

Attracting talent

Well-designed career sites improve recruiting effectiveness, even in a down economy

For the past few months, recruiting may have been the last thing on many employers' minds given the current state of the economy. But the recently passed stimulus plan could create a need for rapid hiring in selected industries. However, the resourcefulness, innovative thinking, and productivity that proven talent brings to an organization are needed now more than ever in any industry. The question is: How can your organization find such talent?

Many talented job seekers rely on the Internet as a fast and efficient means to search for, screen, and connect with potential employers. Developing a new corporate career site or refreshing an established one may be just what your organization needs to grab job seekers' attention and set you apart from your competition.

This paper:

- Identifies seven key recruiting challenges and looks at how an informative and user-friendly career site can address each one.
- Poses questions about your organization's workforce needs and recruiting efforts as related to the challenges and solutions presented here.

Building an optimal career site

Given the uncertainties of today's economy, many employers need to find the right applicants as quickly as the applicants need to find the right position. A job search of any length can present challenges for both the prospective employer and the applicant.

Challenge #1: Some job seekers may never find your postings, either because they get lost on your own company website or because your postings don't show up in search engine results.

Solution #1: The link from your company's main site to the career site must be highly visible. Even the best career site is less than optimal if prospective employees can't easily get to it.

Web usability studies show that if job seekers become frustrated in their website search for an organization's posted openings, they are more likely to move on to the next organization's site. Your job listings must be easy to find and your career site must be easy to navigate. In addition, your organization should consider establishing a presence on social networking sites like LinkedIn and Facebook as a means of leading prospects to your career page. Doing so provides information to applicants on their "turf" — while still giving you control over the message. It also allows applicants to ask questions and get feedback.

On the other hand, many job seekers know exactly what kind of job they want and how to access postings of such jobs. They use search engines such as Google to facilitate and speed up their searches. It is important that your organization's job postings appear in the results pages of Google and other search engines when these users enter terms typically associated with your job postings. A search engine optimization expert can help create search engine keyword coding.

Keywords can be related to industry-specific or job-specific skills (for example, project management, communication or marketing) and technology-specific skills (for example, proficiency in Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint). In addition, keywords can contain actual job titles, certifications, degrees, company names, and locations. Keyword searches can be built into your career site to allow users to search using terms relevant to them.

Challenge #2: Disconnects between what organizations communicate during the interview process on such topics as job description, company culture, and values and what new employees actually experience are among the top reasons for turnover (Monster 2007). The average cost of replacing an employee in his or her first year is three times starting salary (Wynhurst Group 2007).

Solution #2: Effective career sites provide prospective employees with information to help them determine if the company is likely to be a good fit before they start work. Your career site can highlight corporate and departmental cultures, team member profiles and a sense of diversity through video messages from employees and senior leadership. By showcasing your organization's culture through an upfront and personal approach, you can provide insight into the organization's commitment to inclusiveness, work/life balance and other employer-of-choice characteristics. In addition to employee testimonials, career sites can also incorporate regular messages from executives on key business news and initiatives.

Telling the company story in a high tech/high touch way

- Blogs, podcasts, and videos can all be used to incorporate testimonials from employees and senior leadership into your career site. Each can be used differently.
- Blogs serve as candid, real-world forums for commentary and opinions on various subjects. For example, employee blogs can help enhance recruitment efforts by positioning the organization as a thought leader. Likewise, blogs can help give job seekers a feel for the company's culture.
- Podcasting is a relatively new trend that allows Web users to download multimedia files — both audio and video — to iPods, other MP3 players and cell phones. Increasingly, employers are using podcasting on their career sites as a way to catch recruits' attention and address the issues that are important to them.
- With the advent of YouTube, Internet videos have become popular. Video clips featuring employees, management, and CEOs, as well as interactive tours of company locations, provide applicants with a preview of what they can expect at the company. For example, the police department of a large Canadian city makes very effective use of both Facebook and YouTube to communicate what it is like to work there as well as in specific positions.
- Participation in social networks like LinkedIn and Facebook provide a contemporary way to reach out to new recruits and provide easy paths to your official career site. Social networking can also provide your in-house recruiters with a means of researching and reaching out to top talent.

Challenge #3: Job seekers' perspectives and preferences differ.

Solution #3: It is not uncommon today for up to four generations to work together nor is it uncommon for each generation to see the world quite differently. Each generation's work-related perspectives and preferences were likely shaped by different demographic, economic, and social trends. Your career site should reflect this reality.

It's not enough to just provide information; an effective career site must communicate with those accessing it about issues that matter to them. Therefore, including information relevant to each employee group is a best practice. This can be achieved by setting up different sections of the website to address particular topics, such as relocation benefits or community amenities. Remember, a career site should have a personal feel. It should be focused on the prospective employees and talk "to" or, better yet, "with" them as opposed to talking "about" them.

