

# 7 Digital Agency Hiring Mistakes

(And How to Avoid Them)





Hiring mistakes are extremely costly: damaging team morale, as well as your agency's cash flow. Hiring just one wrong person can have a devastating impact on the performance of your team, affecting productivity, profitability and team culture.

From working closely with digital agencies, and my own personal experiences of growing and managing an agency team, I've seen agencies make the same mistakes, again and again. Here are the 7 most common hiring mistakes that digital agencies make – and how you can avoid them.

# 1

## Not Having a Defined Hiring Strategy

Hiring strategies help agency founders align their hiring decisions with their agency's growth goals and requirements. A clear hiring strategy will also help to shape the agency culture: does your agency prioritise growing from within (hiring a junior employee and training them up) or without (laterally hiring a more experienced employee from elsewhere)?

Your agency's hiring strategy should be the backbone of your entire hiring process: it will shape who you hire, and when. Having an unclear or confusing hiring strategy – or worse, not having a strategy at all – is the biggest hiring mistake that agencies make.



# 2

## Not Having an Established Hiring Process in Place

**An established hiring process will help you to objectively compare your candidates, their skills and experience, as well as enabling you to standardise the hiring experience across all candidates and positions.**

If you don't have a standardised hiring process in place, your hiring decisions will be extremely subjective, and each candidate will have a vastly different application and interview experience.

For example, if someone you know sends in a job application, you may avoid going through the same rigorous interview process you would with normal, 'unknown' candidates. This means you will miss out on key information that will help you assess their suitability for the role, and you are more likely to make impulsive decisions that aren't necessarily best for your agency.



# 3

## Hiring the Wrong Type of Employee

**A very common mistake that agencies make is hiring the wrong type of employee. How does your agency decide on the type of role to hire for when putting together job descriptions?**

It's not uncommon for agencies to bring in new hires at the wrong level of seniority – for example hiring a junior employee, when they really need someone with more experience or a more specific skillset.

Alternatively, agencies often hire a freelancer when they really need a full-time employee, or an in-house employee when a freelancer makes better financial sense and is a better fit for the agency's expanding workload.



# 4

## Hiring Solely for Experience

Another common hiring mistake that all companies make is being dazzled by impressive applications, ignoring the red flags that go alongside them. A job applicant might be a perfect fit in terms of their on-the-job experience, but be a poor fit for your agency's culture.

On a small agency team, assessing culture fit during the application process is just as important as assessing their practical experience. Hiring a poor-fit employee will impact your team's morale and productivity, meaning that the cost of hiring a poor-fit employee is more than just a financial one.

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# 5

## Having Unclear Role Requirements

**If you don't have a good understanding of the problem you're trying to solve by hiring a new employee, how will you be able to choose the best-fit applicant?**

As agencies grow, the founders become less involved with the day-to-day agency work. This means that you'll realise that your team is overworked, but you won't have the necessary insights to understand exactly what is needed from a new hire – particular skills, experience or type of employee.

This can lead to you hiring for roles that don't align with your agency's hiring needs, or advertising job vacancies with unclear requirements, attracting poor-fit applicants as a result.



# 6

## Hiring Blind

**How do you work out if the person who's sent in a job application for your latest vacancy is actually capable of doing the work?**

If your agency's hiring process solely consists of a written application and an interview, you have no insight into the quality of their work or working practices. Hiring a new employee without seeing any concrete examples of their work can cause your agency problems later on, when they join your team and you realise they overstated their skills in key areas of the role.

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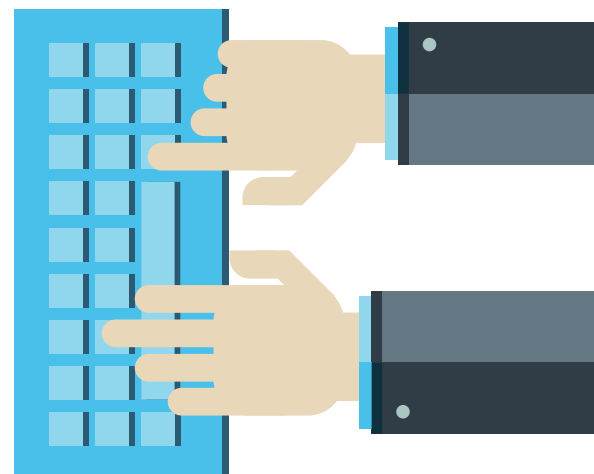


# 7

## The Panic Hire

The panic hire is one of the most dangerous hiring mistakes that agencies make. It occurs when you have an urgent skills gap to fill – because an employee has left your agency, or you secured some unexpected client work without having the necessary skills to deliver on it.

This results in a rushed hiring process to make up the shortfall, and means that you ‘make do’ with the best person who applies in that short timeframe – but who isn’t the best fit for your agency in the long term.



# How to Avoid These Common Hiring Mistakes

## Create a Hiring Process

A clearly defined hiring process is essential for helping you avoid common hiring mistakes. As most agencies won't be hiring very regularly, a good hiring process can help you maintain consistency each time you do it, and avoid missing key steps that can impact your hiring decisions.

