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TECHNOLOGY MEETS VISION

3 STREAMLINE THE IT HIRING PROCESS

WHITE PAPER

Some 70% of hiring managers say they want to hire more technology workers in the coming months. If you're one of those people, you should be aware that a unique set of challenges lies ahead. This whitepaper provides actionable insights into the most prevalent hurdles currently facing IT hiring managers, and is intended to help not only streamline your hiring process, but to get the most from your staffing and recruiting partners.

STREAMLINE THE IT HIRING PROCESS

3

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The need for high-quality IT workers is increasing at a rapid pace, but the pool of potential candidates is smaller than ever – which goes a long way towards explaining why nearly 60% of companies are reporting that open IT positions are currently going unfilled. But that's not the whole story. The challenges in this candidate-driven employment market are many. And some of the moves being made by candidates to leverage the situation (and by companies to try and control it) are only contributing to the ever-increasing complexity of the hiring process.

In this chapter, we provide actionable insight to help address the growing complexities of the IT hiring process:

- The need to slowly integrate social media as a recruiting tool

- Tips for attracting the candidates you really want, by writing job descriptions they really like

- How to optimize your job postings and corporate career site for search engines and mobile devices

- Suggestions for how to position your company as a great place to work

- Making a competitive job offer

- Negotiating tips

- Getting the most from your staffing and recruiting partners

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES OF IT HIRING

IT'S EASY TO GET OVERWHELMED WHEN CONSIDERING THE RAPID EVOLUTION OF THE HIRING ECOSYSTEM, ALL WHILE STILL MAINTAINING THE MANY OTHER DAY-TO-DAY ACTIVITIES REQUIRED OF YOUR TIME. IN THE PAGES TO FOLLOW, WE OFFER SOME OF OUR BEST TIPS, SUGGESTIONS AND INSIGHTS TO HELP STREAMLINE YOUR HIRING PROCESS AND IMPROVE THE RESULTS OF YOUR STAFFING PARTNER RELATIONSHIPS.

CLEARLY DEFINE & COMMUNICATE THE DETAILS OF THE POSITION

A recent study found that the average job-seeker spends just one to two minutes reviewing a job description before dismissing it as a poor fit (even though the study participants estimated that the task typically takes five to ten minutes of their time). The takeaway from those results: If you don't clearly define and articulate the details of your open IT positions, top candidates could very well skip right over the opportunity.

Below you'll find some useful tips for creating an engaging job description. If you don't have the in-house skills (or time) to implement these ideas, consider enlisting the help of an outside expert – companies that specialize in job-description writing, or your staffing / recruiting partner are great resources to help give you sense of what may resonate with both active and passive job seekers.

DO

- Use emotion to make the position as exciting as it can be. Emphasize the impact the person will have, and accomplishments they can look forward to.

- Flavor the writing with the hiring department's personality. If the department is fast-moving, use short, staccato sentences. If co-workers are fun-loving, include a bit of humor. Adapt your writing style to provide an idea of the culture they'll be entering.

- Consider including a high-level, two-sentence summary at the top of the description to pull readers into the details that follow.

- Limit the job description to 300 words or less – especially when trying to reach IT candidates, who are likely to be conducting part of their job search from a mobile device. If you must, link the primary description to a larger version with more details.

- If you also use job descriptions for post-hiring performance evaluations, create two versions: one to recruit with, and another more detailed version to share with the final candidates.

- Imagine your ideal candidate (based on both skills and personality), and write with that person in mind. Forget about trying to attract the most applicants with a generic description, and instead picture a particular individual.

- Review the list of requirements again and again to determine what's truly essential, then delete those things that aren't. Try to target the eight keys to future success in the position.

- Include and optimize for specific "long-tail keywords" within the job posting so they're more easily found by candidates searching online via search engines.

DON'T

- Include an overly long list of requirements. Research shows that most men will apply for a position if they meet 60% of the requirements, but most women feel they need to meet 100% of the requirements.

- Overuse industry jargon and acronyms.

- Settle for dull writing, which makes the job and company seem dull, as well.

- Overuse clichés, such as, "must be a team player," "must be detail oriented," and "must be a dedicated hard worker."

60%
The amount of job requirements met in which *men* feel qualified to apply

VS.