Challenge #4: Like employees, job applicants don't always appreciate the total value of working for an employer.

Solution #4: The content posted on a career site should follow the practice of "show, don't tell." For example, the career site could provide sample total rewards summaries for specific positions filled by someone with "xx" years of experience and a "y" level of education and list each employer-provided benefit and work/life perk that employee may receive.

This listing could help prospective employees see beyond cash compensation to the value of their total compensation. Tools can even be made available to help applicants see how much the company would spend on each program as well as how much various benefit elections would cost them personally. Side-by-side charts can then help job seekers see how your program stacks up against former employers and against the competition.

With fewer available jobs than jobseekers, employers will receive many applications for each open position, some from applicants who are not qualified. How can organizations efficiently screen all these applications and how can they encourage those applicants not chosen to reapply for other positions in the future?

Challenge #5: In this economy, most applicants may be applying for many different positions at once at your organization and others. A cumbersome online application process can drive applicants to another employer's site before completing your process.

Solution #5: Candidates with the experience and skills your organization needs will be more likely to apply online if you make the process as user-friendly as possible. One best practice is to reduce the amount of data applicants must enter. For example, applications can automatically be tagged with the appropriate job reference rather than requiring applicants to insert that information. Another way to reduce the data entry task is to provide applicants with the ability to save their resumes and other information in your system for a predetermined period of time. If an applicant applies for more than one position, or other positions at a later date, the applications can be automatically populated.

Challenge #6: With fewer available jobs than job-seekers, employers will receive many applications for each open position, some from applicants who are not qualified. How can organizations efficiently screen all these applications and how can they encourage those applicants not chosen to reapply for other positions in the future?

Solution #6: Online pre-assessment tools that ask applicants to answer certain questions about themselves (for example, whether or not they have a certain type of degree or a certain number of years of experience) can help employers narrow the number of applicants to a more manageable pool.

Once candidates have been identified, a job notification feature can notify the applicants not chosen via email or RSS (really simple syndication) feed when new openings have been posted. In this way, the applicants who were not chosen for the current opening are still encouraged to apply for positions in the future.

Challenge #7: Many employers have been forced to lay off employees they would have preferred to keep and would hope to rehire in the future. How can a career site help an organization maintain contact with former employees?

Questions for employers

- As part of the job application process, does your organization ask candidates how they found out about the position for which they are applying (i.e., through your career site, newspaper or trade publication advertising, job fair, word of mouth, etc.)?
- Do you track the percentages of job seekers who apply each year online versus by mail? If so, have these percentages changed recently?
- If your organization already has a career site, do you have a means for tracking visits to it?
- Does your career site clearly and consistently communicate your organization's culture to employees and job seekers?
If so, how?
- Have you designed your career site to appeal to the demographic categories you have identified as targets?
- Does your organization's website communicate the "value" of the benefits it provides to employees compared to other organizations in the same industry and by all other employers in the same region?
- What is the average amount of time spent screening applications? Has it increased or decreased in the last 12 months?
- Are you finding that greater numbers of job seekers are applying for positions for which they are either under- or overqualified? Does your career site include screening questions to narrow the pool?
- As part of your screening process, do you identify applicants whose experience, although not suited for current positions, would qualify them for future openings?
- Do you maintain contact with former employees you might wish to rehire when the economy improves? For instance, do they receive any electronic publications with links to your career site?

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Solution #7: An employee alumni network as a feature on your career site can provide a readily accessible and familiar talent pool when employers are in a position to start rehiring. An alumni network can also keep employers in touch with retired employees and other former employees who may be interested in contract work, who can provide referrals to other qualified talent, or who may become buyers of the products or services your organization offers. To increase use, a network can provide incentives to former employees, including information on access to continuing education and other types of career training.

In addition, organizations should also tap into “unofficial” social networks that their employees and former employees are likely to be already maintaining on LinkedIn or Facebook. It can be a best practice to engage with these unofficial networks by posting news updates, answering questions, correcting errors in a gentle way, providing links to official sources, and the “official” alumni network site. These unofficial networks are generally quite popular. For that reason, they will almost always have more members than an official network. However, by engaging unofficial networks, an organization can direct the audiences they attract to its own company sites while using both official and unofficial platforms to get out its messages.

Conclusion

Placing the right people in the right jobs at the right time always presents an employer with challenges, but a weak economy and the mismatch between supply and demand for talent compounds those challenges. Among them are:

- Competing for top performers, especially if your organization is struggling
- Sorting through an abundance of qualified job seekers to find the best for your organization
- Screening out applications from those who are under- or over-qualified
- Appealing to multiple employee groups with different needs and preferences

A well designed and maintained career site can help your organization effectively work through these challenges. While the site can bring to your attention the talent best suited for positions currently open, it can also identify and maintain contact with other applicants whose experience equips them to contribute to the organization as the economy improves.

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