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Small Business Resource Center



Recruiting: The ABC's of E-searches

by Donna Fenn

Smart recruiters are turning the Internet inside out in search of employees

When it comes to searching for qualified job candidates, companies are now plying the Web for good reason: they hope to leap regional boundaries, reach people not actively looking for new jobs, and tap into otherwise inaccessible talent pools. For employers who know where and how to look, there are nuggets of talent to be found on the Internet. Here are the most effective ways to find them.

All on Boards

There are more than 40,000 employment-related Web sites, many of which replicate the early recruiting model in which employers pay to list openings and candidates post their résumés free of charge. "I can very easily imagine a world in which there are one or two billion job boards," says John Sumser, CEO of Interbiznet.com, which reports on the electronic-recruiting industry.

The Goliath boards, like Monster.com and Headhunter.net, are the most visible and serve a number of industries. But the real growth is in niche recruiting sites, which experts say are burgeoning at the rate of nearly 100 a month. Niche sites serve individual professions, ethnic groups, or regions, and consequently may attract people with very specific skills or applicants who are a bus trip — as opposed to a plane trip — away from your headquarters. And then there's efficiency. Profession-specific boards, some of which append to broader profession-specific sites, attract users the same way community boards do, by offering career advice, networking opportunities, links to vendors, and other services. Those inducements lead users to check in often, creating more exposure for job postings.

"The name-brand job services routinely peddle themselves as being great because they're big," says Sumser. "You're paying for a certain number of eyeballs. But how many of the right eyeballs do you reach?" A company might pay anywhere from a few hundred to tens of thousands of dollars for an annual subscription to Monster.com, depending on how many jobs the company posts and whether it opts for the service that allows recruiters to view résumés online. Niche sites are often comparably priced but may deliver more of those "right eyeballs" (particularly for companies searching for job candidates with very specific qualifications) than the large generalists do. And community- and association-sponsored boards may post job listings free of charge.

Niche boards aren't exclusive to the white-collar crowd. The Boiler Room, for example, is an industry site that includes a career center where employers can find that certain special someone to operate their steam boilers. And Lifeguardjobs.com is an obvious destination for those who need to hire some pool police.

Weddle recommends that recruiters test-drive the sites themselves to see if



they're easy to navigate and grill the sites' salespeople for figures on traffic and stickiness. Companies should also weigh the offer of special features into their choice: as boards proliferate they are beginning to compete more on customer service. For example, job boards such as Craigslist, one of the premier hunting grounds for technology professionals, send subscribers daily e-mail messages with new résumé postings, allowing recruiters to keep up on available applicants without having to schlep back to the Web site. Such offerings help differentiate the mediocre boards from the stellar ones.

It's Who You Know

Learning of a job candidate by way of a referral from someone who knows both your company and the candidate is one of the most effective traditional ways of filling a position. Not surprisingly, companies are starting to use the Internet both to expand their networking circles and to manage the rewards paid out to those who refer future hires. "Almost everyone is trying to harness the power of referrals," says Gerry Crispin, co-author of *CareerXroads 2001* (MMC Group), a directory of job, résumé, and career-management Web sites. "In the past six months more than a dozen third-party Web sites that will manage referrals have cropped up. Last year I didn't know of any."

One such upstart is Refer.com. On this site, companies post job openings free, offering compensation of at least \$1,000 (through Refer.com) to anyone who helps them fill an empty position, and paying a matching fee to Refer.com. Individuals sign on as members (at last count, there were more than 25,000), peruse the listings, and refer friends and colleagues who look like a good fit. Members who apply for a job themselves get the referral reward in the form of a signing bonus if they're hired for the position. In the case of a referral chain — a member recommends someone who recommends someone else who takes the job — the remuneration is shared.

JobTag, a Norristown, Pa., application service provider, takes another approach to expanding the networking circle and improving the referral process, by allowing companies to form customized pools from which they can draw recommendations on talent. Unlike Refer.com, JobTag doesn't post its openings publicly but creates protected areas on its site which are accessible only to client companies and organizations those clients designate: customers, vendors, investors, and anyone else with an interest in their success. Using a password to enter the area, members of the client's chosen network can read job listings, refer candidates, and then track them through the hiring process.