100%
The amount of job requirements met in which *women* feel qualified to apply

COMPANY POSITIONING IS KEY

If you want to entice the best IT candidates to apply, you need to position your organization as one of the best places to work. You need to create an "employment brand" that top-quality IT workers find enticing. Positioning (also known as employment branding) is not a matter of crafting a better corporate motto or an eye-catching logo. It's much more than that. It's about demonstrating – with both words and examples – how your company provides employees with just the right mix of challenge, reward, collaboration, growth and opportunity. With the right positioning, your company won't just attract better-quality candidates, those candidates will also be a better fit with your organization's culture.

It's about demonstrating how your company provides employees with the right mix of challenge, reward, collaboration, growth and opportunity.

Do you offer a unique work environment? Are the benefits or amenities at your company better than what candidates would find elsewhere? Is training and advancement something your company truly values? These are just some of the things that attract high-quality candidates; things that you want to focus on in your employment brand.

Take job security, for example. After the economic downturn of 2007, and the experiences many technology workers have had at startups, job stability has become a real selling point for many prospective IT employees. While you may not be able to guarantee these workers long-term employment, you can use your employment brand to communicate financial strength, a track record of success, strong executive leadership and an established industry position.

The more unique the attributes are, the better they will differentiate your company from another that the candidate may be considering. Is your IT department small? Play up the fact that candidates can have a bigger impact than they could by working at a larger company. Do you have an established record of quickly advancing talented workers? Do you have a policy of contributing to employee-supported causes?

Other suggestions include:

- Assess your company's strengths (the best aspects of being an employee). Then assess your five biggest competitors in the same way. Finally, compare the lists and see if there are areas where working for your company is significantly better than working for a competitor.

- Use examples. Just saying your company values work / life balance has little real impact. Any company can say it. Instead, create a video or webpage showing some of the creative, clever and feel-good things your employees have time to do in their free time.

- Encourage current employees to use social media to talk about what it's like to work at your company. Feed them a steady stream of ideas, links and resources they can use for those efforts.

- Establish corporate Facebook and Twitter accounts, and actively use them to build relationships with the IT community you want to attract.

- Choose a topic that's of importance to the IT workers you want to attract (and agrees with your corporate philosophy), and take a vocal and public stand on it.

- Ask someone outside the company to do an online search for your company and describe their initial impression.

- Monitor what people are writing about your company on Glassdoor.com and similar websites, correct any blatant untruths, and address negative sentiments toward your company with honesty and candor.

- Enter your company in some of the "Best Places to Work" contests.

- Announce employee promotions via local business news outlets (in special columns devoted to these announce-ments, or in a paid advertisement congratulating the employee).

- When you discover weaknesses that make your company a less-desirable place to work, correct them, then let the outside world know that you've corrected them.

Your staffing partner can be of great help here, and should be consulted when it comes to company positioning. Staffing providers such as XTGlobal interface with IT workers each and every day, speaking directly with candidates regarding the attributes they look for when evaluating prospective employers, the technologies and projects they are most interested in working on, and the turn-offs that prevent them from applying to certain companies.

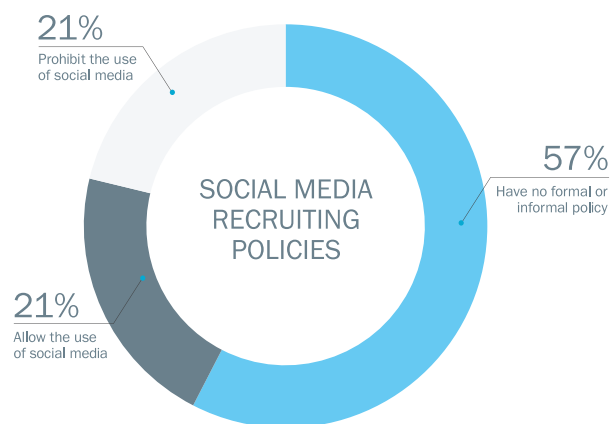## FORMALIZE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY & PRACTICE

From a conversation rate perspective, social media recruiting could be considered a bust, with only 2.9% of new hires being directly attributable to this relatively new recruiting resource. However, analysts and industry insiders both feel those numbers are misleading, and, more importantly, that this tool will be instrumental in the near future.

