

New manufacturing approaches boost jobs market

The move towards batch production of fine chemicals is creating greater demand for skilled personnel in process engineering and operations management. sp² asked Stephen Mothersole of Chemical Search International to explain how recruitment patterns in the sector are changing.

Recent trends in fine chemical manufacture, such as overcapacity in large-scale manufacture and moves into niche markets, are affecting the professional job market in the sector. According to Stephen Mothersole, managing director of Chemical Search International (CSI), the change to batch manufacture of fine chemicals is causing an upsurge in demand for skilled process engineers, operations management and scale-up engineers. Similarly at the distributor level there is an increased need to employ skilled marketers and technical sales persons, especially for API sales.

"There is also greater demand from a shrinking domestic talent pool," says Mothersole. "This is causing a skills gap and hampering expansion efforts at smaller niche players. The effect of Far East competition exacerbates this - it is putting a squeeze on costs which means many companies have less to pay for the skilled staff that are in greatest demand. Another key driver is the 'Christmas tree' demographics trend across most of Western Europe, plus reduced young person uptake of chemistry and sciences putting a squeeze on supply at entry level.

"The problem is also a mind-set one. The shortage of supply means that many companies have to pay premiums to get the best people. Yet in the chemical industry few companies seem happy to acknowledge this, especially in the UK. Sticking to rigid pay scales because a certain vital job is deemed to be at a certain level simply means that the best will not get hired," he says.

Effects of specialisation

Because of the greater degree of specialisation within the industry, companies' recruiting strategies are changing and recruitment organisations are adapting to meet their needs.

"For the reasons given above, companies are finding it increasingly difficult to find the people they need and have to source people from a wider talent pool, especially from overseas. Many companies have used the Internet to try and access this wider area but with mixed success. We set up our company from day one to address this need, that is, the borderless recruitment of a broad range of chemical expertise, heavily using the Internet. Our new chempeople sister site will help take this ability to a new level," says Mothersole.

Another issue is that ever-leaner internal organisations, which developed due to rounds of cost reduction over the past decade, mean more companies have fewer resources to cope with the recruitment process.

"This is a harder one for companies, as even if they use the Internet the rest of the recruitment process is time-consuming. This underlines the need to outsource the whole process to companies such as ours, and to do so from the first day, rather

MEET STEPHEN MOTHERSOLE OF CSI

Stephen Mothersole is an experienced chemical industry professional who received a Degree in Chemistry at Hull University, UK and a Master's in Biochemistry at the University of Cincinnati, Ohio, USA. He spent three years as a chemicals equity analyst for investment bank UBS Warburg in London. He then completed his MBA in Spain and spent eight years with Air Products & Chemicals in Europe and the USA in roles such as mergers and acquisitions and international business development. He founded Chemical Search International in 1999 to offer executive search services for the chemical industry and most recently launched the sister venture chempeople.com.



than after the first attempt to recruit has failed," says Mothersole. "Why is this so? Because a failed internal attempt means there is then less money and will to pay recruiters fees, increased internal pressure to make the hire impacts objectivity and the wasted time means candidates that a good recruiter may have found might be lost.

"Companies need to build a relationship with one or two key specialist recruiters that are then treated as true consultants rather than CV shops. Our role in challenging clients' thinking, crystallising ideas and facilitating the whole process is a valuable skill that companies like CSI can bring to clients. Too often this is not made use of by clients.

"At the senior level a greater use of interim managers or external consultants will be inevitable to plug vital short-term gaps. Our company recognised this two years ago and launched services to supply such individuals."

Greater role for biotechnology

With biology and chemistry becoming more integrated in the discovery and development of new drugs, and biotechnology playing a greater role in fine chemical manufacture, recruitment patterns in the fine chemical industry are changing.

"There is a scramble going on in the pharmaceutical and fine chemicals industries to find enough persons with these skills. Balance that against a decline in the availability of suitably qualified persons," says Mothersole. "This is most acute with experienced more senior persons but also true for fresh graduates. International recruitment becomes vital.



"Despite the need in some quarters there remains a very real reluctance to entertain hiring highly skilled migrants to perform these jobs, even though they may be highly attractive as candidates. For example, salary-wise they are available for less, mobility-wise they are happy to relocate, and language-wise there is rarely a problem with science. Many companies discount these candidates and hang in there for many months in the sometimes vain hope of finding a domestic candidate. This needs to change."

