

'The aim is placing quality people into quality businesses'

Not many companies have a photograph of a dog in a tie at the top of their "meet the team" webpage, but then Spear Recruitment has made a point of being different from the start.

Former car sales manager Darren Street formed the family-run business in 2011 from his home, partly to address the faults he had found when dealing with other recruitment companies in his previous jobs.

Spear has since grown to a base of more than 70,000 candidates, has offices across the UK, from Edinburgh to its main headquarters on the Isle of Wight, and is also active in recruitment in estate agency, property, engineering, accountancy and fast-moving consumer goods. However, it still specialises in the motor trade.

Spear's aim is to place quality people into quality businesses across the UK. Recruitment fees are competitive and there is no fee to interview a Spear candidate.

"I spent a career in sales, car sales, then car sales management," he said. "I was receiving CVs on a daily basis from agencies and I would pick up the phone and ask about the person, their performance, how many units they sell and the agency wouldn't know.

"It made me think I could do this better. I sought to set out a transparent, friendly agency. We have no cloak and dagger of hiding a candidate's name. When we introduce a candidate, we do it with their consent.

"One clear message we want to get out to car dealerships is that we have a strict 'no contact' policy – no re-poaching of candidates that we place. Other agencies might ring the person three months down the line, asking if they are happy, offering something else. I would sack staff if they did it. We will never re-approach."

Among the benefits to a dealership of having an agency take care of recruitment is the high calibre of exclusive candidates, who know what kind of career they are looking for and are not keen on seeing their CVs spread thinly over a large territory.

"If a dealership just puts an advert out, they tend to forget that they are going to get

applicants with no industry experience," said Street.

"A real factor at the moment, a massive factor that's made us change the way we are working as a business, is that a lot of the job boards in the UK have gone out to many of the UK dealerships and tried to sell their advertising services. But a lot of the candidates now are being very savvy, knowing that their management and HR team have access to these job boards."

As a result, he said, Spear is finding fewer candidates register on UK job boards. "We've adapted our business model with a completely new IT system and a mobile app, which has taken off," he said.

The Spear Recruitment app, available on Android and iOS, was downloaded more than 10,000 times in its first three months. Candidates receive a call from a consultant within hours of submitting their CV and have full access to Spear's team.

Another example of the company taking care of its clients is in offering a free service

in finding candidates for part-time vacancies of under 16 hours.

"It's another ethical approach that I take. We empathise that people have budgets and targets," said Street.

"In the automotive industry, whether you want a driver, a valet, sales executive, manager, even a head of business, we cover the whole remit. If a sales manager is there to manage a team, we allow them to do that job. Recruitment is very time-consuming and we're not as expensive as people think we might be.

"We post out cards to all clients and candidates after filling a vacancy as a token from us to say congratulations and thanks. Sometimes I worry we go over the top, but we like to be different and keep that personal touch."

As Spear grew, Lisa Street, Darren's wife, joined the business as finance director. The couple have five children, but say it feels like more than 30 because of the relationship they have with their office staff. And



the four-legged friend featured on the website is their family pet, Reggie, the "chairdog to the board", so named because its birthday, September 1, 2015, is the first day of the registration plate-change month.

"He's here with us every day. We get emails for Reggie. For every five people who send in an enquiry, one will copy in Reggie," said Street.

A successful recruitment agency changes the lives of its candidates and the fortunes of its clients. Street and his staff enjoy keeping track of the career progress made by people for whom they have found jobs.

"It's really rewarding work," he said. "I buy my local paper religiously as part of my routine and I read a lot of AM, wanting to know what's going on in the trade. Often,

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DARREN STREET, SPEAR RECRUITMENT

we place someone and we can watch them grow through their career. We also get a lot of cards and emails or candidates coming back to say thank you.

"Equally, some of the management that we place then use us for their own recruitment because they know how professional we are."

Spear found technician Tomas Janionis his dream job at a dealership in Manchester after he arrived in Britain from Poland.

His family are now close friends with the Streets. Janionis said: "I have never known a better guy who keeps to his word than Darren. He has never let me down and always does what he promises. I appreciate him very much."

Street added: "I travel around the country a lot in my role and Tomas was insistent that I went up and met with him and his family. I arrived at six o'clock one evening to spend an hour with them and I was there until 1am. It was lovely. Next he's going to come and meet my family.

"We have had many success stories at Spear and Tomas is a fine example."

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or enquiries@spearrecruitment.co.uk,
visit spearrecruitment.co.uk or
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