

Strategic Talent Acquisition for Start-ups: A Case Study of HK Engineering (BMD Dealership, South India)

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Abstract- HK Engineering is an early-stage dealership start up marketing BMD manufacturers' earth-moving equipment across South India. The proprietor — an engineer by training — is currently managing operations end-to-end and struggling to scale. This case study examines recent talent-acquisition trends and proposes a pragmatic, low-cost, high-impact hiring strategy that helps HK Engineering acquire the right technical, sales and operational talent in the right locations while minimising risk and time-to-productivity. Recommendations combine skills-based hiring, recruitment marketing, lightweight HR tech, employee referral and flexible staffing models tailored for an SME operating in South India.

I. BACKGROUND / CONTEXT

HK Engineering operates as a dealership (sales, servicing, parts, on-site demos) for BMD heavy equipment across multiple districts in South India. As demand and geography grow, the proprietor confronts three linked people problems: (1) lack of time to run day-to-day and recruit; (2) difficulty finding technicians, field sales, and service managers with domain skills; (3) limited brand visibility to attract candidates beyond personal networks.

Start-ups in niche industrial sectors face the challenge of filling technically demanding frontline roles quickly and affordably. Recent global and Indian recruiting trends (AI-assisted sourcing, skills-first hiring, recruitment marketing, and referral programmes) provide practical levers for small employers to compete with larger firms for quality hires.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

How can HK Engineering recruit the right mix of technicians, field sales executives, and a small management team with limited HR bandwidth, constrained budget, and the need for rapid time-to-productivity across multiple South Indian locations?

III. LITERATURE / TREND SUMMARY (KEY FINDINGS THAT INFORM THE STRATEGY)

1. Skills-based hiring is rising — companies are increasingly prioritising demonstrable skills and assessments over credentials alone, improving match quality for hands-on roles. This is particularly useful for technician and service positions where practical tests outperform degree filters.
2. AI and automation improve sourcing & recruiter efficiency — AI-assisted messaging, screening chatbots, and affordable Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) boost recruiter productivity and candidate response rates — beneficial when the proprietor cannot dedicate many hours to hiring.
3. Recruitment marketing & social media matter for small employers — authentic employer branding on LinkedIn, WhatsApp groups, and regional job boards expands reach cost-effectively in India. Localised content attracts candidates who value proximity and hands-on experience.
4. Employee referrals and local networks yield higher retention and lower cost — referral hires tend to stay longer and fit culture better, an advantage for small teams where retention is critical. Structured referral rewards are a low-tech lever.
5. Flexible staffing (contractors, apprentices, campus tie-ups) — using contract technicians, apprenticeships with polytechnics, and short-term hires helps cover seasonal peaks without long-term payroll burden.

IV. METHODOLOGY (HOW THE CASE STUDY WAS PREPARED)

- Rapid review of 2024–2025 talent-acquisition literature and industry briefs (LinkedIn, Mercer, WEF, SHRM, Indian press).

- Practical filtering for SME constraints (small budget, limited HR time, regional hiring).
- Designed an actionable 90-day and 6-month plan with measurable KPIs for HK Engineering.

V. RECOMMENDED TALENT-ACQUISITION STRATEGY (ACTIONABLE PLAN)

1) Define micro-roles and skills (Week 0–1)

Create crisp role profiles focusing on skills and outputs (not long degree lists). Example roles:

- Field Service Technician — required: hydraulic systems troubleshooting, on-site welding, 6 months field test (practical task).
- Territory Sales Executive — required: 2+ years B2B sales or equipment sales, territory mapping, demo coordination.
- Parts & Inventory Coordinator — basic MS Excel, parts identification, supplier liaison.

Use short, skills-based checklists in job ads and shortlist by practical evidence (certificates, short video demo, or a 30-minute practical task)

2) Quick HR tech stack (Week 1–4)

- Adopt an affordable ATS/free tier (Zoho Recruit, Fresh team, or regional alternatives) to centralise applicants.
- Use simple skills tests (Test Gorilla / short practical assignments) for technician and sales roles to reduce bias and screen faster.
- Implement an AI-assisted outreach template for LinkedIn/WhatsApp to scale messaging; keep messages personal and role-specific.

3) Recruitment marketing & local sourcing (Week 2–8)

- Publish concise, skills-focused job posts on Naukri, Indeed India, LinkedIn, and regional Facebook/WhatsApp groups.
- Run micro-campaigns: short testimonial videos of service visits, day-in-life reels, and images of equipment in action to build credibility. Use proprietor and current employees as storytellers.

4) Employee referral + campus partnerships (Week 2–12)

- Launch a structured referral program with small cash or service incentives. Promote during dealer visits and vendor meetings. Referrals are high-yield for field roles.
- Tie up with local polytechnics/ITI centres for apprenticeships; host a half-day practical test or

workshop to identify talent. Offer 3-6 month traineeships converting top performers to paid technicians.

5) Flexible hiring & RPO-lite (Month 1–3)

- For urgent shortfalls, hire contract technicians via local staffing partners or freelance platforms to maintain service levels.
- If hiring volume grows, consider a limited Recruitment Process Outsourcing (RPO) engagement for a defined window (e.g., recruit first 10 staff) — cheaper than full-time recruiter.

6) Structured selection & on boarding (ongoing)

- Use a consistent interview scorecard (skills task, cultural fit, logistics/availability), with defined pass-marks.
- Two-week accelerated on boarding: shadowing, checklist of 10 core tasks, buddy system, and immediate field exposure. First-month milestones reduce early attrition.

7) Upskilling & retention (Month 3–6)

- Allocate small learning budget for vendor product training and hands-on certifications (could be co-sponsored by BMD manufacturer).
- Quarterly review + pathway to promotion (lead technician → service manager). Internal mobility reduces hire needs.

Sample 90-day implementation roadmap (high level)

- Days 1–7: Role definitions, scorecards, ATS setup.
- Days 8–21: Launch jobs on platforms, referral programme, and campus outreach. Begin AI-assisted messaging.
- Days 22–45: Screen with skills tests, hold practical assessment days, and make first offers (3–6 hires).
- Days 46–90: On-board hires, set KPIs, start apprenticeship batch, evaluate sourcing channels and optimize.

Key performance indicators (KPIs)

- Time-to-fill per role (target: 21–45 days for field roles).
- Offer acceptance rate (target $\geq 70\%$).
- 90-day retention rate (target $\geq 80\%$ for hires).
- Cost-per-hire (compare referral vs job portal).
- First-month productivity score vs predefined checklist.

Expected benefits for HK Engineering

- Faster, higher-quality hiring by prioritising demonstrable skills over credentials.
- Lower recruiting burden on proprietor through automation, ATS, and referral leverage.
- Improved retention and reduced training time via apprenticeships and vendor-led upskilling.

Risks & mitigation

- Risk: Small budget limits paid marketing.
- Mitigation: Emphasise organic channels — WhatsApp, vendor networks, referral incentives.
- Risk: Overreliance on credentials may exclude good technicians.
- Mitigation: Use practical skill tests and apprenticeship pipelines.

VI. CONCLUSION

For an SME dealership like HK Engineering, the optimal recruitment approach is pragmatic and skills-centric: define micro-roles, use inexpensive HR tech and AI-assisted sourcing to reduce proprietor time, leverage referrals and local campus pipelines for frontline roles, and use short apprenticeships and vendor training to build competency rapidly. These measures align with 2024–25 global and Indian talent trends and are tailored to the realities of field service and equipment sales in South India.

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