

Feature

Social Media Recruiting: Here to Stay

The plus outweighs the minus

If you aren't using social media for recruiting, you may possibly have an antenna on your roof to get your TV signal and a rotary dial phone on your desk. In other words, you and your organization are digital dinosaurs soon to be extinct. Exact numbers are not readily available for this country, but only 8 percent of American companies do not use social media for recruitment.

Some employers still use local newspapers and advertising agencies to recruit employees but they are usually reserved for very senior or highly technical positions that need some added attention. In fact, those methods are actually becoming obsolete as more employers and individuals turn to social networks for their hiring needs and more candidates seek work online.

The most popular social media platforms for these purposes seem to be LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. Of these, LinkedIn is the clear front-runner for both employers and job seekers, maybe because it also bills itself as a professional networking and development site. Some estimates suggest that up to 90 percent of companies are using or have used their services. That is up from less than 70 percent just a few years ago. Facebook numbers are around 66 percent and Twitter, the new kid on the social media recruiting list, has about 50 percent participation from employers.

It's not just the percentage of users that is remarkable. It's that these platforms actually work and at a fraction of the cost of the more traditional staffing and recruitment activities. Cost is not the only factor driving this growth in social media recruiting. In one study, almost half of the companies surveyed said that the quality of the candidates coming through these streams were better than in the past, and 20 percent said that it took less time to hire using social recruiting.

One of the most well-known experts in the HR field, Dr. John Sullivan, a prolific author with over 900 articles and 10 books covering all areas of talent management, has also written a number of business case analyses on social media recruiting. In his view, there are a number of tangible, measurable and very real benefits for organizations to continue to use this approach. They include improved candidate quality, cost per hire, enhanced company and corporate branding and the ability to reach a wider, more diverse and sometimes hidden pool of talent.

On the quality of candidates, Sullivan notes that part of the reason for this increase might be that people who use LinkedIn are already on top of their game in seeking out new contacts and new opportunities to grow. Some call these people 'early adapters', that elusive group of employees who are quick to learn and adapt to new ideas and concepts and often come up with the best new products or services. In other words, they are technically savvy innovators and what organization wouldn't want a few more of those employees?

The cost per hire for social media recruiting is also a major factor in the switch to social media recruiting. This is one point that is fairly easy to test and prove. First of all, there are fewer physical upfront costs with this recruiting method versus newspaper advertising or using the services of a headhunter or outside placement service. Secondly, when people are attracted to you through social media or directed by a referral from one of your existing employees, the studies show they are more likely to commit faster and stay longer with your organization. In addition, you are out there recruiting when you didn't even know you were recruiting. Prospective employees find you and check you out without you even realizing it.

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Now what is the downside of social media recruiting? All of us have heard and seen the problems that people have created for themselves because of their social media postings. Now that companies take social media recruiting seriously, they also take what people post online seriously as well. Recruiting platform Jobvite surveyed hiring managers and found that 93% of hiring managers are now reviewing a candidate's social profile before making a hiring decision. And they're not just looking. 55% have reconsidered a candidate based on what they found and most of those reviews have been negative.

For employers, there are a number of possible negative impacts to consider and manage when it comes to social media recruiting. At the top of this list you may consider privacy and confidentiality issues. Add to that the possibility that both the corporate brand and reputation could potentially be at risk when both a large group of employees and potential employees may be able to access and post on the organization's social media platforms. You need a concrete plan and policy to control these risks and limit the damage which they may cause. However, in some ways, they are the same problems you were managing in the past. The difference is that now they are happening at the speed of a mouse click or finger point.

The bottom line on social media recruiting is that the potential benefits far outweigh any possible downside effects. It is the way and the wave of the future in recruiting and it is definitely here to stay.

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