

ATTRACTING TOP TALENT

In today's competitive talent marketplace, you need to think about attracting new employees to your business the same way you think about attracting new customers. It's not enough to just post a job ad anymore – you need to think carefully about how you want to convey the values and unique benefits of your business, and then create consistent messaging that will reach the kinds of people you want to attract.

This notion of “employment branding” has become crucial for large and small businesses alike. Why? As the baby-boomer generation heads toward retirement, there'll be more openings for fewer people, and the war for talent will become even more competitive. At the same time, online recruiting is shifting the balance of power towards job candidates, who can now research and weigh competing offers more comprehensively than ever before.

What this means is that you need to become more proactive in your hunt for talent. These guidelines can help.

— THINK ABOUT TALENT STRATEGICALLY

Once you've identified the strategic goals for your company, you then need to identify the talent you'll need in order to get there – your “people” strategy needs to be part of your “business” strategy. Certainly there are logistical concerns, such as who will manage the hiring process, but equally important is having a clear picture of the types of employees you want to attract. Obviously, when you have a job opening, you need to develop a job description that outlines the requirements of that position. But it pays to go a step further and identify the



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behavioral qualities you want. This will allow you to identify people based on values, culture and ways of working, instead of just their salary and benefit requirements. This process can also help you assemble a pool of candidates you can tap for future openings.

— KNOW WHY PEOPLE WORK FOR YOU

Recruiting and retention are inextricably linked, so having a clear picture of your work environment from an employee's standpoint can help you communicate what job candidates should see in you – and what kinds of candidates will fit with your company's culture.



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Ask your employees what they like about working for you. Is it the collegial, fun atmosphere? A great customer set? A flexible work schedule? Less bureaucracy? Better quality of life? In other words, what would someone say when asked by an outsider “what is it like to work there?” Note that these responses are also crucial if you’re using a referral program to recruit. (See sidebar.)

— **MAKE YOUR JOB ADS STAND OUT**

What do your job ads say about your company? A simple listing of job responsibilities and required qualifications says little to candidates. The good news is that online ads provide you with much more flexibility to also tell candidates about the culture of your company, the management style, work practices, opportunities for career growth, and industry recognition and awards. People want to be associated with “the best” and by showing an applicant what your company can do for him or her – and that you care about your company’s culture – you’re encouraging the candidate to pursue your company. One way to achieve this is to browse other job postings in your space to see how they come off to potential hires – don’t just incorporate what they do, but look for ways to ensure you stand out from these competitors.

TURN EMPLOYEES INTO EVANGELISTS

Your employees are walking recruitment ads for your company. And because they know your company and your culture, they can often target suitable candidates that you could never find on your own. To create a culture where everyone feels responsible for building a great team:

- **Institute a formal employee referral program** — Some companies offer financial incentives, a prize or extra time off if a referral is successful.
- **Continually check on employee satisfaction** — People who like working for you will talk about you, and this word-of-mouth naturally leads to referrals.
- **Make sure employees know what jobs need to be filled** — Stress that you want them to refer good people, and that it is not enough for them to judge the person’s level of interest or qualifications, but they must also make a decision about whether or not there is a cultural fit.
- **Involve employees in the hiring process** — Introduce them to prospective candidates and listen to feedback: do they think the person is a good fit?

Your choice of where to display your job posting also says a lot to potential employees – is it a site where job applicants have to pay to access postings or a more community-oriented site accessible to anyone? Job sites definitely have personalities as well, and you can tell this just by browsing them.

— **USE YOUR WEBSITE AS A RECRUITMENT TOOL**

Be aware that job candidates are researching you as deeply as you're researching them. What does your website say about your company as a place to work? Consider creating an "employment" home page that underscores the advantages of working for your organization. This is not a listing of job openings but an employment marketing tactic. Talk about some of the "wow" benefits you provide. Show videos of managers discussing accomplishments. Publish case studies of how people have grown with your company. Present employee testimonials. Help candidates answer the question, "what's in it for me?"

— **GO BEYOND ADS, POSTINGS AND JOB FAIRS**

To build a best candidate pool, you need to migrate your recruiting beyond the tried and true. Build word-of-mouth about the types of people you might need. Encourage employee referrals (see sidebar). Use trade shows to meet potential candidates (and ensure your booth reflects your company's culture). Tap into your social, academic and business networks. Generate PR that shows your unique work environment – a few nice words in a newspaper or on TV can start a flood of resumes. Keep talking about why your company is a great place to work and encourage others to spread the word. ■



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HOW TO TREAT JOB CANDIDATES

You can build your talent pool by treating all job candidates with courtesy and professionalism. The way you behave towards candidates says a lot about what it is like to work for you. Recruiting is not just about the person you hire. In many cases, a positive experience by a person you don't choose can net you talented employees in the future – through positive word of mouth or by referrals.

- **Don't let submissions go unanswered** — Acknowledge receipt of every resume with a note that thanks the individual for their interest in your company. It can be as simple as turning on an auto-response option to online job postings - a complimentary service offered by many online job boards.
- **Brush up on your interview skills, and coach your employees who may be interviewing as well** — It's not just the questions you ask, but the way you ask them. For example, having multiple interviewers repeat the same questions can create a bad impression.
- **Tell candidates what you like about them** — This doesn't mean you have to hire them. But it pays to empathize with candidates and find something in their resume that you respect.
- **Let candidates know if someone else was picked for the job they wanted** — A brief note or a phone call will be appreciated and lets you maintain the relationship – you never know when that candidate might be the right person for a future opening at your firm.

WORKSHEET:

SETTING YOUR RECRUITING APART

Use this worksheet to help you highlight the benefits of your business in order to attract top talent.

1. HOW DOES YOUR SALARY AND BENEFITS PACKAGE COMPARE TO YOUR COMPETITORS?

Being a pay leader won't necessarily get you the best candidates, but you do need to be competitive with market norms, which you can find on websites like www.salary.com. List the basic benefits you provide.

2. WHAT NON-FINANCIAL BENEFITS DO YOU OFFER?

Things like flexible schedules, telecommuting opportunities, career advancement opportunities, and the like are increasingly important to many job candidates.

3. WHAT VALUES ARE IMPORTANT TO YOU?

List five characteristics that are critical to your company's culture.

4. WHY IS YOUR COMPANY AMAZING TO WORK FOR?

List five reasons why someone would choose to work for your company. Be excited and enthusiastic – it's contagious. Top talent is generally already employed somewhere else – are these reasons enough to induce them to come work for you?



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5. WHY DO YOUR EMPLOYEES ENJOY WORKING FOR YOU?

Take a minute to speak with some of your most loyal employees. Why are they still with you? That will help you know why someone else would want to join your team.

6. WHY DO PEOPLE LEAVE YOUR COMPANY?

Understanding the reasons previous hires haven't worked out will help you hone in on what type of people you really want to focus on. Implement "exit interviews" to assess this information.

7. WHAT RECRUITING SUCCESS STORIES DO YOU HAVE?

Nothing is as compelling as a real-world success. Gather testimonials from current and past employees to use on your recruitment website. These can also help you garner positive press and learn more about the benefits of working for your company.



NOTES

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