Who's doing the hiring?

So which types of companies are doing the most recruiting? Mothersole says that life science companies, both large and small, are hiring at the greatest rate using many techniques, but in other parts of the industry, for example speciality chemicals, it is more mixed.

"Generally the larger the company the more it seems likely they will manage the recruitment process in-house and use the Internet or traditional media to try and source candidates. These companies are also more likely to use headhunters, but only for very senior roles. This trend is very evident. SMEs tend to use specialist recruiters more, because they have less internal staff to manage the recruitment process, but are less likely to engage recruiters in headhunting mode. Instead, they are more likely to give the role to several recruiters in the hope that the spread is a quicker route to getting candidates. This often backfires, as without exclusivity most recruiters assign the work as low priority," says Mothersole.

The types of staff in demand is another variable in the fine chemicals jobs marketplace and recruitment patterns also vary from country to country.

"We would say younger researchers are in the highest demand, especially those with expertise spanning chemistry and biology," says Mothersole. "More-senior-level staff would be next, as the trend of the past few years towards early retirement and layoffs amongst the most highly paid has created critical skills gaps that are hard to fill internally. The softest market is for middle-level managers.

"High demand for skilled experienced Western managers in overseas markets reinforces the need for international specialists. There is a growing demand for interim managers to take on temporary positions in overseas markets to train local managers. These are very special individuals willing to make decisions from day one.

"Generally in Western Europe the recruitment demand is still high at lower levels and fuelled by staff shortages as discussed above. The USA also suffers from reduced numbers of graduates at a lower level, but the problem here is not lack of talent but lack of jobs. The effect of outsourcing R&D and other functions abroad has dampened the US job market, salaries and expectations.

"The Far East, India and China are the greatest beneficiaries now of the globalisation of the fine chemicals business. They generally have large supplies of domestic talent at all but the very senior levels, so these companies rarely need to recruit overseas. Recruitment practices are also more polarised: they make greater use of the Internet for all recruitment, and make greater use of networking to source staff through services like chempeople.com. However, they do occasionally engage large global generalist headhunters but only for very senior positions."

Linking chemical industry people

chempeople.com is CSI's new sister Website, and it is more than a recruitment service. It connects people directly and offers a way of helping people help each other by finding valuable contacts from across the chemical industry worldwide and by

BENEFITS OF RECRUITMENT CONSULTANTS

Chemical Search International (CSI) is a boutique specialist search firm and has a large network of consultants, all of whom come from the chemical industry, based in several European countries.

The benefits of using companies like CSI are:

- **They can probably understand the client's business and needs more easily than larger, generalist recruiters, which often lose interest when chemistry is mentioned.**
- **CSI's broad geographic focus and high industry profile means that the company can more easily identify or be approached by quality candidates from the broader talent pool.**
- **Working closely with companies such as CSI takes the burden of responsibility and effort from the client so they can do what they do best, which is get on with their business.**
- **Exclusivity, close client relationships and the ability to challenge pre-conceived notions are important to enable CSI help a client get the very best candidate in the most efficacious manner. Many companies view all recruiters as CV shops and do not value the consultative asset recruitment companies can bring.**


sharing information. It might be considered to be a form of do-it-yourself recruitment!

"chempeople.com covers the whole sector. You are as likely to find research biotechnologists there as chief executives, industry consultants or venture capitalists," says Mothersole. "It includes a large number of academics and students and is truly global. It is a concentrated and easily accessible group that anyone can join and use, really the ultimate industry who's who and networking media."

It works by individuals registering their details, giving as much information as they are happy to share. This is done in a highly searchable manner and is very industry-specific. People then pay a small yearly fee (as low as £10 for students) to use the site.

"Companies can use chempeople.com to actively find valuable contacts, new clients, suppliers, consultants, services etc. They can also advertise their company and we shall be adding a truly innovative jobsite later in the year for recruitment," says Mothersole.

Individuals can use the site to raise their profile so that recruiters and employers (who may be members) can easily find likely candidates.

"The beauty of this approach is that if you already have a job you can get noticed for a better one in a discreet manner - all you are indicating to the world is that you want to network! This is a valuable new resource for those who cannot put their CV on public display in a CV bank. There is also a global forum on the site so people can get new ideas and share theirs. It will be especially valuable to individuals going through outplacement or retirees who want to stay in touch," says Mothersole. 

FURTHER INFORMATION

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