

Delivering
rapid growth
at Dubai Duty Free

Managing intense recruitment drives and sourcing staff overseas



Delivering rapid growth at Dubai Duty Free

Introduction

Rapid growth across the United Arab Emirates, particularly in Dubai, has led to Dubai Airport becoming the world's busiest airport with more than 70 million passengers per year. Dubai Duty Free is growing: the airport and retail space has increased five-fold 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. 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 are 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 nurturing 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 which 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 level and the ability to serve a very diverse range of customer nationalities and languages passing through its shops and outlets. This is what drives recruitment campaigns.

The main nationalities within the company are Filipino, Indian, Nepali and Chinese, as these nationalities 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 who will be successful and train them in Dubai.

Recruiting quickly and efficiently is extremely important, as is the need to ensure consistency both during recruitment and on-boarding and training. Mr Bruwer continues: "When you grow so fast and employees are joining the organisation in huge numbers, it is 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 – approximately 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 reference. 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 interview; to have greater consistency; and to be able to track our applicants – and we started to work with cut-e."



"We decided we needed to improve in three areas: to be better informed at interview; to have greater consistency; and to be able to track our applicants – and we started to work with cut-e."

*Mr Nic Bruwer,
Vice president of human
resources for Dubai Duty Free*

Delivering rapid growth at Dubai Duty Free

The solution: an ATS system, self-screening, standardised assessment and informed interviews

An Applicant Tracking System was key to providing a professional finish to 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 of 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 have 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 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 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,” 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 received in the region of 60,000 applicants. However, it has noticed 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 come entirely from this existing talent pool.



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.

Delivering rapid growth at Dubai Duty Free

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 1.7:1 to 1.5:1 – and that equates to approximately two days per trip (about \$20,000). 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 reduce the 'stock' answers often given as a result of interview coaching. With a more standardised approach to local interviews, the team are now investigating whether local overseas agents could be used to carry out the first interviews using the standard guide.

A further benefit is that reporting for the senior and executive team is more clear, accurate and timely compared to the manual intervention needed with paper-based CVs and spreadsheets. An example is the ability to pinpoint duplicate CVs within the system. At one time, it believed it had 88,000 applicants but the true figure of unique applicants was 55,000!

"Since adopting cut-e's online assessment tools, we have been able to save significant time and resources in identifying the right people for our company."

*Mr Nic Bruwer,
Vice president of human resources for Dubai Duty Free*



The reporting for the senior and executive team is more clear, accurate and timely compared to the manual intervention needed with paper-based CVs and spreadsheets.

About cut-e

Founded in 2002, cut-e (pronounced 'cute') provides online tests, questionnaires and gamified assessments for attraction, selection, talent management and development. The company's smart, valid and innovative psychometrics have made it the preferred partner of multinational organisations.

In May 2017, cut-e was acquired by Aon plc, a leading global professional services firm providing a broad range of risk, retirement and health solutions. cut-e now operates as part of Aon's global offering in talent solutions, helping clients achieve sustainable growth by driving business performance through people performance. cut-e and Aon, as Aon's Assessment Solutions, undertake 30 million assessments each year in 90 countries and 40 languages.