



Manufacturing Case Study

Food & Beverage Manufacturer
Macedon, NY



Background Information



Lead Recruiter

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Notable Attributes

History | Founded in 1997, the company stands as one of the largest African-American family-owned businesses in the food manufacturing industry. Built on a strong entrepreneurial foundation, it specializes in producing high-quality food and beverage ingredients.

Size | The company employs approximately 447 individuals across its operations.

Locations | Headquartered in Oakbrook Terrace, Illinois, the company operates manufacturing facilities in Macedon and Williamson, New York; Pennsauken, New Jersey; and Corona, California. These facilities focus on producing syrups, sauces, toppings, and other food ingredients.

Services Provided | Custom Formulation: Development of syrups, sauces, toppings, and fillings tailored to client needs. Product Development: Partnering with customers from ideation to commercialization, focusing on innovation and optimization. Custom Packaging: Providing flexible solutions for various packaging requirements

Client Base | The company serves major food and beverage brands, including Foodservice: Quick-service and casual dining restaurants in the U.S. and Canada. Industrial Ingredients: Leading cereal and breakfast food brands. Private Label: National grocery chains with products such as syrups, sauces, and condiments

Sustainability & Innovation | Sustainability is a core value, reflected in the company's commitment to eco-friendly practices, community engagement, and continuous improvement. Innovation drives its product development efforts, ensuring enhanced customer satisfaction and improved end-user experiences.

Value-Add Strategy | The company delivers value beyond manufacturing by integrating insights, ensuring reliable supply, and advancing sensory innovation. Its strategic approach focuses on reducing costs, improving efficiency, and enhancing the nutritional value of its products.

Search Context

Our client is a privately owned, leading manufacturer of custom ingredients for the food and beverage industry. With five manufacturing locations, JK Exec has been a trusted, long-term partner, supporting their change management efforts, capital improvement initiatives, and expansion goals for several years.

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I have collaborated with senior leadership teams across Human Resources, Talent Acquisition, Operations, Engineering, Quality, and Supply Chain to support the development of their teams. Over the years, we have partnered on numerous searches to identify leaders in various disciplines, contributing to both cultural enhancement and the operational efficiency of the business. Successful placements include:

- Sr. Director of Engineering
- Sr. Human Resource Operations
- Plant Manager
- Process Engineer
- Sr. Category Manager
- HR Generalist
- Procurement Specialist
- Supply Chain Analyst
- Production Manager
- Production Supervisor
- Manager Talent Acquisition
- Indirect Category Manager
- Engineering Manager
- Maintenance Supervisor
- Manufacturing Training Specialist
- Manager Plant Quality
- EH&S Specialist
- Human Resource Coordinator
- Manager Organizational Learning & Development

Position Details

Sr. Director of Engineering: This newly created position was pivotal in launching the company's capital improvement project and establishing standards for strong leadership, mentoring, and guidance during a critical change management initiative. The role played an integral part in developing a high-performing engineering team with expertise in controls, process, and manufacturing engineering, supporting all facilities. Key responsibilities include optimizing efficiency and controlling costs associated with manufacturing operations.

Manager Organizational Learning & Development: This position was designed to cultivate internal talent, supporting both employee retention and the attraction of external talent seeking organizations that prioritize professional development. The role is responsible for developing and executing programs that build human capabilities and foster a strong employee development culture. This includes creating inclusive talent development initiatives such as new hire onboarding, performance management, skill training, and professional and leadership development. With an employee-centric framework, the position ensures that talent development programs adapt to organizational changes and build workforce capabilities.

Sr. Humans Resource Operations: This newly added position in the HR organization was created to support future acquisitions, business initiatives, and the staff involved. It focuses on building organizational capability aligned with the company's business strategy, cultural imperatives, and long-term goals. By continuously enhancing the employee experience and fostering an inclusive culture, the role ensures the company embodies its purpose and values. Additionally, this position drives talent management strategies to align with organizational growth and objectives.

Plant Manager: As a newly established role within the production team, this position became a key member of the leadership team. It allowed the Vice President of Manufacturing to concentrate on the company's strategic goals, while empowering a strong leader to oversee and improve production floor efficiencies. The Plant Manager provides vision, leadership, and coaching to build and sustain team performance, collaboration, and competencies across all plant departments. This critical hire enhanced team structure, promoted alignment, and created peer support in a rapidly growing environment.



Process Engineer: This position was an addition to their engineering staff due to growth and enhancements. This hire was made to intentionally leverage Industry 4.0 (I4.0) to improve performance visibility, provide actionable insights, and automate manual processes. With the goal to achieve rapid, impactful I4.0 adoption and to create a center of digital manufacturing excellence, this position was crucial to designing and deploying an Industry 4.0 lighthouse in one of their locations

Challenges Faced

Skilled Professional Shortage

One of the primary challenges we face as recruiters is the shortage of skilled professionals, which makes it increasingly difficult to identify candidates who meet the specific requirements of specialized roles. This challenge is further exacerbated by a highly competitive job market, where top talent is often presented with multiple offers. As a result, recruiters must act swiftly and strategically, presenting compelling opportunities and attractive packages to secure the best hires.

