

Diana Mota



Looking to Core Competencies when Hiring International Credit Professionals

Finding qualified credit employees can be a challenge. It's often a balance between finding someone with the right skills and who also will fit well with your firm's culture. To make the process a bit easier, it helps to know exactly what you need and express that in a well-written job description that attracts the right person.

In particular, finding someone to handle international accounts can become even more difficult. "These are not easy positions to fill," said Leslie Harrison, director of membership, staffing and HR for NACM Connect. Harrison recruits for NACM member companies in Ohio, Illinois and Missouri. Most jobs she fills are not 100% international, she explained. "The scope of international is about 20%."

Harrison and others in the credit field shared some thoughts about what they look for when hiring credit professionals for international accounts. FCIB Board of Advisors and European Advisory Council also developed a new list of core competencies available on the FCIB website (www.fcibglobal.com). The list is meant to serve as a guide and not be exhaustive. Among the topics covered are keeping abreast of issues within global trade credit and risk management.

What It Takes

Hiring requirements vary from company to company, Harrison noted. Some companies handle international accounts from a desk, while others expect credit professionals to travel to the countries they cover. Expectations for travel can range from once a year to multiple times, she said. "It depends on where the issues are." For example, Asia is currently a hotspot that requires more travel, she pointed out.

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Prospects have to be willing and able to travel. "If they haven't experienced international travel, they need to understand the impact it can have on them," she cautioned. "It's quite a grind." Oftentimes traveling to the country isn't the issue. It's the return trip home that often hits people hard because of the time change.



International credit managers have to have experience in international markets, Harrison continued. It's one area that the companies she works with "won't give an inch," she added. "It's not enough to understand letters of credit. They have to have real general interest in other people and cultures. Employers want to know that [the candidate] understands cultural differences." Flexibility is another important trait. International markets don't follow a 9-5 day. "Sometimes, it means getting up as early as 4 a.m.," she said.

Certification, such as FCIB's Certified International Credit Professional, also comes into play. "Anyone with an international certification rises to the top of the list," she emphasized. Certification doesn't just signify an expectation of knowledge. It shows a credit professional's commitment to and interest in his or her field, Harrison explained.

For an account executive, knowing a country's language is not typically on the list of dire requirements. The higher up you go, the more likely the people he or she interacts with will speak English, she explained. "In lower level positions such as a credit analyst speaking the country's language becomes important. Someone working in a customer's accounts payable department likely will not speak English."

Filling these positions is a challenge because it's a big commitment, Harrison said. "It's all about quality of life. [A candidate] really has to be willing to commit to a job with an international market. For the right person, at the right time, it's a truly rewarding experience. You make relationships around the world."

Core Competencies

When Gary Gaudette CCE, ICCE, senior treasury analyst for Hypertherm, Inc. and NACM chairman, fills these positions he looks for someone with *core competencies*. “I sort of view core competencies as the makeup of who we are,” Gaudette said. “They are different than skills.” Skills are specific items that are taught and learned, whereas core competencies “are part of the beliefs and value systems we have, and how we apply these to our roles as credit professionals.”

“I can teach people how to rate the creditworthiness of a customer, or how to manage collections activities,” he continued. “To a degree, I can also teach someone what it means to be customer focused, but I think a person needs to have a strong internal desire to serve others, to fix problems for them, to think about how a decision today impacts that customer relationship over the long term, and to think about the many other aspects that may not be immediately obvious to the current situation.”

Gaudette looks for people with those traits first. He believes that if they have those traits then they will do well even if they don’t initially possess some of the technical skills required for the position. For the most part, this is true for domestic or international credit positions, he said. Doing business internationally, however, adds to the complexities of managing credit accounts. For these positions, he also looks for someone able to work across borders and boundaries.

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They will likely encounter very different views and beliefs as they interact with people from other countries and cultures. “You need to be able to recognize and be respectful of these differences, but you cannot let them impact your integrity,” Gaudette said. “Procedures, policies, and even laws are not going to be as effective as someone with a high integrity competency in ensuring the right things are being done.”

For Ed Bell, CBA, ICCE, senior manager, credit administration for W.W. Grainger, Inc., core competencies cover three areas: interpersonal, knowledge and personal.

Interpersonal skills include the following:

- Ability to lead and manage a diverse workforce
- Tolerance and understanding of different cultures
- Cultural networking skills
- Ability to develop and convey a clear vision
- Capacity for managing uncertainty and conflict in the global environment

Knowledge includes:

- International knowledge
- Business and industry savvy

- Best practice standards
- Technology savvy
- Cultural and cross-cultural awareness
- Global risk management

Personal involves:

- Passion for the profession
- Continuous learning
- Personal development
- Drive and desire

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“There are obviously many specific tasks, skills and responsibilities that an international credit manager must be able to know and perform such as financial acumen and good communication skills,” Bell added. “However, I have found that people who possess these basic competencies tend to perform the best.” ■

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For FCIB’s list of suggested guidelines on core competencies for international credit professionals, newly developed by its Board of Advisors and European Advisory Council, visit <http://fcibglobal.com/education-professional-designation/core-competencies.html>

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