

Creative Approaches to Filling a Key Position

Jeff Valentine

When Amber Newman, Fonality's recently departed director of marketing communications, turned in her notice, she proposed a recruiting plan that was unprecedented for the company. This led to one of the company's most successful—and nontraditional—recruiting efforts to date.

Newman had been with us for about a year. At Fonality, she was in charge of communicating our marketing messages about our great business phone system to prospects and customers, and she did a fantastic job. Then, as her manager, I received the call I knew I might get one day but dreaded: she was offered a position that represented a huge promotion in another industry to take over their entire marketing department, and she had decided to take it. Even though she was leaving on excellent terms, she didn't want her pursuit of a "can't-miss" opportunity to hurt Fonality or her colleagues. So she pitched me on how she would announce this change, and after I chuckled a bit, I agreed: she would find someone who could do her job better than she could, and we'd blog about the process.

"I was leaving with very good feelings about the company and the team," said Newman. "I wanted to find someone who would not let the team down and who would maintain and expand on the work I'd done. It was very important to me to hand that off to someone so that the rest of the organization didn't feel pain as a result of my departure."

Whereas some managers and companies are fearful that departing employees will reflect poorly on them, we usually tend toward the transparent, honest, and bold, shining light where others prefer darkness. So when Amber approached Rob Snodgrass, director of human resources, and me with this idea, it was a no-brainer. Together, we got to work.

BUILD ON THE BASICS

Although Fonality has chosen to implement an atypical recruiting process for this and other positions, delivering on recruiting essentials like a job description, applicant tracking, and legally required hiring processes was nonnegotiable. The potential exposure for employers in any hiring situation underscores the need to move in lockstep with human resources through any recruiting process.

"Like any other person in HR and recruiting, I have trouble relinquishing control of the recruiting process," said Snodgrass. "And for good reason. There are legal parts of recruiting that need to be handled flawlessly."

Newman knew this, which is why Snodgrass was her second call. Her understanding of the necessary steps and partnership with HR were keys to the success of this approach. She evaluated the résumés in the company's applicant tracker, selected those applicants she would interview, and moved the finalists on to be interviewed by me.

Putting those activities in the hands of a hiring manager isn't much of a departure at many companies. What made this situation unique was that we marketed the position. We showcased the realities of the role and the company's culture in a post on the company's blog. We tweeted about it on Twitter, bragged about it on Facebook, and referenced it on LinkedIn. And Newman and others in the company spread the word far and wide through their own social networks.

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Snodgrass, in turn, ensured that every candidate got a response, creating a good final impression of the company, as well as adherence to standard language. He also managed important HR functions like candidate completion of the job application, the offer process and negotiations, and the background check for the final candidate. Based on feedback from Newman's replacement, the process ran seamlessly.

"Amber's approach was a huge selling point for the role, the company, and its leadership," said Maggie Thill, who started as Newman's replacement in late December 2014. "I saw the job posting in my LinkedIn alerts and was referred for the position by a former colleague who works at Fonality. So that part was good old-fashioned networking. But it was Amber's blog post and my initial interview with her that closed the initial sale. Any company and team where the culture inspires the kind of loyalty it requires to take this approach is worth serious consideration.

Subsequent interviews and steps in the process reinforced it."

This approach offered an unexpected benefit by alleviating some pressure and stress for the Fonality HR team. In addition to the process overlapping with major holidays, Snodgrass got married and went on his honeymoon during the most active recruiting period for this position. He couldn't resist keeping up with the process, but he was confident he didn't need to actively participate until he got back.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

The fact that the company's quirky culture allows for creative recruiting doesn't justify even considering breaking the rules of traditional recruiting—any recruiting program should be built on a firm foundation of HR basics. For Newman's position, this foundation started with the following job description:

Director of Marketing Communications

Fonality provides unified phone systems and applications for growing businesses. More than 30,000 businesses in 99 countries rely on Fonality to help them sell, service, and collaborate with ease. We are a team of 250-plus engineers, support professionals, operations and finance experts, sales experts, and marketers who work together to delight our clients and have a little fun.

Fonality is looking for a Director of Marketing Communications, who will be responsible for all of Fonality's day-to-day planning, management, and execution of strategic communication activities. The ideal candidate will be familiar with Fonality's market and should be an

expert at writing, editing, and authenticating all marketing communication materials including press documents, sales collateral, product documents, website, and other promotional materials. This position will report directly to Fonality's CMO.

Responsibilities

- ❑ Develop, edit, and be responsible for Fonality's Marketing Communications strategy, including creation of all marketing collateral, such as customer success stories, thought leadership papers, blog posts, web content, web pages, data sheets, press releases, newsletters, sales collateral, and product and promotional materials.
- ❑ Drive communications in multiple platforms (print, web, and social media) for delivering content to broad audiences and be savvy at developing content for these platforms.
- ❑ Work with demand generation and sales to deliver high-quality, prospect-focused sales enablement tools and documents.
- ❑ Use creativity and out-of-the-box thinking to take Fonality's organic search optimization to the next level.
- ❑ Work with product marketing, sales, other marketing team members, and internal stakeholders to identify, create, and distribute content and stories that attract, acquire, and engage targeted audiences.