While the number of new hires directly attributable to social media may be surprisingly low, most feel certain that it influences and enhances the other, more traditional, hiring methods used along with it. Candidates may not be applying for positions via social media in great numbers, but there's no doubt that it's whetting their employment appetites and driving them to online job postings and other direct-application interfaces – all of which end up with the final hiring credit.

One of social media's most exciting and powerful elements is its direct-sourcing capability. Instead of posting an open position and waiting for qualified candidates to see it and apply, recruiters and hiring managers are now able to use the medium to proactively search out qualified prospects – currently employed or not. Yes, recruiters are already using databases to proactively search for candidates. But, with social media, the candidate pool is far larger, the prospects are often passive (fully employed and not actively looking for work), and the information available for each prospect can be much richer and more insightful than found anywhere else.

Social media's other great power is its ability to engage prospects, build community and develop brand awareness. It's extremely well-suited for educating outsiders about your company, developing relationships with high-quality talent, learning their wants, needs, strengths and weaknesses, even tapping into their network of friends and co-workers – and then using all that information to fill open positions. However, it's no silver bullet. Social media is not going to replace the other recruiting tools traditionally used to find talent. And from an operational perspective, it's certainly not free – running a productive social media recruiting program is a full-time job. Your best bet is to integrate it into your current recruiting program, use it as a supplement, and slowly ratchet up its use as you become more adept at leveraging its strengths.

Another reason to move slowly and cautiously on this front: The huge liability risk. The chances of discovering a

21%
Prohibit the use
of social media

57%
Have no formal or
informal policy

SOCIAL MEDIA RECRUITING POLICIES

21%
Allow the use
of social media

potential candidate's age, race, gender or religion (all protected characteristics) while viewing their Facebook page, Twitter account or LinkedIn profile are very high, which leaves hiring managers and their employer open to lawsuits from candidates who are turned down for positions. An employer who learns that an applicant is gay, disabled, or over 50 years old, and then hires someone else may face serious discrimination charges.

Hiring managers are human. You can't blame them for wanting to know about a candidate's personal life before offering an opportunity to work side-by-side. So you shouldn't be surprised to learn that 43% of hiring managers admit that they have chosen not to hire candidates because of what they discovered through social media screening. That's why any company considering social should have a well-reasoned social media policy in place beforehand. A recent survey by the Society for Human Resource Management found that 57% of organizations do not have a formal or informal policy regarding screening candidates via social media. Of those with a policy, 21% prohibit it.

Social media is poised to create a seismic shift across the IT recruiting environment, but employers would be wise to develop informed policies regarding its use prior to aggressively using it as an employee acquisition medium.

LEVERAGE THE BENEFITS OF SEARCH & MOBILE

Today, most job-hunters bypass online job boards and corporate career websites when hunting open positions and instead go straight to Google. There, they key-in the type of job they're wanting, and the city where they'd like to work (but not necessarily the employer). In fact, ten times more job-seekers use Google to start their search than any other resource. And only 4% of them enter the name of a specific company. So if your job descriptions aren't tailored for strategic "long-tail keywords," and if your career page isn't indexed and optimized, the top-quality IT workers you want to apply probably won't even see the listings.

Optimizing your job postings with effective long-tail keywords and well-structured metadata can help keep your listings on the first pages of search engines – and it involves the same techniques your marketing department is probably using to push your products / services.

You'll want to mobile-optimize your recruiting efforts as well. A 2012 study found that 31% of Google searches for the term "jobs" were conducted on a mobile phone – almost double the rate from a year earlier. Yet, only 3% of Fortune 500 companies offer a way to apply for jobs by phone. Globally, only 110 out of 694 employers have a mobile career website or app. Mobile devices are so ubiquitous among IT workers, they're considered another appendage – which is why every company searching for IT talent should be mobile-enabling their job listings. That means creating shorter job descriptions (and including a quick summary of the position), allowing candidates to import their online employment profiles, asking for less information (or allowing candidates to skip some of the more laborious information fields). Your corporate career site should receive the same kind of treatment.

IT-dependent organizations that don't embrace SEO and mobile-optimization as part of their recruiting strategies are at serious risk of being left behind, because top-ranked competitors have been incorporating these ideas for years.