Search Strategy

Research & Planning

In our search process, we utilized a variety of tools for market research, including LinkedIn Talent Insights, ZoomInfo, and compensation data from LaborIQ. While these resources were instrumental in shaping our strategy, the most valuable insights came directly from conversations with candidates in the market.

Understanding their experiences, expectations, and the competitive landscape proved essential for conducting a successful search and securing top talent.

Sourcing Candidates

To source candidates for our client, we employed a comprehensive, multifaceted approach. This included leveraging our extensive nationwide network of thousands of candidates, utilizing LinkedIn Recruiter for targeted messaging and candidate identification, and sourcing through platforms such as Indeed and ZoomInfo. Additionally, we promoted the positions across various channels, including our website and industry-specific job boards tailored to manufacturing.

Candidate Assessment

Our candidate assessment process began with a comprehensive understanding of the unique requirements for each role. With multiple positions to fill, we identified specific must-haves, preferred qualifications, and key skills for each opening. Candidates underwent a rigorous evaluation process, including an initial phone screen, a written assessment, and a video interview. This method involved reviewing an average of 150–200 profiles and conducting in-depth interviews with 15–20 potential candidates. Ultimately, we presented a shortlist of 4–6 highly qualified candidates for each position, ensuring a precise match to the hiring team's needs.



Execution

Timeline

The timeline for the search process varied depending on the position, with the average search taking approximately 90 to 100 days from start to finish. However, due to the competitive market, some positions were filled in as little as four weeks, while others took longer due to specific criteria and location considerations. Throughout the process, the primary focus remained on identifying the right fit for our client.

Communication

I maintained consistent communication with our hiring team, providing weekly status updates. Additionally, I regularly checked in throughout the week to discuss candidate feedback, offer negotiations, and the overall progress of the search.

Adaptations

Acting as a seamless extension of our client's team, we conducted weekly meetings to ensure full support and alignment throughout each search. These sessions allowed us to provide regular updates and make adjustments as necessary. We tailored our approach by addressing key details and specific needs for each search. Throughout the process, we continuously reassessed and adapted, offering immediate support and maintaining consistent action to drive the success of all search initiatives.

Outcome

As a long-term partner to our client, we have seen a significant increase in retention and stronger leadership, with a focus on fostering a culture of engagement, development, innovation, and mentorship. This has positively impacted the company's reputation in the market, attracting prospective talent. Over the course of our partnership, we have witnessed how investments in change management and key initiatives have built a stronger, more appealing culture—one that naturally attracts candidates eager to explore employment opportunities with the firm.

Lessons Learned

Key Takeaways

Strategic Alignment with Business Goals

My deep understanding of the company's long-term business strategy enabled me to focus on hiring leaders who align with its growth, innovation, and sustainability objectives. For example, I prioritized sourcing candidates with strong operational or product development expertise to drive the company's innovations in custom formulation and packaging.

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Diversity & Inclusion Commitment

As a leading African American-owned business that values diversity and cultural fit, I was able to prioritize candidates who not only align with these values but also actively champion them, thereby strengthening the company's organizational culture.

Flexibility in Identifying Talent for Growth

I supported the company in identifying talent with adaptable skill sets capable of managing their North American footprint and contributing to their expansion plans. This flexibility ensured the seamless integration of new hires into evolving roles.

Focus on Retention and Succession Planning

By prioritizing candidates with leadership potential, our partnership played a key role in building a team capable of effective succession planning and ensuring long-term organizational stability.

Best Practices

Understanding Unique Cultural Dynamics

In an organization with a strong entrepreneurial spirit and family-owned values, recruiting required a keen sensitivity to cultural dynamics. It was essential to ensure that candidates not only possessed the necessary technical expertise but also aligned with the company's interpersonal values and culture.

Evolving Role Definitions

As the company grew, roles often evolved throughout the recruitment process. Collaborating closely with leadership to refine position requirements mid-search became a key learning experience, underscoring the importance of agility in executive recruitment.

Balancing Technical Skills with Visionary Leadership

Identifying talent capable of making an immediate impact while also driving innovation for future challenges required a deep understanding of the company's industry-specific hurdles, such as product customization and sustainability.

Navigating Market Competition for Top Talent

Competing for top-tier candidates in a competitive labor market posed a significant challenge. To address this, I leveraged my network and developed tailored outreach strategies to attract passive candidates, emphasizing the importance of building a robust talent pipeline.

Sustainability and Innovation Focus

Candidates needed to resonate with the company's commitment to sustainability and continuous improvement. This required highlighting these values in both job descriptions and interviews to ensure alignment with the company's mission and vision.

Conclusion

These takeaways and learning points highlight my value as a strategic recruitment partner, one who goes beyond simply filling roles to enhance overall team dynamics and strengthen the organization's capacity for innovation.