

A Healthy Cynic's View of Social Media Recruiting

By Dawn Longshaw

WHILE PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS used social networks to find jobs through referrals, the move online has changed the recruitment process considerably. Social media in particular, connects organizations with vast networks of people across a wide range of industry sectors and companies. Without doubt, the utility and efficiencies introduced to the talent acquisition process are commendable.

However, for all the benefits of social media, there are some lingering negatives—most of them rooted in our more traditional organizational moorings. What is needed is a balanced approach to putting the available tools to the best use and a willingness to change our offline processes accordingly.

Let's step back, look at some of the concerns and see how smart business managers and HR practitioners can make the most of both worlds: the virtual and the real.

Branding a Double-Edged Sword

While much is made of the number of 'connections' or 'friends' that social media can bring, its value as an employment branding tool is even greater than its 'database' appeal. That said, the cutting-edge tools of social media can cut both ways. Businesses no longer have sole authority over what is being said; technology has shifted the power of the message from corporate to the people.

Claims which companies make related to employment are being scrutinized. Simply by tapping into their social networks or visiting sites such as glassdoor.com or honestly.com, candidates

are able to validate employment brand statements and value propositions on a 24-7 basis. This holds true even outside the immediate recruitment experience as prospective employees can get 'live' answers on Twitter, Facebook and internet forums to their questions about companies, their management, their recruitment process and the employee experience.

"...nothing connects quite like people."

In today's e-centric world, employment brands are no longer controlled by the corporate point of view. While a transparent online presence should be accompanied by such mission and mandate statements, prospective employees have grown brand savvy and are seeking authenticity rather than corporate propaganda. As a result, job seekers use social media to learn about the culture of your company.

What questions are other applicants asking? What do employees say? How quickly does HR respond to questions on Twitter or Facebook? Given a keyboard and Internet connection, prospectives employee can learn more about a company than imaginable and/or sometimes desirable.

Does your organization live up to the expectations of its online presence? Smart organizations will be those which honestly assess whether what they think they offer is what they truly offer.

Building Better Offline Processes

From a candidate perspective, social media recruiting tools have dramatically changed how job seekers learn about companies and connect with people who work there. Rather than applying for jobs online, the savvy candidates often connect directly with people who work for a company, and, in turn, get connected to the organization.

Unfortunately, most corporate recruiting practices are incongruent with the expectations of these most mobile and motivated members of the candidate pool. Herein lies the greatest peril of social media in the recruitment process. Unless you have addressed the fundamentals, all best online efforts are mired by the brick and mortar follow-through.

True enough, recruiting is traditionally transactional in nature which does not necessarily make for a great candidate experience. However, a better experience is always possible. Is your application process unduly painful? Are applicants tossed into the 'black hole' experience after first experiencing the 'friendly touch'?

Social media makes it easier for employers to identify and craft relationships with top talent, but nothing kills a referral faster than a slow response. Make sure that your presence on Facebook or Twitter is not a version of 'post and pray', but more along the lines of 'post and host'.

Giving immediate access to a wider pool of potential talent, social media can provide instant outreach. The question is: 'Do you have the mechanisms in place to accommodate an instant reply?' Moreover, hyperlinks back to your job site should

always include a mechanism for reply, otherwise you need to think about what the word of mouth is likely to be about your social media platform. If you do not respond within 24-72 hours at most, then the damage is done.

If the dynamic online introduction only serves as a fashionable funnel for a depersonalized transactional recruitment process which has not changed for years, you can expect to hear about it through social media.

Personalizing the overall recruitment experience can dramatically yield results. Invite the 'friends' of the candidate to participate in the recruiting process by inviting them to breakfast or lunch with the candidate, asking them to lead company tours or sending 'thank you' notes post-interview.

Communicate, Participate, Adapt

It isn't enough to use social media for outreach. Studies show that using networks merely as a broadcast channel does not generate the same results as those who engage with their 'connections', 'followers' and 'friends'. This makes logical sense considering both the new media's 'social' monicker and participatory means of perpetuation.

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Seen in this light, social media encourages the job seeker and prospective employer to 'get to know one another' and empowers them with the tools required. That said, nothing connects quite like people.

One Approach Does Not Fit All

Networking is still about relationships – trust, confidence and familiarity – and online alone is not enough. Incorporating new tools into your kit does not mean dismissing or excluding what came before. Effective communication is an essential part of recruiting; there are simply more

means by which to communicate. Identify and use a variety of channels to engage with candidates.

Above all else, remain an engaged participant in the conversations that evolve. When recruiters do not pick up the phone to speak to candidates, rely on email or InMail or wait for electronic responses to job board postings, the candidate experience suffers.

No matter how smart and fast the technology becomes, recruiting will

always be about people—and while well-used technology enhances effectiveness, it cannot replace 'people focused' processes—such as picking up the phone to make a live connection.

Think not in terms of high touch alone, but of quality touch above all. **▶**

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