31%
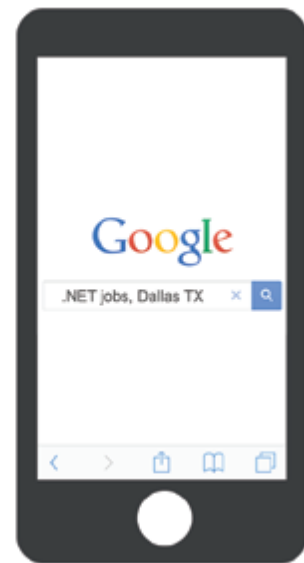
of Google searches for the term "jobs" were conducted on a mobile phone in 2012 - almost double the rate from a year earlier.

EMBRACE A STREAMLINED HIRING PROCESS

High quality IT workers simply won't wait 40-70 days for a hiring decision. They're hot commodities, and they know it. Bureaucracy and paperwork has been known to slow down many corporate decisions, and no company wants to rush into a bad hire. But when the competition for workers is this intense, you must act quickly.

Having an already-established relationship with the most promising candidates is an excellent way to shorten the hiring timeline. If you already know the candidate, his or her experience, desires and objectives, the interview process can segue into an offer much more quickly. Your staffing partner can help leverage this advantage, since many recruiters have long-standing relationships with candidates as they progress throughout their careers. But companies can establish their own relationships with social media and other online networking tools.

TIPS FOR STREAMLINING THE HIRING PROCESS

- Make sure the requirements for the position, and your expectations for the right fit, are reasonable.

- Limit the number of employees involved in the interview / screening process and the eventual hiring decision. The fewer people involved the faster a decision can be made.

- Agree on a formal method for making a group-hiring decision (appoint one person as the final decision-maker, define tie-breaker process, etc.).

- Limit pre-hire challenges, tests and exercises to only those that everyone on the search committee agrees are predictive of future success.

- Prepare a candidate checklist, then spend five minutes after each interview summarizing your thoughts. Using a checklist makes it easier to compare the different candidates. Jotting down your initial reactions, opinions and outstanding questions, makes it easier to share those things among the hiring decision-makers, and also provides extremely valuable feedback for your staffing partners throughout the process.

- Don't start the recruiting process until you're ready to quickly move forward. Carefully define the job and its key responsibilities, establish who will be on the hiring committee (and ensure each person's schedule is free), get all the necessary approvals for the salary range, etc.

- Listen to your gut. Human instinct is one of your most powerful screening tools.

- Make sure everyone understands that high-quality IT talent is very sought after today, and delaying decisions could very well result in losing the most promising candidates to competitors.

- Don't worry about appearing too eager.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MAKING COMPETITIVE OFFERS

In a candidate-driven market, it's more important than ever that you make your offer competitive and enticing. That means not just matching what others are offering, but also contributing something unique. This is not the time to lowball your most promising candidate and "see where things go from there." Peter Cappelli, a professor at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and an expert in human resources practices, says salary is the key. Like it or not, prospective candidates are most influenced by offers of more money. However, Cliff Stevenson, a senior research analyst at the Institute for Corporate Productivity says the best offers are more nuanced.
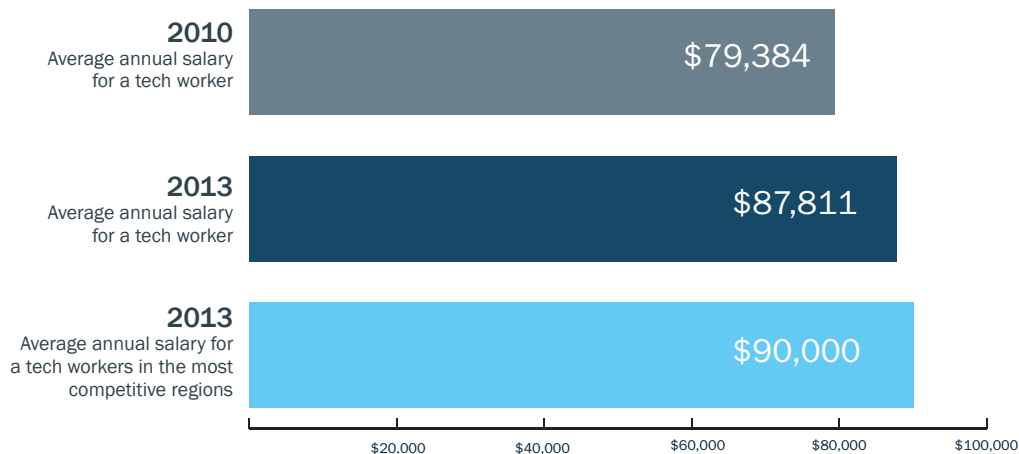
Pay in the IT industry is rising faster than other segments of the employment market

