

# Dealing with agents and building relationships

## Introduction

Unless you are good at sales yourself or have a network of business contacts who can offer you work it is [advantageous to use sales agents to help secure contracts](#). For many it is cheaper to effectively outsource part of their sales activities.

However, you need to be aware that sales agents themselves get paid based on their own margins, and as such might not always have your best interests at heart. Their target is to place as many people as possible by buying people at a low rate and selling them on at a higher rate.

Some contractors unfortunately consider some of the activities of sales agents to lack integrity and are often labelled as 'rogue'. This simply isn't the case, and sadly indicates a lack of appreciation of the sales profession on the part of the contractor.

This article explains how to maximise your dealings with sales agents and how to avoid some of the pitfalls.

## The Basics

When dealing with agents you need to be able to:

1. Maximise your chances of being chosen for interview
2. Negotiate your rate.
3. Deal with time wasting phone calls .

### 1. Maximise chances of being chosen for interview

Job search techniques are discussed in depth in the article [How to Find a Contract](#).

The key points to understand are:

- o The agent will only want to put forward candidates who are serious for the position and have maximum chance of securing the role. You might be the best qualified, but if the agent thinks someone less qualified will interview better or is more committed to the role then you could get dropped.
- o Avoid mentioning anything that might paint you in a negative light, for example "I have two other interviews this week", or "I'm not sure I'm fully qualified". You must remain positive and portray yourself as perfect for the role.
- o Despite being illegal there are advertisements for non existent contracts that are used solely to attract phone calls by contractors who are looking to change contract. Whilst a nuisance they can be fairly easily detected when the agent continually attempts to drill you about where you currently working and who for. They are simply phishing for leads. You can get around this by saying that the information is confidential but that you would be happy to share it with them if they secure you an interview.

### 2. Negotiating your rate

Another article discuss the [negotiation of your rate](#) in depth, the key points being:

- o The sole aim of the agent to get as much out of the potential client and to give you as little as possible. They are not interested in bettering your contracting career. This is not a bad thing, it is standard business practice. You just need to understand that fact.
- o Rate negotiation is a game. To get the highest rate you can requires a strong bargaining position. The strongest position is after you have interviewed and the client wants to hire you.
- o The agent will be looking to earn a nice margin from you, so initially be vague and uncommittal about rates and agree in principle to the rates they discuss. You can always try for more money later (after the interview when your bargaining position is stronger) on the justification that the role is more senior than you originally envisaged. This tactic does frustrate agents, but it is standard sales practice and part of the industry.
- o Having agreed a rate before the interview the client, despite what the agent says, will very rarely try to offer you less. Some agents try to increase their margins after the client has made an offer. You'll need to stand your ground. It's the oldest trick in the book!

### 3. Dealing with time wasting phone calls

As a contractor you will frequently be telephoned by agents who have nothing to offer you. Their actual reasons are potentially:

- o Phishing for current or future leads (positions).

- o To try and locate a hard to find candidate for a position they are trying to fill.

Here's a list of common questions/scenarios to be aware of:

- o **Providing references:** Sometimes in response to a fictitious advert or a cold call from an agent they will try and get references from you. However, unlike permanent work, in contracting references are rarely required. This is simply a tactic by agents to get hold of your bosses name so they can then phone them in the future to obtain leads. To overcome this you can offer to provide all the references they like after they have secured an interview and subsequent position for you.
- o **Other Interviews:** some agents will ask 'Do you have any other interviews?'. This is so they can source further leads, and also to establish how hot you are a potential candidate for the position you are trying to fill. The easy answer on this is to say that you do not have any other interviews.
- o **Updating database:** Some agencies have dedicated lead teams who phone contractors to get updated details about when their current contracts expire. There is no real harm in giving the answer since it means you will get on their candidate list at a later date. Still, you can expect a call a few weeks before by the same agency trying to find out who you are working for and whether you intend on staying.
- o **Where is your next contract:** If you have already secured a new contract you could be asked who it is with. This is again to secure leads and the best response is to say that you've been told by your agent not to tell anyone. With the contract almost in the bag you would be foolish to tell them and give them the chance of putting in someone better skilled than you!
- o **Do you know anyone else who is available?** This is often asked to step over to a new contractor for questioning about who they work for etc, and in many cases to try and source a candidate for a hard to fill role.

Whilst the cold calls for Phishing can be a nuisance after a while they really won't prove a problem at all. You'll have your standard responses finely tuned and can then move onto the next stage of attempting to form good working relationships with the agents.

## Building relationships

People buy off people, and building yourself a good network of agency relationships can be invaluable. Contractors who adopt an 'us and them' attitude are shooting themselves in the foot by missing out on the advantages of building successful relationships with their suppliers.

Agents and contractors can and should build mutually rewarding business relationships.

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- o [Successful contracting – the importance of a professional sales approach](#)
- o [How to Find a Contract](#)
- o [Negotiating Your Initial Rate](#)
- o [Why Agents Don't Want To Pay Contractors Market Rate](#)
- o [What is an Acceptable Agency Margin?](#)
- o [First-time contracts for contractors](#)

### Related Calculators:

- o [Contractor Calculator](#)
- o [Contract Comparison Calculator](#)
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