

HOW TO HIRE

INTERNSHIPS, NETWORKING AND ADVERTISEMENTS

Finding the right employees can be hard - especially during the starting phase of a company. We asked successful startups in Antwerp how they handle employment and how to find the right people.

Door David Hanny

What's the most common way companies get their first employees? "Existing relationships", according to Stefan Debois. He's the founder of Survey Anyplace and works on an application for engaging surveys. His first employee was an old colleague of him. They once worked in the same company and teamed up for founding Survey Anyplace.

Peter Coppens, Co-Founder at Datylon, a data visualisation company, tells a similar story. The only difference: for him, it was the other way around. He was the one who joined his colleague, Erik Laurijssen, for founding a business.

Both companies grew to a decent size over a couple of years so both had to look for more people at a certain point. The point at which you need more employees is easily noticeable according to Stefan Debois. "It's when you see that the work can't be handled anymore by the existing team. And when you have the financial means to afford it", he explains. "Then becoming bigger will help you grow even further."

Generally, the ways Survey Anyplace and Datylon got their employees vary from case to case. But both companies have unique strategies they've been successful with up to now.



SURVEY ANYPLACE



“Internships are one of the best ways to find employees”, says Stefan Debois from Survey Anyplace

DIFFERENT STRATEGIES FOR THE SAME GOAL

For Stefan from Survey Anyplace internships are one of the best ways to find employees. Several people that work at Survey Anyplace full-time today started out with an internship. If they proved themselves they got a longer-term contract. Even at this moment, there's an intern working in the office of Survey Anyplace. Her name is Livia and she works in the marketing team.

“The good thing about internships is that you get to know what people can do and if they fit in”, Stefan explains. “If everything works out they can get a real contract afterwards.” In order to get interns in the first place, Survey Anyplace promotes themselves at Universities along with other companies.

Datylon, on the other hand, approaches the process of finding employees in a different way. “Mainly, we look for employees through our website. People that are interested in working in an environment like ours will find it”, says Peter. “We've also tried to work with employment agencies but that didn't work out too well”, he explains further.

For him, job offers on the company website has worked really well for the task of finding employees. Apart from that, Datylon also got several employees through the team's network.

“EMPLOYEES ARE LESS RESTRICTED”

Work in young startup certainly is different from work in a big company. “Unlike in a corporate job, you see the results of your actions quickly in a startup”, says Stefan from Survey Anyplace. “You’re less restricted by an organisation or existing procedures. This means you can get more creative to reach a certain result.”

Employees in startups tend to have more variety than in large corporations too. “But of course, you also see the impact immediately when you screw something up”, Stefan adds.

Employees aren’t always perfect though and sometimes a person just doesn’t fit into the company. Stefan experienced this once. “We had a developer at one point with whom we didn’t get along too well”, he explains. It was an internship with a possibility for a real contract. They didn’t keep him after the internship period was over.

When looking for new people, it’s particularly important that they’re able to work without too much supervision. “They should be able to find their approach to a problem and get creative”, Stefan points out. Apart from that employees should be open, willing to learn and fit into the company culture.

LINKEDIN AND FREELANCERS FOR SPECIAL SKILLS

Apart from internships, Survey Anyplace also relies on special job boards and LinkedIn for finding people. “LinkedIn is a great tool”, Stefan says. “Not only can you put job advertisements on the platform but you can also look up people with certain criteria”. They did this for one of their employees, he further explains. They reached out to her and asked if she would like to talk. “It’s really nice for finding specific people”, Stefan concludes.

Freelancers are another way to delegate tasks. Survey Anyplace as well as Datylon rely on freelancers for a wide variety of tasks - be design, development, content marketing or developing the user experience. “Freelancers can add a lot of value to your team”, Peter from Datylon says. “Especially if you’re looking for certain skills.” That’s why his company works together with a variety of specialized freelance workers to get tasks done in the best way possible.

Finding employees isn’t easy. And most likely, there will be some bad choices in the process of getting bigger. In the end though, a bigger team will help a company grow faster and bring it to the size it aims to be.



TIPS AND TRICKS

There are different approaches to the same problem.

Don't shy away from employing interns.

Classic job advertisements still work. So try it.

If it doesn't work out with a new employee: it's better to let go. Watch people's personality, not only their skillset.

Try using LinkedIn for your employee search.

Delegate tasks to freelancers if they can do it better.

“MY IMPACT IS VISIBLE”

Nigel Lindemann currently does digital marketing at Survey Anyplace. Like a lot of colleagues, he got his position through an internship. “This is my first job. I started to work here as soon as I had my diploma. Ever since he has worked for Survey Anyplace for 2,5 years. During these years he has experienced the advantages and disadvantages of working in a startup first hand.

“In comparison to a big company I have a lot of room for experimentation. We don't have a structure that says how we do this or that. We have space to come up with our own ideas”, he explains. “My impact is visible. When I post something there's my name on it.”, Nigel goes on. He feels important at Survey Anyplace. “I have a couple of friends who work in bigger companies and they have the feeling: If I wouldn't have been here today it wouldn't have made a big difference. Here people would definitely notice.”

