

Delivering rapid growth at Dubai Duty Free



Rapid growth across the United Arab Emirates and Dubai has led to Dubai Airport now being the world's busiest airport with more than 70 million passengers passing through per year. Dubai Duty Free is growing with the airport and retail space has increased fivefold over the past eight years. With further expansion planned, an efficient and effective recruitment process is essential.

The challenge: how to manage intense recruitment phases, recruiting in other countries, lack of consistency, and paper-based CVs

The opening of additional sales space requires a rapid ramp up of staffing levels. Mr Nic Bruwer, Vice President of Human Resources for Dubai Duty Free, explains, "In 2008 we opened a new concourse, doubling the operating space within five months. And this happened a few years later again and we went from 3,000 staff to over 5,000 in the space of a couple of months. We're expecting similar bursts as airport expansion continues. So, as a team of only five people, we need to be able to support these growth spurts – from both recruitment and training points of view."

Dubai Duty Free is committed to growing its own talent and has a strong internal advancement philosophy. This means that external recruitment is only for entry-level jobs such as sales assistants and warehouse assistants – but this comprises 73% of employees. At the core of the external recruitment are the sales assistants. Dubai Duty Free prides itself on its high customer service levels and the ability to serve the very diverse range of customer nationality backgrounds and languages passing through its shops and outlets. This is what drives the recruitment campaigns. The main nationalities within the company are Filipino, Indian, Nepalese and Chinese, as these tend to have a strong service orientation, a good education and speak good English. Morocco is also a target recruitment area for Dubai Duty Free because of its Arabic language capability. The challenge is to reach those applicants in their own local base countries, assess them, identify those who will be successful and onboard them in Dubai.

Recruiting quickly and efficiently is one challenge but there is another: the need to ensure consistency both during recruitment and during the onboarding and training. Mr Bruwer continues, "When you grow so fast and employees are joining the organisation in huge numbers, it's a real challenge to train and get everyone up to speed with the high level of service standards expected."

Dubai Duty Free receives a vast number of unspecific and unsolicited applications - around 50,000 each year. The challenge for Mr Bruwer and his team is how to acknowledge these CVs, screen and choose from them, and store for future use. Consistency and objectivity are key. Mr Bruwer explains, "We go to different countries where different recruitment agencies carried out the screening for us, using different standards and different interviewers supplied different formats and summaries. Then, when we followed through with local interviews during a mass recruitment trip, we were doing 25 interviews a day each lasting about 10 to 15 minutes. We questioned what we could really expect to learn about someone in that time. We decided we needed to improve in three areas: to be better informed at interviews, to have greater consistency and to be able to track our applicants - and we started to work with *cut-e*."

The solution: an Applicant Tracking System (ATS), self-screening out, standardised assessment and informed interviews

An Applicant Tracking System was key to professionalising the recruitment process. Dubai Duty Free now captures all the applications in the same format and has integrated this with applicant assessment information for filtering and screening. By using the ATS, the team can now communicate instantly and directly with candidates, as well as generate analysis reports in real time - something not possible before.

In recognising the value the information standard tests could provide, Mr Bruwer and his team decided to include them early on in the application process." Mr Bruwer comments, "We now use the information gleaned to help prioritise applicants and we've developed a measure of 'fit' of applicant against our model of the 'ideal'. We also knew that we wanted to use the assessment information later on in the interview process to get to a better understanding of the person in the short interview time we had."

Mr Bruwer continues, "As well as using standard assessments, we thought it was important to include an element of the Dubai Duty Free context as well. The result was a customised situational judgement questionnaire based on realistic sales scenarios in our own retail environment designed out of discussions with our own people. We used this alongside *cut-e*'s verbal and numerical reasoning tests, a language test and a personality questionnaire."

Having selected the tests, Mr Bruwer wanted to confirm that this combination did indeed predict success for the company. A trial, assessing 224 of its staff and comparing their scores to their manager performance ratings, was successfully conducted.

To support the standardisation and therefore comparability of the interview, an Interview Guide was designed. It brings together and summarises the results of all the online assessments and highlights areas of strength and possible risk against the competency model. It also provides competency-based interview questions and lists the competency indicators to look for during an interview. "This was a really big change for us and our recruiting managers, as well as our line managers, so there was a lot of training we went through," comments Mr Bruwer.

The outcome: a vast talent pool, reduction in recruitment time and better interviews

Since going 'live' and going 'online' with applications, Dubai Duty Free has had in the region of 60,000 applicants. However, it has seen that 35% of these withdraw and self-select out of the process before completing the tests. With service orientation and a passion to serve so critical within the business, retail track record is not always a predictor of success. Around 50% of applicants score at the required level on the tests in order to progress giving Dubai Duty Free a vast talent pool from which to select. Indeed, the success at building the base of suitable candidates over the past 18 months has meant that staffing expansion into a new concourse has been entirely from this existing talent pool.

Mr Bruwer comments on one of the most significant benefits for Dubai Duty Free. "Before introducing these online assessments it took around 8.5 workdays to identify 50 suitable candidates to be invited for the first interview. That equates to 170 workdays when we needed to recruit 1,000 sales assistants. Now we spend only 0.5 day to identify 50 suitable candidates – a vast saving. And, importantly, we know now that we are reviewing all the applicants consistently and fairly and there is no possibility that we are overlooking talent."

The interview success rate has also improved – from 1.7 to 1.5 – and that equates to approximately 2 days per trip (about \$20,000) and typically the team may be carrying out 20 trips a year to interview possible employees. The interview itself is based on the Interview Guide, which helps to ask more pertinent questions and helps to reduce the 'stock' answers often given as the result of interview coaching candidates have been through. With a more standardised approach to interview at local locations, the team are now investigating whether local overseas agents could be used to carry out the first interviews using the standard guide.

Another benefit: the reporting for the senior and executive team is clearer, accurate and timely compared to the manual intervention needed with paper-based CVs and spread sheets. An example is the ability now to pinpoint duplicate CVs it held in the system. At one time it believed it had 88,000 applicants but the true figure of unique applicants was 55,000.

Mr Bruwer concludes, "Since adopting *cut-e's* online assessment tools, we've been able to save significant time and resource in identifying the right people for our company."

For any further information please don't hesitate to contact us!
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