

Emergence from the Recession Positioned for Success

Three Focus Areas for Every Recruiting Team

By Valerie Osinski

The challenges human resource professionals have faced during the last 18 to 24 months have been vast and varied. Now, as we look toward the other side of the recession, the question is “What knowledge can be gained that will help better insulate us in both bull and bear markets to come?” More specifically, what steps can you take as a recruiter in the gaming and hospitality industry to help your company prosper in good times and weather the down times?

#1 - Rethink Your Sourcing Strategy

The world of candidate sourcing is changing rapidly regardless of the unemployment rate and you won't do yourself any favors by choosing to ignore it because you've got more applicants than you can manage right now. The fact is quality of hire is the metric to watch now and in the future. An employee who is qualified and possesses the characteristics and aptitudes that fit into your organization is more likely to meet or exceed expectations for productivity, tenure and adding value to your organization.

Think about this scenario for a moment. You have an open position for a restaurant manager in your four-star French restaurant. The position requires a degree or equivalent experience, ability to work evenings and weekends and a few other basics. However, the ideal candidate might have the following skills and characteristics in addition to the requirements: two years experience managing a French restaurant, fluent in French language, strong vendor relationships, well-liked by current/previous staff members. How would you go about finding that person?

If you answered, “Post a job on my career site and one of the major job boards and a few of the local boards and maybe put an ad in the newspaper classifieds,” you have missed the boat. There is little doubt you would receive hundreds of applications, but how much time will you spend trying to weed through the unemployed pizza parlor managers, the recent graduates who haven't landed their first job and the current and former wait-staff hoping to break in to management? The answer is way too much and you still may not find the candidate you want, which means you'll have to place more ads and spend more money. Obviously you can't post a job advertisement for French-speaking restaurant manager who has all of the desirable skills and attributes. However, you can be significantly more strategic in your sourcing methods.

First, be thorough in the job description you post to your career site. That doesn't mean you have to require that a candidate speak French, but in the description of duties indicate that the position involves daily interaction and communication with the chef who is a native of France. Once you've posted the job, target your sourcing efforts using one or more of the following tactics:

- ▶ Optimize your posting so it appears in organic search results for “French cuisine restaurant manager jobs in Las Vegas” and similar variations. Why? There are more than 300 million searches for jobs, careers and employment on Google each month and 80 percent of users click on the organic results rather than the sponsored ads according to Marvin Smith in his ERE.com article, “SEO is Not Enough.”
- ▶ Source via social networks. Social networks, like Facebook and LinkedIn, have a tremendous following and offer pay-per-click and pay-per-impression ads with the ability to target placements by user attributes. You can also establish a business presence on these networks and mine the connections you make to fill a position. And let's not forget about employee referrals. The average Facebook user has between 150 and 200 friends. If only 50 of your employees posted a job advertisement on their Facebook page, 7,500 to 10,000 people who share something in common with your employee have just learned you have an open position that has been recommended by someone they know and trust.
- ▶ Dedicate time to building a talent pipeline. Positions like our restaurant manager don't open up very often and can be difficult to fill because your ideal candidate is most likely already employed. However, if you've been actively building and managing relationships with passive candidates, when the time is right and you have a position to fill, you will have immediate access to one or more potential candidates to engage in discussions about the opportunity. There are a variety of ways to build your pipeline, or “talent community” as I've seen it called, but almost all of them involve some sort of candidate relationship management tool that integrates into your applicant tracking system to streamline every aspect of the process.
- ▶ For positions unlike our French restaurant manager that you fill frequently and require broader recruitment efforts, make sure you're spending your money on the online media outlets that deliver. I realize this seems like a monumental undertaking – ad performance tracking, data aggregation, managing placements – but it can be extraordinarily simple with some newer technologies. Up and coming online recruitment advertising companies have developed software that does all of that and more automatically. In addition to managing your entire ad campaign and online placements, it monitors each ad's digital DNA to continuously redesign them to ensure optimum performance on the Web sites that generate the most clicks.

By updating your overall sourcing strategy, you not only gain significantly more insight into where your budget dollars are going, but you should spend significantly less while improving that all-important quality of hire metric. When you're able to make more quality hires—employees who are more productive and add more value to your organization—that translates to a leaner and more efficient staff, which adds to your bottom line in good times and helps keep it in check in a weaker economic environment.

#2 - Hire Top Talent NOW!

The recession has affected every single company in the gaming and hospitality industry, but let's focus on the positive effects it might have on your business in the future. A company that has gone through multiple layoffs has done more than cut the fat. They have had to let go of some experienced individuals with sought after skill sets who rarely fall into the 'active job seeker' category. Others, who are still employed but are no longer happy with their current employer, are suddenly much more open to new opportunities. If you and your leadership team have the foresight to strategically capitalize on this situation, you have a golden opportunity to engage the best talent your industry has to offer to help your organization thrive well into the future.

The key to doing this successfully is to focus on key positions that directly affect your company's success. In "Money Matters in the Hiring Process" by Joanne Sammer published in the September 2009 issue of HR Magazine, Mel Stark, vice president in New York for the Hay Group advises employers to, "make some judgments regarding the potential return on investment a position might bring ... what is it that I'm buying here, and what is the potential return to my organization?"

As you're considering the ROI, keep in mind that you may be able to fill certain positions for less – for now, anyway. Salaries are a bit more negotiable in light of the current economic situation and many who are currently unemployed may accept a position at a lower salary. However, you should be prepared to bring those salaries back up when the economy improves or you're likely to lose your investment to the competition.

#3 - Build a Strong Employer Brand

One of the best pieces of advice the HR industry has been preaching for the past decade is to build an employer brand. But, why would a well-established employer brand be so valuable to you right now? Because it makes achieving points 1 and 2 much simpler and less expensive.

If you're still unsure of what an employer brand is, here's a brief explanation. In general, a company brand reinforces a message to the public about a company. Through marketing efforts and product/service experiences, the buying community learns what an organization offers, how that product or service is different from competitors and what an individual person can expect in terms of its quality.

When it comes to an employer brand, gaming and hospitality companies must translate their player and guest experience and brand to a candidate and employee experience and brand. Your employer brand should reinforce what a potential employee can expect from you, what you expect from your employees and how those expectations work together to deliver the desired guest experience.

As you're contemplating building or investing more into your employer brand, keep in mind the following two statements quoted in Bill Roberts' October 2008 HR Magazine article "Manage Candidates Right from the Start."

"We consider every candidate a customer, either current or future. The candidate application process is an opportunity to drive customer loyalty ... to extend our brand ..." (Roberts, 2008)

- Kristen Weirick, Director of Talent Acquisition at Whirlpool Corp.

"We talk about branding every day. We leverage technology because the millennial generation leverages technology. If one of them has a bad experience on the Textron Web site, that person text-messages 300 of his closest friends that he didn't like it. We can't afford that kind of advertising." (Roberts, 2008)

- Kelley Hoffman, Enterprise Sourcing Specialist at Textron Inc.

Recession or not, can you afford not to manage your employer brand? A brand begins and ends with communication. Take a look at all the ways in which a potential candidate may encounter your organization. What message are you sending? What message are your employees sending? An employment brand must move beyond the candidate experience into the employment experience or you will have wasted your time and budget dollars.

In the end, what we all must learn and teach our corporate leaders is that recruiting can, and should, be a strategic function that can positively affect every organization's bottom line. To prove that, we must take action and proactively adapt to the current and forecasted recruiting environment and show that, with thoughtful planning and calculated investments, recruiters don't just add value, you add dollars.

Works Cited

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