Developing a More Effective Electronic Recruiting Strategy: What Does the Research Tell Us?

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Winning the talent war is more important than ever, and organizations are increasingly turning to technology, especially the Web, in their fight to attract the top candidates and to support recruiting. Organizations know they need technology to serve more than just a collection bin for applications, but most aren’t sure how to best leverage them. Technology support can be as simple as listing applications on generalized or specialized job boards and as complex as corporate recruiting portals with their back-end capabilities that help manage the recruiting process (candidate relationship management, interview scheduling, reporting, etc.). Estimates have suggested that e-recruiting can reduce cycle time and recruiting costs by as much as 90 percent (Cober et al, 2000). Thus, the question is no longer whether to implement e-recruiting, but instead how to implement an e-recruiting strategy that maximizes recruitment outcomes and minimizes risk. Building upon the work of Johnson (2013) and a review of over 70 scientific studies, we briefly outline eight tips for organizations as they use technology to increase applicant attraction, applicant quality, yields, and enhance their recruiting strategy.

Essentially, the goal of your recruitment portal is to market your organization to highly qualified applicants and to increase the probability that they will apply for open positions. The recruiting portal becomes the face of your organization and, consequently, many applicants will form opinions about who you are based on a quick visit to the company’s website. This is particularly true for applicants who have limited knowledge of your company. Thus, the challenge for many organizations is how to effectively design their portal to reach the most qualified applicants. Research has focused on four key design considerations that affect the quality of the applicant pool and applicant attraction: design, content, interactivity, and fit.

Website Design

**Tip #1: Make your website aesthetically pleasing and easy to navigate. Use multimedia tools to increase applicant engagement with your recruiting portal.**

One of the strongest findings in e-recruiting research is that the look or feel of a website, or its aesthetics, is related to how applicants view an organization’s image and how likely they are to apply for a position. Even unfamiliar organizations were viewed as attractive organizations when they used more pleasing website designs. Developing portals that are playful, interactive, and stylish will increase applicant’s engagement and perception of your organization. In fact, some studies have found that the aesthetics of a website are more important than usability. Without good aesthetics, applicants will spend less time on your website and will be less likely to recall the information. Ignoring aesthetics in your Web design will lead to your company being viewed as less attractive, which may decrease opportunities to hire good candidates.

In addition, **website navigability** affects perceptions of your organization and the likelihood that a candidate will apply. If candidates have problems navigating your website, they will feel less engaged and connected, and as a result, may choose not to apply. Firms should also keep in mind that expectations in regards to aesthetics and usability continue to evolve. With the increasing use of Web 2.0, social tools, and mobile devices, individuals “will judge a potential employer’s website in light of these experiences” (Johnson & Gueutal, 2011, p. 11). For example, companies such as Cummins and GM have developed recruiting apps for smartphones.

Finally, **video** increases realism, relevance and memorability, and can more effectively reach candidates than static Web content can. For example, instead of simply listing the corporate vision and culture, use video interviews or profiles of employees describing what it is like to work with you, or walk through a “day in the life.” For example, Target has developed a series of videos targeting college graduates that talk about what it is like to work in various areas of the company. Given the advances in technology and the use of mobile video, firms no longer have to use a professional studio, but instead can use hand-held devices to quickly film, edit, and post to the Web.

**Website Content**

**Tip #2: Provide applicants with job information, people policies, and cultural information that differentiates your organization.**

The content of your website sends applicants signals about your company’s values, your people policies, and helps applicants assess their likely fit with your culture. Ask yourself what internal practices differentiate you from your competitors, and how can this be communicated through your recruiting portal. Don’t simply provide job-related information and details, but use your recruiting portal to communicate information about organizational culture, employee development opportunities, and compensation and benefits. For example, State Farm has a career section...
dedicated to corporate employees and one for agents. Each section provides information targeted toward the needs of each applicant group and includes employee quotes and testimonials relevant to that group. The more an applicant senses a fit with your organization, the more attracted they will be, and the more likely they will be to apply.

In addition, consider including employee testimonials that emphasize organizational facets such as your culture or the diversity of your company. However, it is important to make sure that these are credible. To increase credibility, include testimonies from a variety of employees and have each employee speak not only about the company, but also about themselves. Candidates don’t want to just hear organizational cheerleaders; they want to hear about how that person fits in the organization and how they feel about working there.

