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On top of the chain

From designer coffee shops, to national fast food chains and high-end restaurants, the food service sector is witnessing significant growth. Candidates with retail marketing and sales backgrounds are in demand. Michael Floyd investigates these trends and updates retail candidates.

Data collected by BIS Shrapnel in April found that our love affair with eating out has continued to flourish, with 42 cents in the dollar of our food budgets spent at restaurants and takeaway outlets.

The recent figures were no real surprise to the food service industry, which has been enjoying this boom.

'MasterChef's' influence? Some would argue that our fascination with all things hospitality-related stems from this. However, it seems our spend was on the up long before 'MasterChef'.

Over the past decade we have seen Australians spending more time than ever in social environments, including restaurants, cafes, pubs and clubs. And when we go out, we are spending more money than ever, no longer satisfied with the humble fish and chips on a Friday, or that bottle of house wine at the local.

Interestingly, it is not just consumers who are driving money into food service; suppliers are doing so as well. In fact, many businesses have recognised the growth potential in food service, seeing it as the ideal way to diversify revenue streams and income sources. This has assisted businesses in balancing margins and reduce the risk of being dependent on the national grocery chains.

A changing landscape

So with consumers and industry pumping money into food service, how has the industry responded to this growth? By turning to the retail sector for support.

It makes sense, as the retail sector is renowned for its level of training and development. Furthermore, it is also an industry that has particularly modern means of managing customer relationships. This also equates to an ability to drive business in a new direction.

And with the needs of the food service channel changing, businesses are using increasingly sophisticated management techniques, which means they are looking for a different style of account management. Candidates with retail backgrounds are perfectly placed to meet these needs.

What clients are looking for

Although retail candidates are currently being sought, it is important to note that a retail background alone is not enough to get you over the line for a coveted position in food service. You must also be able to meet a number of key recruitment criteria.

Our food service clients are looking for candidates who have the capability to drive change and to adapt to new and different situations. And they are also seeking candidates with a strong ability to influence.

They are looking for marketers who can use the branding skills acquired in retail to drive opportunity and growth in food service.

Candidates with category development experience are sought after, as businesses look for ways to introduce products to the market and to new segments within food service. Customer relationship management experience and an ability to adapt management styles are both highly sought after.

Strength in analysis, account management and customer service skills are also in demand, as is experience in developing profitable sales strategies and new product development that complements the product and channel strategy.

Many businesses are also looking for specific product knowledge/experience or experience within a specific channel of distribution (i.e. distributors, end user, caterers or HORECA).

What we are hearing from candidates

There has been interesting feedback from the candidate side. On the one hand there are candidates who are open and willing to move into this new territory. Then there are the candidates who worry that the food service channel may not be quite challenging enough.

But just like the inventive marketer from Intel brilliantly branded the computer chip, a good marketer will be able to innovatively market anything. Mediocre marketers need a good brand, but a great marketer will be able to work from scratch.

We are seeing some of the most talented marketers entering this new channel with great enthusiasm and executing some inspiring campaigns, which in turn is making food service a space to watch.

Taking advantage of the opportunities

I am often asked by candidates about the best ways to take advantage of these opportunities.

My answer? It all starts with improving your CV. It might sound simple, but you will be surprised to know how many CVs we see that need work.

A CV should not be a 'static' document – it should be tailored to demonstrate your experience is relevant to each specific role.

To leverage opportunities across the foodservice channel, you need to ensure you have a thorough understanding of the specific requirements of each and every role that you are applying for.

You must also relate your experience to the requirements of the position and focus on specific experience. Demonstrate adaptability and show this through examples. Lastly, it won't hurt to relate a specific event in your background that demonstrates capability in foodservice.

Ensure your CV is up-to-date and relatable and I am confident that the opportunities will soon follow. 🛒

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