driven companies in our group found a shortage of staff with the training and competencies to perform in niche jobs. To overcome this, we plan to collaborate with colleges and universities in the development of courses and training programmes to help us fill roles focusing on fresh graduates (Saudi nationals).

2 GOOD CULTURAL FIT

Human resources plays an active role in the development of an organisational culture. Increased diversity contributes to the challenge of building a cohesive culture. While people from different backgrounds bring fresh ideas and perspectives, differences also contribute to the prevalence of conflict.

Cultural variance in values and rituals affects the abilities of employees to find commonality, which is important in communication. So having a strong culture that attracts the right people and brings them together is essential. This is especially true when it comes to Saudi talent – more specifically the youth. This generation relies a lot on technology and branding, so our challenge was to build a strong relationship with these candidates using the right messaging and communication channels.

3 QUALITY OF CANDIDATES

Candidate quality is almost always an issue, particularly in a changing economy where new technologies, awareness of global economics and rising educational requirements are in demand. High-quality candidates are quickly snapped up, and it can be difficult to lure them to a new job. Also, like most companies, we don't want to constantly



GUY RICKETT, CEO, CAZAR

Guy has spent more than 25 years developing software businesses in Asia/Middle East and has been based in Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. He now lives in Dubai.

www.cazar.com



“Good candidates want to work in an environment where they can grow”

compete on benefits packages and compensation schemes. However, offering a compelling culture with strong values can win them over. While it is not always easy to communicate something as abstract as culture early in the recruitment phase, things like having a quick and professional hiring process gives these candidates a glimpse of the company's personality. It also differentiates you from competing employers.

What concrete steps did you take to overcome these challenges?

Since 2014, we have established a well-structured recruitment strategy that allows us to plan ahead. We continuously build our talent database so we can be proactive rather than reactive. This way, when we have vacancies, our recruitment team can find quality staff quickly and easily in our own talent pool. Some of the major initiatives we've taken to achieve this include:

A STRATEGIC RECRUITMENT FUNCTION We've linked our overall HR vision to our recruitment function by having a detailed strategy map.

A CAREER WEBSITE We launched an attractive mobile-friendly career website – Mostaqbaly.com – with a strong employer brand message. It is designed to attract the types of candidates we look for and offers a seamless applicant experience. We get tens of thousands of applicants every month through it alone.

A SOLID RECRUITMENT PLATFORM This is key. We implemented the Sniperehire recruitment management system from Cazar, which is the central recruitment tool for all the companies in the group and powers Mostaqbaly.com too. The software automates and tracks every applicant and recruitment activity, provides us with all the reporting we need and ensures our process is joined up. Overall, it speeds up hiring and allows us to work effectively.

PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING We opted to leverage LinkedIn. It is a strategic partner when it comes to sourcing quality candidates



**SAEED AL MABROUK,
HEAD OF
STRATEGY HR,
ABUNAYYAN
HOLDING**

Saeed has more than 10 years' experience in various HR sectors

www.abunayyanholding.com



environment where they can grow – we've always been aware of this. In fact, we called our career site Mostaqbaly ('my future' in Arabic) because we offer our employees a future.

We have career development plans including career paths, competency frameworks and appraisals. We have an employee engagement cycle, where we meet all CEOs and employees within our group. Then we agree on initiatives and an action plan to enhance engagement.

What is your advice to companies wanting to attract the next generation of talent in KSA?

Give them a modern, personalised candidate experience. Saudi youth are the biggest users of mobile, web and social media in the world. Use these tools or other technologies to simplify the recruitment process. It will have a huge impact on the way these graduates view you.

For example, we invest a lot of resources attending career fairs, so we don't want recruiters spending time scanning CVs and doing paperwork. Instead, we have a mobile website where graduates on the stand can apply quickly without having to upload a CV. This makes it easy for them and allows us to get a lot of applicants – recently, at a careers day at King Fahd University, we received 450 applications in a few hours. And we were one of only three paperless booths.

Other things that can help include being transparent with them about the job requirements and culture.

Overall, if you give the young generation a slick candidate journey – even if they don't get the job – you will stand out, they'll remember it and tell others about you. That's how strong employer brands are built. ☺

and growing our talent pool. We increased the number of LinkedIn followers from 500 to more than 12,000 in under 10 months.



PSYCHOMETRIC ASSESSMENT We train for skills but must hire people with the right attitude for each post. We implemented psychometric assessment software by Talent Q. Psychometric testing helps our team evaluate shortlisted candidates and it has been a valuable tool.

What opportunities do you offer prospective employees to position yourself as an employer of choice?

This is a key point to address when talking about talent attraction. Good candidates want to work in an

