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McCarthy fuels BP's forecourt revolution

BP Convenience Retail connects with McCarthy Recruitment

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Fuelling a forecourt revolution

When BP decided to transform its forecourts, it turned to McCarthy Recruitment to find its people. **DeeDee Doke** investigates

Photography: David Marsden/
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Kate McCarthy and her team clearly had their work cut out for them. Their client, BP Convenience Retail, was transforming its forecourt operations, moving from the traditional fuels-focused service to a more well-rounded retail experience — complete with bringing Marks & Spencer Simply Food stores into some locations.

Last year the oil giant was rolling out 40 new model convenience shops in Scotland, the Midlands and the South-East, which needed managers and deputy managers especially suited for the new way of doing business.

In the words of Carolyne Daykin, people and capability manager, BP UK Convenience Retail, BP Oil UK, the company was looking for “retailers with energy and passion, who really want to make a difference. Individuals who have a clear ability to not only successfully run a commercial retail convenience store but who show strong leadership qualities and have the capacity to continually challenge and raise the bar”.

To pinpoint and attract the people who matched BP Retail's vision of its future, McCarthy, managing director of the *Recruiter* Awards for Excellence-winning McCarthy Recruitment, was soon on the case. Now she and her team can point to a recruitment drive that achieved measurable success in the numbers of candidates interviewed, placed and retained (see box, right). But in McCarthy's view, it's not only her team's success — it all comes down to partnership.

The word “partnership” is used, abused and overused,

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Kate McCarthy: top partner



when recruiters talk about their ideal relationship with a client. In the wrong hands, the word can be cheapened and come to mean a merely polite relationship in which a signed contract rules, and no one colours outside the lines or thinks outside the box.

But there's something dynamic, kinetic and real going on when the P word is applied to the business relationship between McCarthy Recruitment and BP Convenience Retail, the arm of the energy giant which oversees recruitment of store managers within the company's UK forecourt operations. It's especially significant when the client describes the relationship that way.

“They are our first-tier supplier. It's very much a partnership,” says Daykin of BP Retail's relationship with the McCarthy team.

Partnership — requiring time and commitment to the best possible result — is the best vehicle to ensure that a recruitment programme is successful for client, candidate and recruiter alike. “I think it's even more

SCORECARD

In 2008, McCarthy Recruitment achieved the following statistics in its work for BP Convenience Retail:

- Placements: More than 100 in 2008
- Percentage of total external placements: 75%
- Retention of McCarthy candidates: around 87% over 12 months

PARTNERSHIP DEFINED

“A relationship between individuals or groups that is characterised by mutual co-operation and responsibility, and for the achievement of a specified goal.”

● TheFreeDictionary.com

to broaden the picture of backgrounds that candidates would come from,” explains Daykin.

“We recognise that a business can train people in the technical part of the job — technical management of fuels, for example — but management behaviours are what we're looking for: leadership, delegation, engagement and the capability to drive the performance of the store,” she says.

Obviously, retail operations were an initial target for headhunting potential candidates but McCarthy recognised that “hospitality could also do” as a source of great talent. To attract the right candidates, McCarthy and team also needed to do the right sell on the jobs on offer: yes, BP Retail was a great employer offering a revitalised retail operation as a work environment, but candidates needed to realise that the work itself would be demanding.

To appropriately sell the jobs, the McCarthy team had to fully understand themselves what the roles were about. A sign of their commitment which particularly impressed Daykin was team members' working alongside shop managers to see what the day might involve in a fast-paced, convenience environment. They also met with area managers to understand the needs of different territories.

“One of the great things was, McCarthy really spent time with our operations people finding out what ‘good’ looks like, to really get a feel for and understanding of our business,” Daykin says.

BP Convenience Retail used online advertising and its own website throughout the drive, to draw, receive and track applications. McCarthy Recruitment handled the responses and built shortlists from the best CVs. The recruitment firm also helped with twice-weekly assessment centres to narrow the fields of candidates. Those who showed the most promise in the centres were then invited to participate in an in-store work assessment.

Daykin was impressed that McCarthy favoured “quality over quantity” in putting CVs forward. “I would rather see two or three CVs than dozens,” she says.

Asked what the most crucial element of the partnership was, Daykin answers: “I think the communication was the important thing.” Mutual honesty was key to the effective sharing of information, but Daykin also credits the McCarthy Recruitment team for ensuring that such essentials as “what the vacancy is, what the requirements are” were quickly and accurately communicated to each participating consultant.

McCarthy elaborates on how her team works. “In our business, everyone can work on every account,” she explains. “Everyone has knowledge of everyone and every project we recruit for. Everyone learns together about the journey of that client.”

And it all came together: “I would say it was a success,” Daykin says of the recruitment drive. “One thing that really stands out is that one out of every two or three candidates McCarthy puts forward go through to offer. That's fantastic.”

McCarthy still recruits about 10 people a month for BP Convenience Retail to fill vacancies, and Kate McCarthy herself remains passionately committed to the idea that when both sides give their all, success follows. “The clients will get the best talent for the best value,” she says. ●

important right now,” McCarthy says at a time when employers are recruiting less and scrutinising each hire more closely. She adds: “My biggest frustration is when clients use a ‘service provider’ instead of people who can bring in great talent.”

BP Retail and McCarthy have worked together on various placements over four years. But their collaboration built up steam when the oil company's retail convenience arm stepped up the forecourts' transformation.

“The challenge was they wanted a different kind of management than what they perceived they have had over the years,” McCarthy told *Recruiter*. “Like many businesses, they've wanted something different at different times.”

And to attract the kind of high calibre, professional candidates BP Convenience Retail wanted, several perceptions had to change along with the type of credentials candidates would bring to the roles: the types of backgrounds considered appropriate for the manager and deputy manager roles being recruited, the company's view of the roles themselves and the candidates' own mindset about what it was like to work at a forecourt.

Previously, successful candidates for managerial roles at BP forecourts had a professional background in fuels. What Daykin calls the “task-orientated, hands on” demands of the role lessened while management skills, a commitment to quality customer service and a strong sense of commerciality grew in importance. “We started



Carolyne Daykin: success