

Facing up to the Talent Crunch

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Taleo 
Business Edition

Have you created social or business profiles for yourself? If not, perhaps you should.

Consider Facebook. Founded by three Harvard sophomores as a social networking site, Facebook is a social utility that connects people and allows them to exchange information. While Facebook initially started as a forum for connecting with fellow students, the site quickly crossed over into the business arena. The popularity of the site has skyrocketed in recent years, with organizations now using it for everything from marketing initiatives to fostering a stronger corporate culture. And now, HR departments are looking for ways to successfully leverage the site for recruitment.

Social networking and recruitment are all about connecting with people, which make Facebook a natural fit as a recruitment tool. However, many businesses are still reluctant to use it because of potential productivity losses. For example, the Ontario government banned Facebook in May 2007, because of concerns about its usefulness in the workplace. Other organizations worry about the “transparency” of the platform. According to a recent study on social computing and recruitment by Forrester Research, many companies fear the transparency of unedited two-way communication and have internal policies that ban the use of social computing. The main concern is that employees will spend countless work hours updating their profile, messaging friends, posting videos to their “Funwall” and playing “poke” tag.

Whatever reservations companies may have about Facebook, there is no denying the tremendous reach of the social networking tool. According to a recent study by Zinc Research, Facebook claims about three-quarters of all Canadians who subscribe to social networking sites, with the online destination being most popular among females between the ages of 18 and 34. Half of Canadians using the Internet are now Facebook members. All told, seven million Canucks are now using the social-networking site.

With its younger demographic, Facebook offers a gold mine of candidates from Generation-Y or “Millennials,” which refers to those born between 1980 and 2000. Forget the days of targeting new graduates through ads in newspapers. Friend-to-friend referrals dominate the way this Internet-savvy set seeks employment.

Indeed, today’s labour market demands a non-traditional approach to recruitment. With Canada’s jobless rate at 33-year low, the labour force is tight – and executives have reason to worry. An aging labour force combined with a robust economy is creating labour shortages at every level. Smaller companies, in particular, will be especially hard hit. A survey conducted the Canadian Federation of Independent Business showed that finding and keeping good employees is the number one challenge facing small business today. Clearly, hiring managers need to look beyond job board and newspaper ads to address hiring demands. A recruitment approach that employs social media, may just give a company the edge it needs. Since so many jobseekers are actively using the Web to search for more job opportunities, employers have the opportunity to re-evaluate their recruiting strategy to include this social networking component. The rewards of Facebook are waiting to be realized, often for a fraction of the cost of traditional recruitment methods.

So how can companies take advantage of Facebook to bolster their recruitment efforts?

[Establish a corporate presence on Facebook.](#) Traditionally, job seekers would submit their resume through an electronic job site or directly to the recruiters. But to find the passive job seeker or new graduate it’s best to take a proactive approach. Facebook has its root membership in academic institutions – ripe ground for recruiting the ever-elusive Millennials,

Setting up a company profile page on Facebook can support recruitment efforts on the network and supplement your existing career site. By encouraging

employees to join the company's Facebook group, it increases the chance of connecting your message with their networks as well.

Consultant giant Ernst & Young recognized this when it created a group on Facebook as part of its college recruitment strategy. Featuring slideshows and video testimonials, the "Ernst & Young Careers" group has drawn more than 11,000 current and aspiring employees. Ernst & Young recruiters can search member profiles and reach out to those with the most promise. By establishing its own group, Ernst & Young has created a ready-made pool of candidates.

Transform your workforce into a band of head-hunters.

Not every company has the budget to sponsor a group but it's possible to still take advantage of the site without straining their budget. "In-sourcing" recruitment efforts through an employee referral program can help companies reach passive job seekers. As part of the program, encourage employees to post jobs to their Facebook for their friends to consider, and then evangelize to help close the deal. A program like this can lend a hand in reducing the time and cost it takes to fill a position.

Gain valuable insight into your candidates. People use Facebook to share interests with their friends, express certain views, and provide insight into their social life. Candidates often reveal far more about themselves on these sites than they would on the phone or in an interview. Unlike professional profiles on sites such as

LinkedIn, Facebook's "open" profiles can offer insight into a candidate's personality and interests. Hiring managers can leverage these profiles to qualify potential candidates, find out what motivates them and decide if they would fit in with the company culture. Then in the interview, hiring managers can use that information to promote the organization.

Connect with potential job seekers. Social networking sites make it very easy for recruiters to become trusted advisers to candidates and genuinely get to know them. Start a dynamic, two-way dialogue with the candidate rather than the one-way passive, communication of a print or online advertisement. Potential recruits tend to be more open to receiving personal messages through Facebook than regular email because of trust that has been established within their personal network.

The bottom line. With more job seekers looking for employment through non-traditional channels, companies need to think creatively about how to reach that talent and stand out from the crowd. Social networks, such as Facebook, make it easy for HR managers to extend their networking efforts beyond the usual suspects. It's high time more took advantage of it.

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