



CASE STUDY

GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION OF DECENTRALISED
FTSE 100 COMPANY DS SMITH

1st Executive

GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION OF DECENTRALISED FTSE 100 COMPANY

DS Smith | Global Packaging | Employees: 30k | Turnover: £6.8bn

Following consistent outperformance, 1st Executive progressed from one of three suppliers on a competitive PSL to becoming DS Smith's exclusive partner for procurement, supply chain and logistics talent across Europe, UK and increasingly the US. Also recruiting for sustainability and broader roles across operations.

THE CHALLENGE

Following rapid expansion and M&A activity, DS Smith recognised decentralisation across business units, countries, and regions. To address this, they launched a global transformation project to centralise operations, creating an urgent need for skilled talent with strong stakeholder management capabilities to 'win hearts and minds' and deliver change.

THE MARKET POSED SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES:

- Demand for top talent was high, with candidates receiving multiple offers and substantial salary increases
- Existing employees often earned less than incoming hires, requiring DS Smith to address internal pay disparities
- As a primarily B2B brand, DS Smith lacked the immediate recognition of consumer-facing companies, making it harder to attract talent
- HR had utilised all available internal resources, resulting in their desire to partner with us

THE SOLUTION

1st Executive became a trusted strategic partner, embedding deeply with DS Smith's HR and hiring teams to address those challenges.

Collectively, we:

- Conducted detailed salary benchmarking across specialisms and regions to inform DS Smith's remuneration strategy
- Developed a compelling sales pack and employer value proposition in partnership with HR to position DS Smith competitively in the talent market
- Engaged directly with hiring managers to understand each role's nuances and the ideal candidate competencies
- Conducted comprehensive competency-based interviews, presenting only the most qualified candidates
- Ensured a smooth end-to-end hiring process for candidates and hiring managers alike, including ongoing communication and management (pre & post start), interview prep and feedback calls, and presented offers to ensure high acceptance rates



THE RESULTS

- ⌚ Filled 74% of all roles assigned; the remaining 26% were filled through internal promotions or direct applicants
- ⌚ Placed over 50 professionals across Eastern Europe, Western Europe the US, and UK covering roles from graduates to senior leadership positions
- ⭐ Candidates placed by 1st Executive have shown rapid career progression and strong retention within DS Smith
- 👤 Established collaborative and enduring relationships with HR and hiring managers, contributing to DS Smith's transformation success

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1st Executive have supported us with the Procurement & Supply Chain Transformation in DS Smith, making sure we create the A-player team in the Procurement function by providing us with the greatest candidates in the market.

DSS – HR Business Partner

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1st Executive are a team who find and deliver special talent. Understanding the client's culture, ways of working and what type of person will be a good fit. This drives a high success rate in landing capable procurement professionals.

DSS – Chief Procurement Officer

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Not many people understand 100% what you need and certainly not in a timely manner, but 1st Executive surely do, going beyond this to provide valuable input delivering stronger processes.

DSS - Head of Procurement - Centre of Excellence

1stExecutive



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