### THE 4 MOST IMPORTANT STEPS IN YOUR HIRING PROCESS ARE:

Clearly define the role, and the associated responsibilities and level of experience required.

Create a job description that is an accurate reflection of this role, and clearly explains what is expected from the successful applicant.

Filter out unsuitable candidates early in the application process:

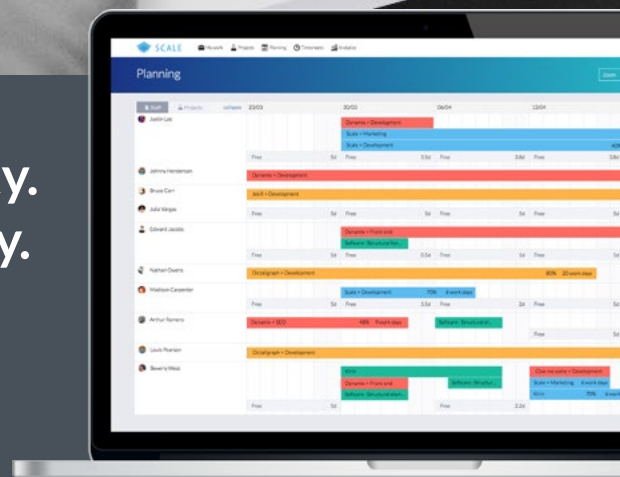
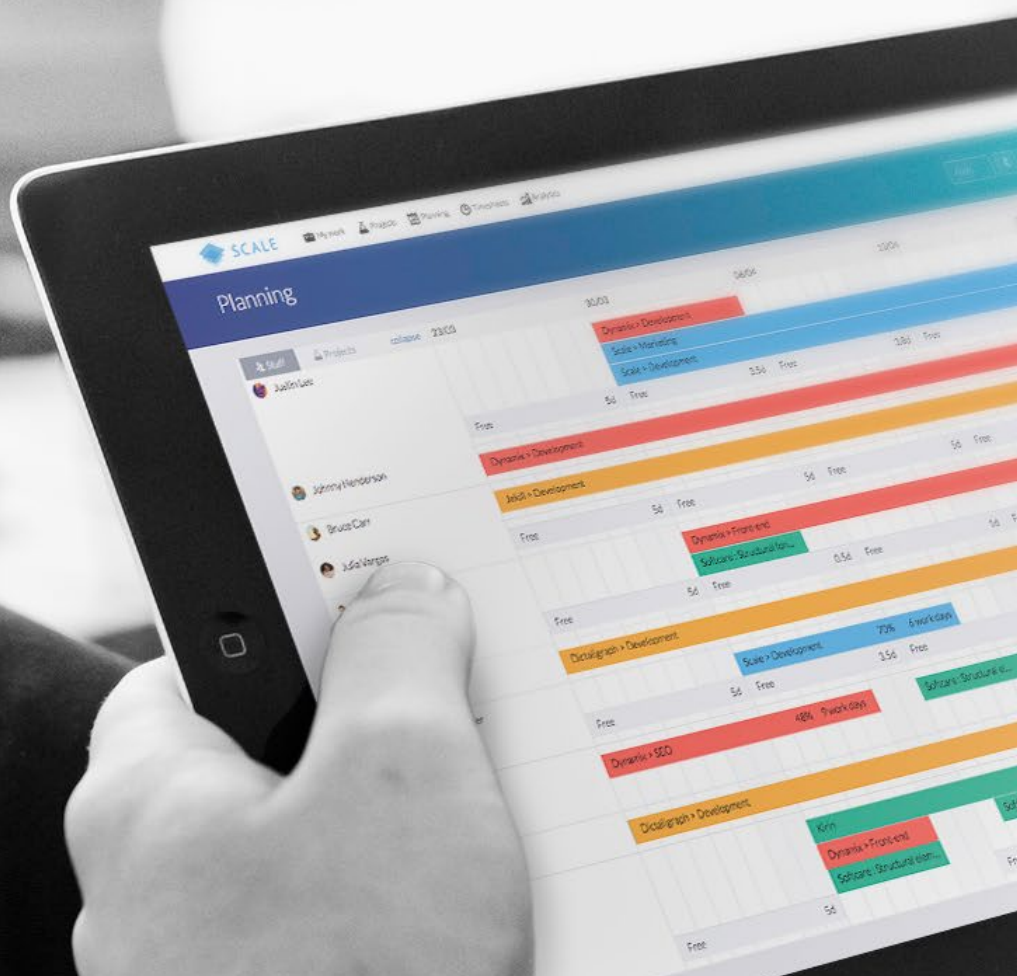
- If applicants meet the criteria in the job description, get them to complete a practical task related to the job, to help you assess the quality of their work.
- If appropriate, ask to see a portfolio of previous work.

Create a framework for in-person interviews to ensure you ask key questions that address their experience and also their culture fit for your agency. You should also put together a framework for assessing the suitability of candidates. This will help you compare applicants objectively, rather than subjectively, so you're not hiring on impulse.

# Increase Agency Profitability Through Better Hiring

To avoid the most common hiring mistakes, you need to be able to quickly identify when, who and what skills you need to hire, to complement and expand your agency's current offering.

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