VIGIE INSIGHTS

How do you recruit top refs?

For a marketplace team, “top refs”, the handful of products that account for most of a category’s sales, are also the hardest ones to land. In an uncertain environment, and without a way to assess the real value of these products, the temptation is strong to settle for the ones that seem easier to onboard. Everyone works hard and feels the catalog is growing, yet the GMV results turn out to be disappointing.

How can a manager change the game and help the team recruit the future top refs that make the difference?



vigie

Why top refs slip through your fingers

THE BALANCE OF POWER BETWEEN MARKETPLACES AND SELLERS HAS SHIFTED

The best sellers are flooded with requests from marketplaces, as competition grows ever fiercer. **Marketplaces no longer choose their sellers: sellers choose their marketplaces.** For the Business Development team, sending an email is no longer enough to recruit. This is hard for teams to accept, as they don't know how else to go about it. They write to sellers as if they were doing them a favor. The seller, meanwhile, wonders what one more marketplace will bring them, and so doesn't reply.

HANDLING INBOUND REQUESTS INSTEAD OF HUNTING

Unsolicited applications from sellers who want to join the marketplace come in on their own, and it is tempting to settle for them. Under the guise of "responding properly" to every request, "taking care of our sellers" or even "not missing an opportunity", teams take the time to talk with each one. Yet a seller with time to knock on every door is rarely one who sells a lot elsewhere. **Settling for inbound requests means letting whichever sellers are available define your offer instead of your customers.**

YOU CAN'T CHOOSE WELL... BUT YOU CHOOSE ANYWAY

Without precise data on how a product performs in the market, it is hard to persevere in recruiting a top ref. After all, why put so much effort into it if you are not even sure of its potential? This is the start of a vicious circle. **Without a quantified view of the market, the team struggles to choose. But since it has to move forward, it falls back on the sellers who said yes, even if that means taking the bottom of the barrel.** Yet onboarding a seller with low commercial value takes as much work as onboarding an excellent one. While you polish some sellers' product pages, you miss out on others. The catalog grows, but not necessarily the GMV, and the gap with the market widens.

AND WHEN IT DOESN'T WORK... YOU TURN TO ADVERTISING

When the numbers aren't there, the reflex is to buy visibility. And to decide which products to promote, you naturally rely on what you know: your own sales figures. As a result, you give even more weight to what already works, but this does not help you become known for new offers. In the long run, the risk is reinforcing the marketplace's image around its historical categories, the exact opposite of the diversification goal.

Taking back control: four levers to activate as a team

LEVER #1

THE PROCESS: DECIDE, TRACK, ADJUST

Once you have spent time on a seller or a product page, it is hard to let go: it would mean admitting you were wrong. So you keep pushing. This reaction is understandable, but it is up to the manager to put processes in place to avoid this trap.

Your teams cannot make the right choices without the data to justify them and to measure the effort they deserve. Every product added to the catalog is the result of a decision. If the criteria are vague, the choices will be too.

We each have our own Excel file, and we don't always remember what we discussed about a particular seller.

Testimonial from the Head of Business Development at a marketplace

Give your teams the data and the method they need to make objective decisions. Not every choice will be a winner, but everyone will know why it was made. You can then drop an unpromising lead without drama and move on.

Recruiting a top ref is not something you improvise between two emergencies. The weekly team meeting is a key moment to set the pace: share the opportunities identified, rank them by potential and assign responsibilities. Everyone commits to handling one or more targets. Follow-up matters just as much: has the seller been chased? Where does the discussion stand? Why was it dropped?

Keeping a record of decisions and the reasons behind them helps you stay focused on the top refs to win, without spreading efforts too thin.

LEVER #2

TARGETING THE RIGHT SELLERS

Customers buy a product, not a seller. So the first target is the product: the one the market wants and your catalog is missing.

Once that product has been identified, there are several ways to get it:

- Recruit the seller who offers it on a competing marketplace.
- Find another seller of the same product if the first one doesn't respond.
- Convince an existing partner seller to add it to their offer.

Having precise data on demand and on the commercial potential of each product is essential to know what to go after, from whom, and with how much effort

LEVER #3

FINDING THE RIGHT CONTACTS

Not all sellers are approached the same way. For some, a few emails will do. For others, you need to identify the right contact and bring in the right people internally. Some sellers have grown so large, with tens of millions of euros in revenue, that the conversation has to happen between executives. Deciding who should talk to whom, even before the first contact, is part of the recruitment strategy.

LEVER #4

HITTING THE MARK WITH THE RIGHT PITCH

Then comes what to say. Today, too many teams show up empty-handed, with a single argument: “we would like to have your products.” They cannot explain to the seller why they chose them, or what they stand to gain by joining.

A convincing pitch rests on concrete elements:

- The revenue the seller can expect over the first six to twelve months, estimated from sales of comparable products.
- The products in their catalog that interest you, and why those ones.
- What your marketplace can offer them beyond the ones where they already sell.

But numbers aren’t everything: how you present them matters just as much.

These four levers require reliable data, a method and a follow-up that few teams have the time to build on their own. Vigie gives them that structure.

VIGIE, A GROWTH MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR MARKETPLACES

Every Monday, the marketplace team receives a selection of high-GMV-potential opportunities, qualified and quantified. For each opportunity, it has what it needs to decide where to focus its efforts, identify which sellers to approach and build a convincing pitch.

Behind these recommendations, an infrastructure of AI agents collects, structures, normalizes and analyzes e-commerce data at product level. Teams no longer have to guess which products are the top refs in their category, or how much revenue they could generate on their own marketplace.

With Vigie, prospecting becomes a structured process managed over time: teams know which products to go after, from whom, why and with which arguments.

About us

Founded in 2016 by Karl Leicht, Vigie is an innovative french company specialized in marketplace growth management.

OUR MISSION

To help our clients compete with the e-commerce giants on an (almost) level playing field.

HOW WE DO IT ?

By combining real-time market visibility with real-time product-level granularity, we created a genuine marketplace steering system: one that gives business development and account management teams a much clearer sense of where to focus, when to adjust course, and where the opportunities are.

CONTACT US

karl@vigie.co