According to a nationwide survey of HR professionals, salary / pay is indeed the most important consideration. But everyone agrees that it's only part of the package. Amending your offer with other sought-after benefits can help make up for any salary shortfalls. Typically, health care benefits are the second most valued element of a compensation package. Training and development ranks third. The least-important benefits include reward/recognition programs, and family benefits.

To establish a competitive salary, make sure you're working with region-specific information. In 2012, the mean annual salary for a network and computer system administrator was $76,320. However, in Virginia, the mean was $87,880. Your region may command even more – or significantly less.

Basing salary level on past experience is also a mistake. As an example, with pay in the IT industry continuing to rise much faster than other segments of the employment market, what you paid for a UI designer just a few years ago would almost certainly be considered a low-ball offer today.

- In 2010, the average annual salary for a technology worker was $79,384.

- Just three years later, that average rose to $87,811.

- The average surged to more than $90,000 in many of the most competitive regions (Charlotte, Atlanta, San Diego, Austin, Philadelphia, Houston, Denver, New York).

2010
Average annual salary for a tech worker
$79,384

2013
Average annual salary for a tech worker
$87,811

2013
Average annual salary for a tech workers in the most competitive regions
$90,000

$20,000 $40,000 $60,000 $80,000 $100,000

While many employers – especially non-tech companies – think they can get a good candidate for cheap, the truth is, top performers are very hard to find and difficult to move. A-rated IT candidates are being heavily courted and usually have multiple offers to consider. So if your offer isn't as competitive as it can be, chances are higher than ever that the candidate will accept an offer elsewhere, or use this as an opportunity to ask their current employer for a raise.

In cases where the salary you can afford simply isn't enough to land the type of candidate you want, consider an alternative employment model (contract-to-hire, project / contract staffing, etc.).

THE NUANCES OF NEGOTIATION

Today, negotiating a job offer has become standard practice: Make an offer to your most promising candidate, they respond with a counter-offer, you both engage in a little back-and-forth before agreeing to a compromise. But if this step drags out, or isn't handled diplomatically, it can ruin your chances of landing the IT worker you really want.

- Use research to justify the salary offered. If you have facts and figures showing the salary range that a person in that position makes, in the same region, share that information with the candidate. It's one of your most powerful negotiating tools.

- Emphasize the role of geography in relation to salary. A .NET developer looking to relocate to Texas from San Francisco can't realistically expect to maintain the same salary. However, the move may counterbalance any loss of salary with other financial benefits (a better cost-of-living, the lack of a state income tax, lower utility costs, etc.).

- Understand that this is a candidate-driven IT employment market, which means you may have to offer more money than you'd like to land your leading candidate, especially if they are currently employed and in no danger of being forced into looking for other employment.

- Don't close the door on a candidate who asks for more than you think reasonable. Remain open and take a non-defensive posture.

- Be prepared with add-ons you're willing to offer, if necessary. Ideas include:
    - Additional vacation days
    - Telecommuting
    - Flex time
    - Stock options
    - Bonus opportunities
    - Training and development opportunities
    - Paid relocation costs
    - Signing bonuses

The key is using what you've learned about the candidate throughout the interview process (and during any offer conversations) to deliver a customized package that helps them realize their personal goals. For a candidate eager to move, a relocation package can be the decisive factor. A younger candidate may be swayed by the promise of a free fitness club membership or other lifestyle perks. Even offering to change the job title can prove successful in luring some candidates. Listen carefully, ask probing questions and try to read between the lines.

Learning to sell your offer is also important:

- Review the details of the offer with the candidate or staffing partner. Don't let the document or offer details speak for themselves.

- Ensure the candidate understands the specifics of the offer, and encourage questions in order to communicate confidence in what's presented.

