

From staffing to talent acquisition: An evolution

By Michael Palmer, Founder & CEO, Xscient

Recruiting is evolving. Was it easier in the early 90s than it is today? Was it faster? Was it cheaper? Just what exactly is driving the changes? In many ways, recruiting has become more challenging. This is primarily a result of changes in demography and technology accompanied by an underlying philosophical shift. Though it is not generally clear to HR departments, candidates are very aware that recruitment has become more of a sales function and less of a purchasing function.

In the course of our consulting, we meet many HR professionals and business leaders who struggle with the evolution of recruitment. What is the best way to attract, hire and retain the best employees as the world around us changes? Perhaps we can gain a better perspective by exploring these areas and ultimately retasking our recruitment activities and processes to better align with today's environment.

Demographic influences

Despite the significant impact the great recession has had on employment, there is still and will continue to be a "war for talent". The reason most often cited is that baby boomers are approaching retirement age. Though this is definitely a factor, another key factor affects recruitment -- declining employment tenure.

As recently as the mid-1990s, employees were more likely to join a company and stay with that company for several years. Today, we see younger workers, particularly Generation X, Y and Millennials taking positions for two to three years, and then

moving on. Many companies struggle with this concept and invest large sums of money and energy to build robust retention programs. Many of these programs are now evolving to adapt to the needs of these 'mobile' workers. For example, there is an emerging trend to create opportunities for employees to move around the organization to try new roles (internal mobility programs). Some companies enable, or even encourage, 'boomerang' programs, where employees upon their departure from an organization are encouraged to return at a future point in their career to explore opportunities.

Most recruitment experts agree that we did see a significant slowdown of job-hopping during the recession; we are now seeing the acceleration as we slowly emerge to more prosperous times. We are experiencing increased recruitment needs to hire more people as the average tenure of employees' drops. We're also experiencing increased pressure on our internal training teams. The alternative is to sacrifice aspects of the customer experience to deal with the additional volume of new employees entering our organizations.

Technology

The advent and proliferation of applicant tracking and Web-based recruitment technology has driven profound changes in the recruitment industry. It is clear that in today's market, there is a fundamental shift in how candidates and recruiters experience the recruitment process.

Not too long ago, organizations spent thousands of dollars to place an advertisement in the Sunday paper. This included time and money spent working with an ad agency to design the layout. Organizations did not have the software to do it themselves -- even if they had a

computer. The wording needed to attract prospective employees, but also be concise as newspapers charged by the number of lines and the size of the ad. Employment seekers responded to the ads by typing a resume with a cover letter and mailing it. To speed up the process, some people faxed their resume. Recruiters then sorted through the resumes and sent thank you letters to each candidate.

What's changed? We've made it very easy for candidates to find and apply for opportunities. Web-based job posting is dramatically different than newspaper advertising. We can post from our desktops or our applicant tracking system to multiple sites with a mouse click -- reaching out to candidates 24/7. And, we can use virtually unlimited words to describe our roles. Candidates, regardless of their location, skills, experience or ability, can apply for positions. And they do apply, in droves. In virtually every industry in which we consult, we see the volume of candidates has increased. However, the quality and fit of those candidates has decreased. We've reduced their level of effort to a point where it's possible to apply for thousands of roles in the time it took to apply for one job just a decade ago.

To combat this trend, we have automated significant portions of our recruiting, just to keep up with the volume. Applicant tracking systems have evolved, by design, to help recruiters focus on the high value work, instead of the chore work. Ironically, most recruiters seem to spend even more time administering the recruitment process today. Are we afraid of technology? While we have the ability to create and utilize prescreening questions in most automated recruiting solutions, less than a handful of organizations use them on a regular basis to

screen out candidates who do not meet the most basic requirements.

Most organizations are acutely aware of the need to have an attractive employment brand. Many invest in programs and initiatives to increase employee and community awareness, with the goal of driving candidates to their opportunities. Recruitment technology can help you stay ahead of the competition in two fundamental ways. The first is communication. Using automated recruiting solution's communication tools, we have the ability to communicate far more effectively with candidates. We can let them know where they are in the process and let them know if we're no longer considering them for the role. Very few companies take this step. Yet, not doing so can have a derogatory effect on your employment brand. The second is speed. Utilizing prescreening tools to get to the top candidates quicker, setting up interviews faster and sending offer letters sooner will set you apart from other employers. Speed sends a 'we want you' message.

The demographics have changed, and yes, the technology has evolved, and will continue to do so as we see candidate relationship management, performance management and succession planning tools becoming integrated into an evolving suite of technology products. Understanding and embracing these factors will take us part of the way. At a philosophical level, understanding that recruitment is no longer a buying process, but rather a sales process, is an underlying change that highly successful organizations have embraced. Gone are the days when top candidate's resumes just landed on our desks. Perhaps we should think like sales professionals and remember our alphabet. The new ABC's of recruitment.... always be closing.



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Mike is a recruitment effectiveness expert, leading the efforts to help his customers solve their hiring challenges. As the CEO of Xscient, he identifies and aligns his customer's recruitment function with their overarching business objectives, enabling the recruiting function to establish credibility and deliver business impactful results.

Prior to re-establishing Xscient, he managed the Implementation PMO for Futurestep RPO, led the Government Solutions division of Adecco RPO and created Ceridian's Talent Acquisition Practice, leading Ceridian's Recruitment Services and Technology Solutions globally.

About Xscient

We are a recruitment services and consulting organization committed to our customer's results. From decades of experience, we help our customers analyze, design, implement, maintain and measure talent acquisition programs, technology and processes.

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