

Recruiting and Retaining Staff Gets Specialized

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Why do people complain about a lack of jobs in America? If you talk to anyone in the world of industrial printing, the real issue is the lack of talent. Finding and retaining top personnel, from management to sales to operations, has become a tall order. It may not be of much comfort, but other skilled industries are experiencing similar shortages.

According to a 2011 survey by the Manpower Group, one in three employers globally (34%) experienced difficulty filling positions due to a lack of available talent. That number may be even higher in a specialized industry such as industrial printing. Finding people who understand the world of membrane switches, specialty printing, RFID, OLEDs, photovoltaics, and sensors isn't easy. When last

we checked, these topics aren't featured prominently on most college and tech-school syllabi.

Instead, you have an industry that largely develops and trains its own personnel. With such a limited talent base, recruiting and retaining is exceedingly difficult. To provide you with some strategies for competing in today's business environment, we tapped into the thoughts of three top business strategists, both inside and outside the industry.

THE BIG CHALLENGE: IT'S NOT YOU, IT'S ME

Wouldn't it be nice to run a classified ad in the Sunday paper for a million-dollar sales producer with a solid understanding of exactly what you do and the markets you sell to? That's basically a fantasy, but

many CEOs treat it like reality. They give their HR department marching orders to bring in the big gun, and then they return to their business and wait for the results. It's the primary reason why many companies never land the big fish.

"Your HR department isn't a good place to start," says Jeff Ignatowski, director of sales with the Emerald Corp. "They don't have the breadth of knowledge or the network of contacts to find a real skilled or niche position."

The sentiment is echoed by Michael Brenk, managing partner with Global Recruiters of Clarendon Hills. He notes that a typical HR department is responsible for multiple tasks, such as employee disputes, tax forms, hiring processes, and much more. Strapped for time and without the freedom to truly network within the industry, they're quite often relegated to posting jobs on Monster.com and searching through hundreds of unqualified resumes.

That's not entirely the root cause of the problem, however. Even in companies where there are recruiting personnel, the decision makers are truly the ones who need to be intrinsically involved in the process.

"HR departments don't know where the real pain is," Brenk says. As a recruiter, he usually needs to spend several hours with top management trying to pull out the key attributes a company needs when searching for a new hire. Before you even get to the recruiting process, however, it's important to define your company as much as you expect a recruit to define him or herself.

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A top recruit isn't going to commit to your company unless you are either profitable or on the track for big-time growth. A successful sales producer, for example, didn't get that way by selling bunk products.

Brenk recommends your company do some serious soul searching and define itself before hanging out the *Now Hiring* sign. "Every company has strengths and weaknesses," he says. "Sit down, and assess them."

THE BRAVE NEW WORLD OF RECRUITING

Once you have your internal ducks in a row and your top management is part of the search team, you need to find the gaps in what you require from your people and the qualities you now have in house. And different levels of expertise require different approaches. Both Brenk and Ignatowski agree that finding top-level management and sales people requires different tactics from finding operational hires.

For white-collar positions, the use of social media and hiring a recruiter is highly recommended. According to Doug Wick, president of Positioning Systems and a certified Gazelles Business Consultant, "*Forbes Magazine* recently reported that 90% of employers plan to use social-media sites such as LinkedIn to recruit employees."

LinkedIn, with its industry-specific groups, grants you direct access to highly specialized industries. Not only can you use the service to post job openings, but its search feature also allows you to tap into the profiles of personnel in similar companies.

Simply by typing in a competitor's name, for example, you can generate a list of potential candidates for a job. We'll get into why poaching talent may not always be the most effective long-term recruiting tactic, but there's no denying the access you have to the profiles of qualified people in social media.

For management and top-level sales producers, Brenk says recruiters could use online data to network with potential candidates—even those who are happy in their current job.

"There is nothing more important than calling and developing a relationship with a passive candidate," he says. "They quietly have their head down and are

working, but they may be intrigued by an offer from another company."

Brenk also explains that it's a competition between the devil they know and the devil they don't. "Give them the information on why your company can better their lives. Many times, it's not just the money, but a host of other factors."

Recruiting can be a different story for skilled operations positions. Ignatowski suggests reaching out through your own personnel.

"Most people in our industry are aware of other companies and the people who are working there," he says. "They know who they are and can help you target new people." This strategy is particularly important for his Grand Rapids-based company, as they have to recruit from local talent pools.

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Brenk agrees with the strategy. "If you value the opinion of your key employees, tell them you need to find a person with similar skills," he says. "Ask them if they know anyone at a competitor."

Wick agrees that this is the easiest strategy for a smaller company, but cautions that you understand the potential consequences. "If you hire someone who is stolen from another company, their longevity with you will be the same as where they were previously. They are susceptible to leaving," he explains.