- For each of the major features included in the offer, mention a benefit (e.g. "Office visits are free with our health insurance plan, plus the network is so large, any doctor you want to see is almost surely included.")

- Highlight related benefits that could appeal to the candidate (e.g. "And don't forget about the shorter commute, which means less time in your car, more time with your family and friends, fewer tolls and less pain at the pump").

Negotiating with a take-it-or-leave-it attitude almost always leaves the candidate with a bad feeling (even those who end up accepting the offer), and can result in negative social media publicity. But a willingness to consider alternative approaches, explore common ground and negotiate in good faith can help both sides feel like winners when all is said and done. It's certainly a nuanced and touchy process, and is an area where a seasoned IT staffing professional can step in to act as not only an expert in the process, but also as a buffer in the event that discussions devolve into tension on either (or both) sides.

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR STAFFING & RECRUITING PARTNERS

As you know, the IT hiring ecosystem is becoming increasingly complex, and the trend shows no signs of stopping anytime soon. Effectively managing the complexity and coming out on the other side with a top-tier hire is a nuanced process, involving internal dynamics, social media, technology, interviewing, negotiation and budget management (at the very least). The time and effort required to truly master each element in and of itself is quite the challenge, and integrating them all into a cohesive and consistent practice, even more so. While it's possible to manage these skills and maintain your hiring process internally, the case for employing a skilled staffing firm is becoming stronger.
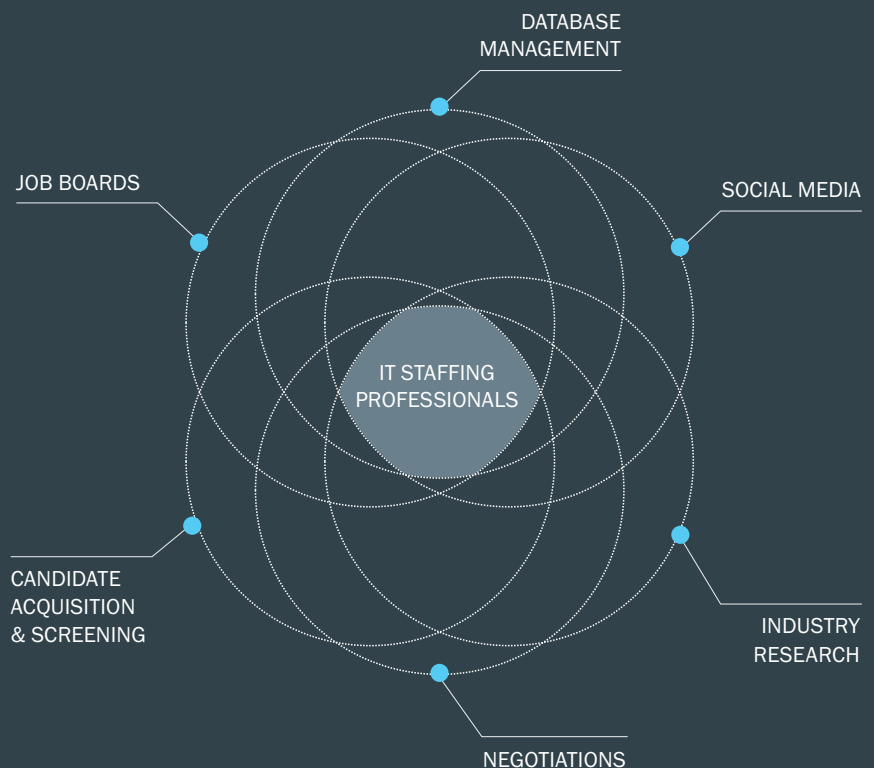
Keeping up with the candidate market, hiring trends, salary statistics, social media, hiring tools and database mining is certainly a full-time job, and many companies can't afford to divert internal resources to this type of focus. Staffing professionals live in this space, and the skills that could potentially take months (or even years) to master and standardize within your organization are already embedded in the day-to-day activities of a quality staffer.

Throughout this document, we've highlighted how creating a strong partnership with a staffing / recruiting firm can directly influence the results of your recruiting efforts for the better. But moving the relationship to a truly strategic level requires both parties to have a similar approach, and that both be willing to invest the necessary time and energy that recruiting top-quality IT candidates requires today.