**Interactivity**

**Tip #3:** Use your recruiting website/portal to develop an interactive and rich relationship with job candidates.

Applicants don’t only want to know about your history, culture, and vision. They want to experience it. Two-way communication is especially important; design as if you are engaging in a conversation with them. Slideshows, videos, and games can be used to preview jobs and to highlight company culture. Research has shown that the more a potential applicant is interactively involved in the website, the more attracted they will be to your organization and the more likely they will be to apply.

**Tip #4:** When using social networking tools, apply the same design principles as you do to your traditional recruiting portal.

Social networking sites (SNS) such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook are increasingly being used by organizations, with over 90 percent indicating they use them as part of their recruiting strategy (Swallow, 2012). Unfortunately, only limited scientific research on their use and effectiveness exists. Despite the dearth of scientific research on the use of SNS, the same tips that apply to designing your corporate portal can also apply to your SNS. Maximize your organization’s attractiveness to prospective candidates by communicating the culture and values of the organization and engage in authentic prospect relationships. Finally, make sure someone is dedicated to monitoring and responding to communications on a regular basis.

**Organization and Job Fit**

**Tip #5:** Allow applicants to assess job and organizational fit through your website.

Applicants are using your website to assess their fit with you. Incorporating feedback and customization into your recruiting portal can help potential applicants assess fit. Specifically, organizations who design their websites to more effectively allow applicants to assess degree of fit with the organization are viewed as more attractive employers. One way to apply this concept would be to identify your organization’s core culture and values, and to then develop an online tool that allows applicants to assess how well their interests and values match yours. If an applicant cannot get a sense of their fit with your organization, you will be viewed as a less attractive employer and you may miss out on top talent.

**Tip #6:** Design for a customized user experience.

The dynamic nature of the Web provides opportunities for you to target or customize the experience to applicants. You can enhance the likelihood of applicants better assessing their fit through a customized experience. A customized user experience is associated with greater applicant time on your website, better information recall, and a reduction in the likelihood that a poor-fit applicant will apply. In other words, poor-fitting applicants may self-select out of the recruiting process, resulting in fewer, but better-fitting applicants. This can reduce recruiting overhead, as well as creating a more motivated and attracted applicant pool.

**e-Recruiting and Diversity**

**Tip #7:** To ensure a diverse applicant pool, don’t rely exclusively on online sources for your recruiting efforts.

**Tip #8:** If diversity is a core value of your firm, emphasize it in your recruiting portal.

Many organizations are making diversity a centerpiece of their corporate culture and hiring practices. Research has shown that companies interested in emphasizing diversity should design their site to highlight the value diversity brings to their firm. To increase your attractiveness, consider enhancing your recruiting portal with images of a diverse set of employees, e.g., age, ethnicity, gender, etc., and developing video-based testimonials that come from a diverse set of employees, e.g., age, ethnicity, gender, etc., and developing video-based testimonials that come from individuals with a variety of backgrounds, ethnicities and ages.

An issue that can arise with the use of e-recruiting is that relying on it exclusively can artificially limit the cultural and ethnic diversity of your applicant pool. One of the challenges is that research has found that those from lower social economic backgrounds and minorities are less likely to use computers, the Internet and e-recruiting. In addition, the research is currently mixed in terms of how minorities respond to e-recruiting. Some research found that minorities were less likely to use e-recruiting. But, other
research found that minorities found e-recruiting more attractive because they perceived it as being less discriminatory than traditional forms of recruiting. More research is needed to clearly articulate how those from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds respond to e-recruiting and how organizations can maximize the diversity of their applicant pool. Organizations should carefully assess their recruitment strategies to determine their effects on the diversity of the applicant pool and utilize multiple recruitment channels.

**Conclusion**

Organizations are constantly competing for talent, and e-recruiting has become a central tool in the recruiting game. For many potential applicants, the recruiting portal is their primary source of information about jobs, careers and corporate culture. It is important that portals catch their attention, create connections with them, and clearly communicate company culture and values. Given the potential for adverse impact, organizations should carefully consider the mix of recruitment methods and the diversity of their candidate pool. Applying these tips can increase recruiting portal effectiveness and help organizations compete for top talent.

**References**


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