

Glasford International Partner Spotlight: Africa



Q&A with Gail Burns
Managing Director
Target Search & Selection
our International Partner in Africa

Q. Gail, tell us a little bit about yourself and your firm?

A. I am the Founder of Target Search & Selection, now a leading executive search firm and a global partner to Glasford International. I've acquired a B. Ed and studied B Comm (Marketing) and am an experienced recruitment professional with 21 years' experience in search recruitment and management consulting. Having spoken at several high-profile events, both locally and internationally and being the recipient of various consulting awards, my focus has always been on improving and uplifting search and recruitment service and methodology in South Africa. I am stimulated by human capital development, travel, new projects and international communication. As an experienced recruiter, I'm well connected with leading business professionals and have an intimate knowledge of industry in South Africa.

Target Search is a leading executive search firm dominating the headhunting, recruitment and talent industry in South Africa and filtering into Africa. Target Search has strategic alliances with our clients, offering a unique value proposition combined with the synergy of many years of experience and expertise. We have extensive regional networks and knowledge of local and international business environments. Our practice is focused on these sectors: ICT, Engineering and Manufacturing, Power and Energy, Petrochemicals, Mining, Manufacturing and Finance. We provide our clients with the highest quality, most innovative recruitment methods, offering more than just outstanding executive search capabilities to ensure that they are adequately prepared for whatever the future may bring.

Q. South Africa has recently had the honour of hosting the World Cup. What do you think this will mean for the country, and the continent, in the short and medium term?

A. South Africa will benefit economically going forward from the staging of the World Cup. The construction effort, infrastructure, and business tourism here has cushioned the impact of the recession to an extent and helped the economy to start to recover at a faster rate. The "spend" upsurge has been expensive but our debt ratios low. However, if South Africa is to grow at a faster rate it needs to follow the example of China and India who have huge investment rates. To do this South Africa needs to attract large amounts of private investment into limping areas like transport and energy. Whilst the Government indicates that it is committed to private and public partnerships in these areas, it needs to make sure that these partnerships become a reality.

Q. What are the challenges facing South Africa in the medium term?

A. Currently in South Africa there are more people receiving monies from UIF and Social Grants than there are people employed. Stats SA report this month: "There was an increase of 41,000 Formal Sector jobs between Q3 and Q4 2009 with most jobs in Finance, trade and Utilities. The Community and Social Services industry however lost 23,000 jobs and transport 15,000 within the same period. In the Informal Sector. The year-on-year comparisons show a net loss of 423,000 jobs in the Formal

Sector, with trade and manufacturing being the hardest hit with the loss of 202,000 and 170,000 jobs respectively, although finance experienced job gains.“ That is not a good picture. Given the economic downturn generally, employees are still hesitant about making career changes. Also, companies are delaying the selection process, and are extremely cautious in their hiring procedures and decisions. The turnaround time companies are taking to finalise recruitment selection is lengthy, despite the internal need to fill urgent vacancies. If one considers the economic climate and anticipated growth, companies are experiencing this growth hampered by lack of skills, human resources and facilities as the market conditions stabilise and they will find themselves at the end of the queue and not first in line, thus failing to reap the rewards. Despite the challenging climate, companies still need to ensure that they make effective and efficient decisions if they want to gain the competitive edge. This is especially important when recruiting top-tier executives, as unnecessary procrastination results in high demand being frustrated with laborious processes resulting in frustration and disinterest.

People are the most important factors in successful businesses and without the right leadership, organisations will not be able to outrun the economic downturn. Laborious “old school” processes not only deter executive talent, but also have a negative effect on a corporate identity, and lead to poor morale internally.

Q. What does this mean for Target Search, Glasford International and the Recruitment Industry in general in South Africa?

A. South African companies looking to maximise growth have been more courageous in expanding into Africa. Because many of these initial expansion initiatives have been very successful, these companies are looking for further growth, which has created greater need for more skilled staff. Africa is currently one of the big growth markets for corporations both in South Africa and globally. And while it is often more desirable to appoint locals, the required skills base is sometimes not available. As a result, companies have needed to bring in staff to fill certain roles, but because many countries on the continent have historically been considered high risk areas for non-locals to live and work, attracting top skills for senior management jobs has been a challenge. This has created skills shortages especially at senior levels.

Because some of the more emergent economies in Africa do not have the same corporate infrastructure and high-level corporate governance standards, South African skilled professionals with the right qualifications and experience have become the most natural and relatively easy choice for staff.

This is extremely positive for South Africa's senior managers as it provides an incredible opportunity for senior staff currently working in South Africa – especially if they originally hail from other African countries – to gain new emerging market experience.

Over the past few years many students from our African neighbours have studied and graduated at South Africa's universities, many of them choosing to stay and gain work experience locally. Now is an incredible time for them to consider returning “home” with some solid business experience at senior level and benefit from this expansion. If you have the skills, know the lay of the land and can speak the language, you will be in high demand.

Q. Where are the senior management skills gaps?

A. In the main:

- High Level Management – All
- Power, Energy, Engineering
- High level Finance and Accounting skills
- Technicians and Trade
- Health Professionals
- Banking Professionals
- Teaching Professionals

Q. How do you deliver client work elsewhere in Africa?

A. As an emerging, aggressive market this always poses a problem. Knowing the lie of the land helps, being able to speak several African languages is an asset, knowing where to “put the word out” in SADAC regions, neighbouring states, being “well connected”, understanding demographics and where and how to approach source bases, where to advertise when necessary. Networking through our partners throughout Glasford International and also selecting independent researchers.

Target Search in the future, with the assistance of Glasford International, intends increasing its reach to West, East and sub-Saharan Africa, thus creating an Africa Division in the wake of increasing demand from multi-national corporate clients in the Banking, Retail, FMCG, Mining as well as Construction, Telecoms and Petroleum sectors. The countries with the most jobs include Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Botswana, Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, Tanzania and Mauritius.

Q. What would be your key advice to organisations establishing a direct presence in Africa?

A. The staging of the World Cup in South Africa – a first for Africa – has and will result in opportunities amongst various sectors. To participate in the upsurge organisations also need to contribute. You see, South Africa is different in that your contribution will result in a return on investment, be it economically or socially. It is a given that South Africa is a friendly country, and well organised as the world now has seen via the World Cup. With any organisation start up, I would highly suggest pre-feasibility studies, geographical knowledge, territorial favour, etc.

Q. Boston Consulting Group (BCG) have just produced a report on the "economic awakening of Africa" by highlighting 40 fast-growth African companies with global aspirations. It seems like you are located in what will be exciting place to be commercially?

A. Yes, there has been a perception in the past that we have been “neglected” by world powers previously but this paradigm is fast shifting amidst our new country branding and international successes. We are being recognised now as a High Potential Market. This realisation can generate attractive returns as Sub-Saharan Africa is being widely recognised as a most profitable investment destination. It does, according to the World Bank’s 2003 Global Finance Development report, “offer the highest returns on foreign investments of any region in the world”.

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