

Executive Search Firm for Public Relations and Marketing Industries



Sandy Charet
President

CEOCFO: Ms. Charet, what is the concept for the company?

Ms. Charet: Charet Associates is a specialty executive search firm for the public relations and marketing industries specifically.

CEOCFO: Was that the idea from the beginning or more opportunistic?

Ms. Charet: My first job was in those industries and it was interesting enough to remain in all these years. Professional communicators are special people to work with because their attitudes, presentation, style, chemistry, and all those personal factors are very important in finding the right PR person. The right type of person differs from industry group to industry group because each industry requires its own type of person. If you know C++, you might be able to work for a law firm or a medical device company, but it is not that way with PR and marketing.

CEOCFO: Do you find that PR people are better at presenting themselves?

Ms. Charet: PR people have to be good presenters. But the presentation style has to match up with who you're presenting to. If it's the latest lipstick colors, you'll obviously need someone fashionable and pretty. If it's to a CEO of a big industrial company, maybe confidence and certainty is important. If you're presenting to employees it would be something else that works. A great PR person knows when to answer, when not to answer. A good PR person often advises others on how to present but may not have to themselves. Many great PR people are in the background advising senior-level executives and don't get into the limelight themselves.

CEOCFO: What types of companies turn to you for services?

Ms. Charet: I work with all industries from consumer packaged goods to technology and large industrial companies to management consulting firms and the financial sector

When I first got into the industry public relations was very new. I worked with mostly the largest PR firms and the very largest companies in the world, such as IBM, Sony, Citibank and General Electric. Things have changed so much, especially in the last five or 10 years with LinkedIn, social media and online job boards. Now, people find out about openings so easily and the companies can find out about people easily too. The very large agencies are large enough to have their own HR recruiting team, and large corporations also have internal recruiters who comb through LinkedIn daily for possible candidates. The "talent acquisition manager" is a very common job in mid and large-size companies. This has caused my portfolio of clients to shift somewhat. Now I work with smaller companies and start-ups. When the PR department is too small to have a recruiter that understands the field, they will call on me.

A talent acquisition manager will search through keywords without a real understanding of what a marketing or PR person needs to be able to do. They don't know the best firms, the best campaigns, or the subtleties of the work. So, very often I get called in when the internal recruiter has been unsuccessful in finding the right candidate. We've come full circle and now there are new difficulties that companies suffer in the hiring process. Too many resumes to deal with and great people being passed over.

CEOCFO: Are many of the companies you work with coming to you because they recognize the importance of having the right PR person or is it more that they cannot find someone to fill the position?

Ms. Charet: I think the former. I think it has become very easy to find people yet companies come to me when they are at a loss because they have advertised on their own or had their own HR recruiter work on it, a lot of time has gone by without the right candidate and suddenly they find themselves in a crunch. They have to bring in a specialist who can quickly identify and recruit the right people.

CEOCFO: *When you are working with a company, how do you understand what they really need in contrast to what they think they need?*

Ms. Charet: That comes from understanding the person I am talking to and the qualities of the PR department, my understanding of the company. Then of course understanding the common problems and needs of a PR department.

I think sometimes our clients know what they want but they don't have a clue where to find it or if someone like that exists. My understanding of what they need comes from many years of working with similar companies.

CEOCFO: *What is your process and how is your approach different and better?*

Ms. Charet: People often think of executive recruiters as slick sales people who will talk you into taking a job. Sure, the ability to sell is important in every job, but I am only interested in selling something that will work beautifully for both sides. I try to get under the skin of my client and the candidate, and I really listen to people and make sure I understand what the important bottom lines are. Sometimes it's important because it's different than what you have now...but that doesn't mean it's what you're going for. I can take the time to understand these all important things because I specialize in this small area of PR and marketing. If I worked across all different industries, I would not have as deep an understanding of it and wouldn't be able to go deeper.

I don't have to rely on the right words on the resume, but I can read into the language the person uses on their resume. My approach comes through listening and understanding, and I do not think most recruiters do that. I'm actually not a great salesperson, so thankfully I have a lot of repeat business and word of mouth.

Some places don't put the time and concern into hiring, like I do. If they don't make it important, then they are the wrong clients for me.

"We have a very high-touch approach to the business and do a lot more than just matching a resume to a job. We are finding the right people who are going to solve our client's problems and improve their business." - Sandy Charet

CEOCFO: *How do you work with candidates and what is the key to evaluating?*

Ms. Charet: Most of the time, I use LinkedIn even though have over 10,000 records in my database of people I have spoken to over the years. I use my database for sure, but LinkedIn is an incredibly powerful tool for recruiters.

The amount of research that I do on every person that I find through LinkedIn is deep enough so that I know that any person that I actually reach out to is going to be right for the job.

Some recruiters may send out bulk emails on LinkedIn but I spend a great deal of time figuring out if you're perfect for the job and if you are, I make it my business to get in touch with you.

I evaluate them by assessing their writing skill first. I've got their resume and their cover letter as well as whatever I can find on the web. PR and marketing people have to be expert communicators so I look for writing first. Then I use what I call my 'reality meter'. I look for people who are REAL. I give high points to people who can engage with me, are interested, curious and have good manners. These are important things for everyone but for PR people, relationship building is paramount so I look for that.

CEOCFO: *When you see someone's picture on LinkedIn, how does that affect your judgment?*

Ms. Charet: I wish I could say to you that I am agnostic about all the pictures, but I am not. It does have a tremendous affect. Interestingly, in my business PR and marketing people are often representatives of their company and so they know how important it is to have a professional photo.

PR people are really experts at understanding the impact of social media so they if they fail on their own photo, they've lost me. Personal photos with a boyfriend or girlfriend, holding a drink or even their cat...it's just not right. I use an app with outlook that pulls pictures and basic public information about people when I type in their email address. Nowadays, even if you keep a professional photo on LinkedIn, you have to think about where your personal life leaks through.

I think a really professional photograph on LinkedIn is important. I can actually tell a lot from a person's face—I note if they are wearing makeup, if it's a sporty picture, I notice if they are smiling. I search through LinkedIn by using certain words or and sometimes go through 2 or 300 responses. If there is no photo, it's likely that I won't even consider you.

CEOCFO: *What is next for the company?*

Ms. Charet: I would like to start a specialized freelance service. I think it is very much needed, and it would be based around this level of specialty because I think there are many companies out there that have work their own staff cannot handle. But they don't give it out because it takes so much time to explain the company and the project to a new person that it's not worth it. If I were able to find people who have talent as well as knowledge in that very specific area – well, I think that would be very worthwhile.

CEOCFO: *Put it all together. Why choose Charet Associates?*

Ms. Charet: Because we do have a very deep understanding of the industry and what is successful. I understand where to go to find the best and how to evaluate them. I put a lot of care into how I handle the people I work with so I work deeper and smarter. We have a very high-touch approach to the business and do a lot more than just matching a resume to a job. We are finding the right people who are going to solve our client's problems and improve their business. A wrong hire can be a disaster for everyone so I take the time to make sure it's right.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

Charet **& ASSOCIATES**

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