THE EXTERNAL HIRING ECOSYSTEM

It's no longer just a few job boards leading to a couple of candidates and a handful of interviews. Today's hiring process is a complex ecosystem, incorporating more and more technologies and skillsets by the day.

Navigating the process effectively and efficiently is a craft unto itself, and staffing partners who can turn this skill into a value-add for organizations are quickly becoming viewed as true strategic partners.

DATABASE MANAGEMENT

JOB BOARDS

SOCIAL MEDIA

IT STAFFING PROFESSIONALS

CANDIDATE ACQUISITION & SCREENING

INDUSTRY RESEARCH

NEGOTIATIONS

If your current staffing partner isn't taking the time to learn the intricacies of your corporate culture, isn't expending the effort to carefully screen candidates, isn't suggesting new ideas or doesn't share your corporate philosophy, perhaps it's time to consider another. When evaluating your existing provider or looking for alternatives, the following questions will help you understand if the relationship has the potential to reach the strategic-partner level:

WHAT TO ASK	WHY IT'S IMPORTANT
What's the average tenure of your staff?	Not surprisingly, a staff with a longer recruiting tenure has experience on its side, in addition to bringing to the table long-term career relationships with candidates across various IT skillsets.
What percentage of your clients are repeat customers?	A high level of repeat business shows the staffing /recruiting firm is delivering on its promises.
What type of worker do you specialize in recruiting?	If the staffing /recruiting firm doesn't specialize in IT workers, the chances of it finding quality talent in the current environment may not meet the standards required by your organization.
Do your recruiters share their networks and candidate lists with one another?	The more collaborative recruiters at the firm are, the greater your chances of finding a high-quality candidate.
How do you qualify candidates?	Reviewing résumés and conducting reference checks is standard practice. What else is the staffing /recruiting firm doing to ensure candidates are of a high quality?
What's your success rate with placing candidates?	This is a measure of how long new-hires typically remain in a filled position. The longer they tend to stay, the more satisfied you can assume the client (and the employee) was with the hire.
What type of businesses do you typically serve?	Look for a staffing /recruiting firm that's familiar with businesses like yours, and/or experienced staffing within your industry.
Will you take time to meet my staff and get a feel for our office dynamics?	The more your staffing /recruiting partner makes an effort to learn about your organization first-hand, the easier it will be for them to screen qualified candidates.
Can you support multiple employment models?	While some staffers specialize in one or a few options, it may be worth your time to find a partner with a broader range of employment models. Finding a partner that supports direct-hire, contract, contract-to-hire, embedded resources, or even project outsourcing can provide greater flexibility during the hiring process, all while strengthening the long-term business relationship.

TIPS FOR FOSTERING THE STAFFING RELATIONSHIP

- Engage with a staffing firm well before you're ready to hire, which allows both of you the necessary time to educate and understand one another.

- Be very clear about what role you want the staffer to fill (simply sourcing candidates, a fully embraced recruiting consultant, or something in-between).

- Be transparent about your budget so you can get qualified candidates within your salary range.

- Provide direct access to hiring managers so your staffing contact can get a true sense of the working environment, and the specific needs of the people working there.

- Take the time to educate your staffing contact about what makes your company unique.

- Be open to trying new approaches and incorporating the advice offered by your staffing partner.

- Be honest with your staffing contact about what's working and what's not.

- As with any relationship, the connection you have with your staffing / recruiting firm should be a two-way street, with each party seeking collaboration and providing honest communication for the betterment of the partnership.

CONCLUSION

While complex, securing quality IT talent is still quite attainable and should continue to be an organizational focus. Once acquired, however, ensuring the success of your new hire is yet another challenge. In the next installment of this whitepaper series, we'll dive into what it takes to improve the chances of the new hire's success, and how ongoing and honest communications with your staffing providers can help evaluate past, present and future hires.

When your business is planning to add technical resources, our team of Senior Client Solutions Partners and Recruiters are here to assist you. At XTGlobal, our IT Services division provides the depth and flexibility needed to provide your business with more than just an IT staffing resource, but rather a long-term strategic technology partner. By offering flexibility in employment models and pricing terms, we are experienced in streamlining the hiring process while maintaining a keen eye on your needs and budget.

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