

ADVICE FROM THE FIELD

Diving into the Internet for hiring? Look out for the rocks!

Many companies are diving into fast-breaking Internet technology to solve their hiring problems. They'd better look out for the rocks!

Today's record low unemployment has made hiring a crisis, and the "web" has become a tempting medium to solve it. Is the Internet a viable, worthwhile answer?

Projected demographics reveal that finding talented personnel will be even harder in the next few years. More than ever, the shortage of qualified people is causing companies to re-evaluate their growth plans. A quick survey of companies in this area revealed that the Internet is mainly being used for e-mail and research, and not hiring.

Although Guy Cagle of Pfeffer & Hanniford, a CPA firm located in Brighton, uses the Internet for tax research, he still believes that hiring on the Internet is new and something of a "fad" at this point. In some respects, he's not far from the truth. But in spite of its faults, by understanding the principles behind Internet use, a company can have one more viable means for acquiring its most important asset—people.

Companies can use the Internet for hiring in two ways:

Passive—The company puts up a Web site and posts their openings

Active—The company scans resumes posted on Web sites by job seekers.

A huge candidate pool can be both positive and negative.

Active searching on the Internet for "generic" positions will produce more candidates, but the screening process will take more effort. Chris Stonick, a recruitment specialist, estimates the success rate for hiring candidates from the Internet could be as low as one for 500 contacts.

From a practical standpoint, e-mail is a viable and inexpensive method for follow-up, but do not expect many responses. Candidates on the Internet can be in the various stages of interviewing or may be completely out of the market—a waste of time. However, to fill specialized positions, one needs this vastness to find a suitable number of qualified candidates. Of course, that could mean the perfect candidate could be found in Kansas. If so, are the costs associated with relocation better spent in finding a local candidate?

A few years ago, a national moving company estimated average relocation expense to be around \$45,000. Likewise, with any relocation, the possibility exists that "returning home" could prove a stronger lure than the new position or company.

The resume trap—This can be summed up as follows: "Bad prospects can write good resumes; good prospects can write bad resumes." If a company relies too much on resume recruiting, they will continue to hire leftovers. And if a company uses the resume as the sole recruiting tool, that company does not understand the concept of hiring top talent.

The Internet is fast, but it tends to perpetuate the lack of understanding of what constitutes good hiring practices. For example, not taking the time to seek out the top performers who are not actively "looking", but who would entertain a new opportunity if approached.

In many years as a successful "headhunter", I found that the best contact method for recruiting is still the telephone call, based on person-to-person networking. Tom Crick, a technical recruiter for Joseph Goldring & Associates in Southfield, has a candid opinion

of resumes posted electronically, "On the Internet is where you can find people who have bigger heads than bodies."

In contrast, he points out that print ads will attract candidates who are actively seeking new opportunities and will respond to inquiries.

Your own Web site

Using the passive option—your own Web site and job postings—is a low-cost option that can be effective. Most executives contacted, like Norm Bennett, VP at Irish Construction Co. Inc. in Howell, plan to do it that way. Including a Web page on "employment opportunities" and numbers where the candidate can fax or e-mail a resume is a good start. Just be prepared to do all the work. Including detailed job descriptions for immediate needs does not really reduce the workload.

Think long-term

The size of a company's workforce will grow or shrink but the need for talent will never waver. Think long-term! From this perspective, the goal of the employment opportunities page is to gather as many motivated individuals as possible. That means having the ability to attract prospects who don't already have resumes.

To appeal to candidates, the focus of the employment page is to tell a story that sells the company. Background information, such as when a company was founded, is nice. However, copy that notes the company's growth rate, base technology, promotional statistics, low turnover rates, etc., will attract more people.

A good example of such Web copy might be, "Last year, 87 percent of our employees took advantage of our company's fund-matching 401(k) plan. The average increase in value for those funds was an outstanding 32 percent."

At the bottom of the Web page can be this question: "Do you have a resume that you can fax or e-mail to us?" If the answer is "yes", the contact numbers are given and the prospect is presented with a Career Questionnaire to fill out. This questionnaire is an

attitude and motivation check spotlighting the candidate's track record.

A "no" answer results in the presentation of a Candidate Data Sheet to be filled out, followed by the Career Questionnaire. The data sheet is a means for getting the same information one could from a resume but the prospect has the ability to do it immediately, online.

The finishing touch is a database to store this information. If the Web site is well done, it may attract many viable candidates that fit the immediate needs as well as future ones. That candidate database is the gold mine for future employees.

To make the system even more powerful, make the Internet efforts part of a lucrative referral system, including rewards for all who use it, especially your own employees who bring in candidates. More about that in a future column.

Using the Internet to find new employees will not solve all of the inherent problems associated with most hiring programs. However, it does provide one more option for acquiring your most important asset-your employees.

Paul J. Theisen, president Livonia-based Unlocked Potential Inc., can be reached at 248.476.5220 or at HiringSmart@Juno.com. Their web site www.UnlockedPotential.com.

The above article appeared in the June 30, 2000 issue of the Insider Business Journal. To read other topics concerning hiring, visit their web site at www.insiderbiz.com.