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Building the future of work together

How recruiters are turning to digital solutions to support talent acquisition

by Denis Pennel

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Today's tight labour markets require evermore creative approaches to identifying and acquiring talent. The staffing industry is increasingly embracing technology and realising that it can be a real gamechanger for the sector.

Digital solutions afford a number of opportunities for agencies. They often unearth a particularly rich seam of candidates and identify potential matches that had previously been overlooked – such as those with poor or incomplete LinkedIn profiles. By delving deeper and removing bias, technology often identifies a broader diversity of candidates for roles – including women, those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with qualifications from less recognised educational establishments. In short, the digital approach to talent acquisition results in a pool that is more inclusive and diverse.

And because technology frees up recruiters from the more routine admin tasks, it allows them to focus on value-add work and spend more time with clients and talent. Sourcing of candidates can be automated on specific criteria such as skills, experience, location or education, making the process more efficient. This in turn increases quality within the industry by reducing mistakes.

Artificial Intelligence can be used to provide real-time feedback on job applications – such as queries on status or the interview process - ensuring faster communication that helps to enhance the candidate experience.

Leveraging technology can deliver competitive advantage too. By increasing staff efficiency and offering greater speed to market in finding people to present to companies, it allows agencies to get ahead of the competition. In this respect, the race for technological supremacy that we are witnessing across a wide range of industries is also being reflected in the labour market.

Increased productivity is a key benefit of using technology. With demographics in much of the developed world causing the available workforce to contract, and the number of working hours broadly stagnant for some years now, recruiters are fishing in a finite talent pool. The only option left is to increase productivity through working smarter and leveraging automation.

As working patterns have changed so the way in which we work has changed too. Suspicions that automation would replace workers have given way to the recognition that digital solutions can offer a number of advantages. By removing repetitive tasks, automation has freed-up time for people to do more interesting and more productive work. And this is equally true for the staffing sector.

The recent global pandemic served as the catalyst to usher technology into recruitment firms. Up until then the industry had been relatively slow to adopt IT applications in supporting talent acquisition. Necessity changed all that and now recruiters are eager to explore what is out there and how it might be purposed for their sector.

Tech must be used to facilitate the sector, not change its ethos

In leveraging technology to drive efficiency, the staffing sector must not lose sight of who it is. The human side must still be there. Recruiters should use technology to enhance their business, not change their ethos. Think of it not as a solution but as a software that allows more time for softer skills such as chatting with clients and candidates and understanding what they want.

As with all innovations, introducing new technologies can cause problems if it is not sufficiently integrated within the business. Agencies need to guard against ‘tech fatigue’ where people are resistant to evolutions that are not sufficiently explained. By clearly demonstrating the advantages that digital advances will afford to staff in their work, agencies can ensure that everyone is trained and on board from the outset. A useful tip is to identify internal champions that can help to support and drive the introduction of technology throughout the agency.

That’s why staffing firms are keen to hire flexible people with the ability to think on their feet and learn. By hiring on attitude and training on skills, agencies can be sure that their staff are able to move with the times and embrace digital solutions as they come along.

Of course, it is rarely about the tech itself but rather its application within the sector. If the right programmes don’t exist, then staffing agencies just have to go out and create them. There are some interesting examples in the pipeline, such as staffing agencies using tech to scan CVs and profiles to build a picture of the most advantageous educational and work background in any given career.

When adopting new technologies, agencies also need to be mindful of the platforms they are choosing and be sure to do their homework up front. Are these digital suppliers sufficiently stable and reliable? Are you sure that they won’t let you down? There is significant risk attached to placing all your eggs in one technology basket if that company then fails.

Placing people at the centre

Recruitment firms would be well advised to place themselves in the job seekers shoes before introducing digital processes as they have a tendency to overcomplicate the process. We should always remember that people looking for a job expect a digital interaction that is swift, efficient and results in a position that interests them. So be sure to keep up with the latest preferred routes – such as optimising Google Search.

By stepping up the human contact and acting as career counsellors our sector has the opportunity to stay with people throughout their careers – from graduation to retirement – and in many ways this is the future of our industry.

Used properly, technology will increase efficiency for all of us by reducing the time spent in meetings and leaving space for true engagement and discussion. By focusing on flexibility, new skills and the human touch, recruiters have the chance to reap the rewards of technology within their operations and ensure that digital solutions drive efficiency and success in matching supply with demand in the labour markets of the future.

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