Like Refer.com, JobTag may pay out cash rewards, or it may treat referrals almost like a sales contest: rewarding members who make recommendations with points every time their candidates reach a new stage in the hiring process. Those points can then be redeemed for prizes, such as Palm organizers or televisions. JobTag sends out the prizes and bills the clients, who generally pay an up-front fee of at least \$8,000 in addition to covering the cost of the rewards.

Steal This Employee

Generally, the most desirable job candidates aren't waving their résumés around on the Internet. That's because they're usually working for the company down the street. Such "passive candidates," as recruiters have dubbed them, are as valuable as they are elusive. In fact, these already-spoken-for are so desirable that a whole industry has emerged to find them.

Among the best-known consulting firms in that new industry is Advanced Internet Recruitment Strategies (AIRS), a Hanover, N.H., company whose seminars have attracted more than 10,000 professional third-party recruiters and in-house human-resources managers. "In the old days recruiters made money because they knew where the candidates were and you didn't," says AIRS CEO Mike Foster. "But the Internet is a huge database, and if you know how to use it, you can bypass the recruiters." Foster's mantra is "find one, find them all," and he encourages recruiters to "profile the kinds of people you want to hire, find out where they congregate," and then apply the Net's associative properties to "find the links to meet their coworkers and who they went to school with."

In short, the Web sites of alumni groups, professional organizations, and chat rooms devoted to professional development are all fertile ground in which to sow the good word.

To Surf Me Is to Love Me

Of course, companies have been advertising for employees on their own sites since the early days of the commercial Web, and if it's executed well, that strategy can work. But it's rarely executed well. "Most organizations' sites are very poorly designed," says Weddle, and they're often rife with broken links. But there are those that do it right. Take Dan Smith, for example, owner of the Original Bike Cab Co., a San Diego business with a fleet of 50 pedicabs (rickshas powered by bicycles) that are operated by a band of peripatetic contractors. "The average person works for about 120 days, so recruiting is an ongoing process," says Smith. "There are very few career pedicabbers out there."

Smith's ideal job candidates are college students who are hungry to spend time in sunny San Diego — young people who are ambitious and smart and know how to follow directions. Until recently, he found such people chiefly by advertising in the local media. But last year Smith designed a Web site that markets to potential drivers as well as to customers. A five-page photo gallery full of beaming pedicabbers and stunning views — as well as links to the sites of more than 30 local attractions — sells candidates on San Diego; links to airlines, bus services, and even visa information help them get there. A message board allows current and prospective pedicabbers to communicate with one another and with Smith, while demonstrating the company's sense of camaraderie. The site, which includes application forms, also facilitates getting business licenses and driver's permits.

Of course, the glories of Smith's Web site are wasted if no one sees them. So he's energetic in positioning links to his site wherever the right kind of people might gather: at SummerJobs.com and ResortJobs.com, for example, as well as at university job sites. "I go to anything I can find that's free on the Internet," he says. Smith estimates that his Web site gets about 600 hits a day. Last year alone he received more than 800 e-mail messages from prospective drivers, 100 of whom he brought on board.

Finding It Online


Advanced Internet Recruitment Strategies: www.airsdirectory.com
 Anchorsilk: www.anchorsilk.com
 Boiler Room: www.boilerroom.com
 Candlewood Management Services: www.lifeguardjobs.com
 ConneXus: www.starcd.com
 Craigslist: www.craigslist.org
 Headhunter.net: www.headhunter.net
 HotJobs: www.hotjobs.com
 Interbiznet: www.interbiznet.com
 JobTag: www.jobtag.com
 Monster.com: www.monster.com
 MWW Group: www.mwwgroup.com
 Omnient: www.omnient.com
 100x: www.100x.com
 Original Bike Cab: www.bikecab.com
 Refer.com: www.refer.com
 ResortJobs.com: www.resortjobs.com
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