

TALENT SEARCH

In today's tough competition for good employees, can e-recruitment help you target the best and the brightest? Veronica Miller asks.

E-recruitment is old hat, you might think. Many people have already made themselves comfortable on the e-recruitment bandwagon, but it seems many are afraid they are going to get run over if they get in the way. According to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) "Recruitment, retention and turnover 2006" report, only 64 per cent of companies used technology to help them recruit in 2005.

So what is e-recruitment? It is a term that has been overused to the point that a definition is almost meaningless. It can mean as many different things as there are companies, from putting a vacancy on a job board or allowing candidates to download an application form online, though to a fully integrated, end-to-end recruitment and HR solution. If you are one of the 36 per cent yet to move to online hiring, or if you want to enhance and expand your current e-recruitment practices to enable you to target

specific candidates, how do you even know where to begin?

What do you need?

Don't do anything until you conduct an audit of your requirements. You need to decide who you want to attract, and where best to find them. If your ideal target is a demographic with limited access to the internet, it would be counter-productive to move everything online. "What you do depends on the type of vacancy and campaign," advises Michelle Darby, HR Solutions Advisor at Midland HR. "Each industry will have different strategies and drivers," so a cookie-cutter approach won't work.

Broadly speaking, there are two very different ways to use e-recruitment: using the internet to advertise and recruit for a specific role, or using it to act as a "head-hunter", either by compiling your own database of potential applicants, or by looking through someone else's, such as that on Monster. Each strategy would yield very different results, therefore you must decide before you start which approach is suitable for your company and the candidate you are hoping to attract. In addition to this, there are also specialist recruitment solutions that will help you to manage the process from advert to the recruit's first day at work.

Do it yourself

Companies no longer have the pick of a number of excellent candidates. More often, the excellent candidates have their pick of a number of companies. How do you target and recruit those

people that are going to bring real value to your company?

"The future of recruitment is to capture the talent that isn't actively looking," says James Burton, Sales Director of recruitment software specialists Magex. "Potential candidates will speculatively upload their CV and specify the type of job and company they are looking for, and this will allow companies to 'head-hunt' good people who are happy in their jobs, but who would consider moving for the right incentives."

Use your website to reinforce your company "brand", James recommends. A strong brand will drive people to your site, and if your brand is trusted,

"Killer questions" weed out unsuitable candidates before they reach you

people will be comfortable putting their CV into your database for future positions. Not only will this reduce the cost of recruitment by removing the need to spend on print advertising and recruitment consultants, but the quality and number of candidates could be significantly higher than if you were recruiting from scratch.

Sites such as Linked in (www.linkedin.com) which create an online "community", where people are introduced by their online "friends" to other "friends", are creating an environment where vacancies can be advertised and filled within a network of friends with similar interests or careers, for example, cartoon artists. This

ability to search for potential recruits outside of the normal parameters of advertising is the cyber equivalent of "it's who you know".

While searching in this way can seem time-consuming, don't be deceived by the proactive nature of this type of recruitment. More traditional methods of recruiting can deliver hundreds of unsuitable CVs which need to be waded through in order to come up with a shortlist. This way, you compile your shortlist without the excessive number of "give it a go" applicants that can swamp any recruiter.

A traditionalist at heart

If you're not quite ready to go out looking for your next employee, e-recruitment can still be used to effectively target the group you would like to apply for the job. Advertising on industry-specific websites is an effective way to target the people with the experience you are looking for. While generic job boards are useful, they can

should still look to add a covering letter to their application, especially as with the increased volume of CVs, there is a greater need to stand out from the crowd."

Be inclusive

While every company wants the brightest and the best for their jobs, these aren't always found in cyberspace. "Ensure you consider other forms of e-recruitment alongside more traditional methods," advises Darby. "Don't alienate internal staff, for example, who may not have access to the internet at work – installing kiosks could be one way to address this issue."

"In the world of business we are all now used to working with the internet on a daily basis, and tend not to consider internet access as a significant issue," says Brown. In 2004 only 52 per cent of households in the UK had access to the internet (National Statistics, 2004), he continues. Internet access tends to vary across socio-economic groups, which has potential implications for diversity of your applicants, as there are well-established links between ethnicity and socio-economic status. There are also differences in internet access by age group, which is highly significant given the age discrimination legislation. "The critical strategy for any organisation looking to recruit online, while simultaneously achieving diversity objectives, is to understand the access levels of their target candidate population," he adds. "Organisations should provide off-line application processes to accommodate those who lack access, and to ensure advertising strategies also take the needs of the 'off-line' candidates into account."

What could you save?

As always, many decisions come down to the bottom line. What cost benefits could investing in e-recruitment bring? In the short-term, basic costs in terms of print advertising could be slashed, as it could cost as little as £100 for 20 adverts on an industry-specific website compared to many times that for an advert in a national paper. If

you are recruiting large numbers of people, paper and postage costs would also be significantly reduced as you communicate over email.

Vision Express moved its hiring online with e-recruitment specialists First Advantage, says Ed Sweeting, recruitment manager at Vision Express. "After deduction of system costs, there was a net reduction of £43,000 in the annual costs of the recruitment department, with average cost per hire cut from £264 in 2004 to £163 in 2005." With figures such as these, the advantages of moving online are clear.

E-recruitment is often quicker than the more traditional methods of hiring, and you could have a new recruit in days rather than weeks, significantly reducing your spend on temporary staff members. Vision Express's average hiring time has been reduced by nearly six per cent already, says Sweeting.

If you have an end-to-end HR solution, the time saved in the initial recruitment process and later data entry for new starters could free up your HR and payroll staff, allowing them the time to concentrate on strategic, business-benefiting tasks.

Get it right

In such a competitive market, it is important to "get it right" when it comes to recruiting. If a good candidate has a bad experience of the recruitment process of your company, he or she will tell friends, family and colleagues and your reputation with a number of potential employees could be irrevocably damaged. "Too often," says Phil Brown, Services Director at recruitment specialists Lansdowne, "the technology doesn't work properly because the end user isn't considered. Keep in mind the three-click rule – if people can't find what they want on the site in three mouse clicks, they tend to give up and go elsewhere." Concentrating on how the systems will serve you alone, rather the candidate on the other end of the broadband connection is a mistake that could prove fatal to your company's reputation with potential star employees, something every employer should be keen to avoid.

Remember, the best and the brightest aren't always found in cyberspace

result in an avalanche of responses, few of which may be suitable.

Your e-recruitment solution can be tailored with "killer questions" which weed out some of the unsuitable candidates before they reach you. These can contain as much or as little detail as you like, from something simple such as having the legal right to work in the UK, to the number of years' experience or a willingness to travel, if this is what the role requires.

If you are fond of covering letters as a means of getting a feel for candidates, this method is ideal, as you can still request that one be submitted, albeit electronically.

"The fundamental drivers of why a covering letter is important (highlighting relevant skills, conveying a high level of interest in the organisation/role, etc) still remain," says Jonathan Brown, director at HR consultants Reflect. "Where systems allow, candidates