HIRING FROM OUTSIDE THE INDUSTRY

Brenk almost never wants to look outside the industry because most companies want personnel that can hit the ground running. It's an efficiency measure: Bring in the right person with many industry contacts, and the results will follow.

Wick believes it can work in the right situations: "For sales personnel, you really want someone who can build a

relationship. They can be trained on the technical aspects."

Promoting internally and cultivating talent is a method used by Jeff Ignatowski. "Ideally, we want to keep people who know us," he says. The strategy backfires only if you run into the Peter Principle, and the talent can't adapt to the new situation.

Whether you're hiring internally or externally, top-grading was highly recommended as a tool to ensure you're making the right hire. This personnel evaluation system is used to evaluate resumes and conduct interviews that mitigate the risk of hiring the wrong person.

Once the person is in place, the system includes a job summary scorecard. "It defines accountability, and can be used for performance evaluations. All the measurements are right there," Wick explains.

Many owners back away from top-grading, spooked by the level of commitment it takes.

BRINGING SOME ATTENTION TO RETENTION

With all the time and effort expended to land the top talent, you'd think more companies would focus resources on keeping their prized commodities. Yet, this is an overlooked function of management, perhaps because it requires more of a focus on behaviors and personalities than data and numbers.

Build the culture, and they will stay. If your company not only provides financial incentives and good benefits, but also provides rewarding employment and continuous encouragement, retention will improve.

Ignatowski recalls hiring a top sales producer who loved golf. "He was always talking about buying this driver called a Big Bertha," he says. When the producer hit his numbers, Ignatowski presented him with a brand new Bertha.

"I could have given him a check for \$300, but it wouldn't have had the same impact," he explains. "You've got to have a good package in terms of compensation and insurance, but at the end of the day, it's how they're treated and how they feel that determines if they're going to stay."

Ignatowski recalled that a recent company-wide meeting served as an example of how much positive reinforcement means to employees. The company had

brought in pizzas and talked about how important the people were to the success of the business. "Without you, all we have are parts that come in the door," he told his team. "You are the people who put it all together." He then thanked his staff for their efforts.

After the meeting several employees approached him. "They said they wanted to thank me for saying that to the group,"

he recalls. "They said it meant a lot to be recognized."

Doug Wick believes that keeping employees happy also involves more than just rewards—it's a systematic process that must be integrated into the operation of the company.

As an example, he talked about a software company that was constantly fending off headhunters. To keep their

engineers happy, they would routinely sit down with personnel and ask them a simple question: Is there a part of your job that you really dislike?

The company would then identify the tasks most disliked by the engineers, and shift them to administrative staff. The more the team could focus on preferred tasks, the harder it became for staff to leave.

"When someone approached them with another job, they really had to think about what they were giving up," Wick says.

He also recommended using the *Gallop Management Journal's* Q12 employee-engagement survey. The survey allows you to sample the amount of engagement staff has with their job. As Wick wrote in a recent blog post, "Patrick Lencioni, Aubrey Daniels, and several other human-behavior experts and authors have pointed out the value that a well-engaged employee base can provide for your business. In fact, employees who are excited about their work and the company that employs them perform at a 40% higher rate than the average employee."

Perhaps the biggest takeaway from the entire recruiting and retention process is how it requires the involvement of every facet of the organization. From the top level of management, where the ideal persona is developed, to the front-line staff, who are being asked to network and bring in new talent, this is no longer a task relegated to the HR department.

As Ignatowski said, in the end, without talent, there's nothing but parts and machines in your business. Finding the best people to put those parts together is the key, now more than ever. ●



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Rock LaManna is the president and CEO of the LaManna Alliance. The LaManna Alliance helps printing owners and CEOs use their company financials to prioritize and choose the proper strategic transition, including mergers, acquisitions, organic growth, and exit/succession plans.

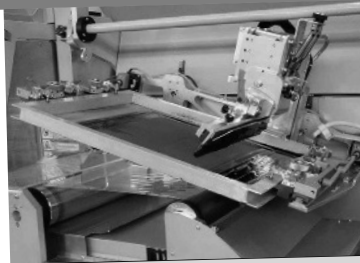
FUNCTIONAL PRINTING PRESS SYSTEM SELECTION CRITERIA CHECKLIST

Manufacturer:

KAMMANN

Product:

K 61 ROLL TO ROLL PRESS



Modular design allows entire system to be easily integrated into existing production environments.



Continuous (vs. stop-start) material transport with constant web tension.



Flat screenheads with up to 50 µm accuracy offers the highest quality screen printing.



Small footprint dryer for easy access.
 Hot Air IR UV LED



Print width and length up to 27" increases productivity.



Roll reversal available to minimize costs associated with roll removal and off-line rewind.

Possible Applications

- Medical devices
- Bio-sensors
- Printed batteries
- Circuitry (RFID, antennas)
- Printed electronics
- Tactile ink application

Contact manufacturer for a demonstration? Yes No

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