Preferred Skills and Experience

- ❑ Seven-plus years in a strategic Marketing Communications role in a company specializing in premise or hosted PBX systems, telecom, unified communications, SaaS, Hosted Services, Managed

Services, or other highly technical fields.

- ❑ Proven ability to create compelling messages and content for prospects, customers, and employees.
- ❑ Experience working with Marketing CRM systems; we use HubSpot, but if you know Eloqua, Pardot, or Marketo, that will likely do.
- ❑ Strong B2B targeting skills.
- ❑ A passion for identifying effective and unique communication strategies.
- ❑ Experience in marketing for a start-up/midsized company a plus.
- ❑ Autonomy: ability to work effectively and independently.
- ❑ Ability to work under pressure to meet aggressive time schedules—multitasking abilities a must!

At Fonality, we believe in promoting from within and investing in our employees. We offer a very competitive compensation package and a comprehensive health insurance package (medical, dental, and vision).

With some of the smartest people in the telephony business working for us, this is a great opportunity to jump on board and work with people who are passionate about what they do. Check us out at www.fonality.com.

If you're the MarComm professional we're looking for, **APPLY NOW!**

APPLY SOCIAL-MEDIA MARKETING METHODS

While Fonality keeps the light tone of its job descriptions consistent with its brand, these documents by their nature can be a little "plain Jane." They certainly aren't likely to

go viral the way a video of crazy cat antics or pandas playing in the first snow of the year

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might.

That's where Newman's blog post and social strategy came in. Fonality didn't need millions of views to find the right fit. It just needed to reach the right readers and help them get to know more about the role and the company. Here's Newman's post as it appeared on both the company's Cloud 9 Blog and on LinkedIn:

Wanted: Someone Who Can Do My Job Better Than I Can

Posted by Amber Newman

Nov 6, 2014 1:58:39 PM

I have a great job. I'm the Director of Marketing Communications for a growing company in an exploding industry with an outstanding team. And I'm quitting. Why? It's time for me to move on and prove to myself that I can do something new, and Fonality has prepared me to accept my first VP level position at a company in a different industry. I'm proud of what I accomplished at Fonality, but even more proud of what I learned.

An unexpected opportunity to learn something entirely new and stretch myself has presented itself, and I've decided to go for it. YOLO. Still, I care about this company and the people I work with, so I'm on the hunt for someone who can take my

place and leave everyone asking, "Amber who?" Is it you?

You might be able to do my job better than me if ...

- You have a ton of experience in a senior marketing position at a B2B technology company.
- Fonality sells business phone systems. You don't have to know much about business phone systems, but you have to convince me that you'll be able to learn very quickly.
- You can write. By this, I mean, you can start with a blank screen and create blogs, data sheets, web pages, press releases, newsletters, or who knows what else. I'm going to want to see examples.
- People like, trust, and respect you. This job requires a lot of cross-functional and intrateam collaboration. That isn't possible unless you can develop good relationships and consistently deliver on promises.
- You can easily make the connection between what a product does and why it matters to customers. You're always asking, "What's the use case?"
- You know your way around marketing automation and CRM systems. We use HubSpot. It would be awesome if you know HubSpot, but if you know Eloqua, Pardot, or Marketo, that will likely do.
- You "get" website optimization. I'm looking for someone who understands the purpose of a business-to-business website and can take Fonality's organic search optimization to the next level. Our industry is very competitive

for search, so this will take some creativity.

- ❑ You can manage 27 things at the same time. Twenty-seven.
- ❑ You know how to handle vendors to get the most out of them for the least amount of money and the most favorable contract terms.
- ❑ You are fanatical about reputation management and customer advocacy. You see every negative review as an opportunity to flip a detractor and know how to leverage the many great ones.
- ❑ Most of your decisions are driven by data, but once in a while you take a flyer on a hunch.
- ❑ You have a slightly twisted sense of humor and can laugh at yourself.

This describes the person I am trying to find. You can see the additional requirements that we're looking for here. If this sounds like you, send me a pitch that will convince me you will do better than I could do.

Whoever takes this position will be a part of an exceptional squad with incredibly powerful technology solutions. (I'm going to miss you HUD.) This is the last important thing I will do for this team and I don't want to let them down.

Topics: Careers

RESULTS MATTER

Even at a company that welcomes risk-taking—or maybe especially at one—measurement is critical. The results of every activity are analyzed carefully to determine success, as well as what the company can

learn for the next time. In the case of this unique hiring approach, it really delivered the goods, as listed below.

- ❑ *More views.* Newman's post cracked the top ten in terms of views on the company's blog for the year, coming in at no. 8. It was also shared 42 times across Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook. The LinkedIn version of the post—Newman's only one on the site's recently expanded publication platform for regular users—attracted 719 views.
- ❑ *More résumés.* The company received up to double the applications it receives in response to the average marketing opening. That department already attracts more submissions than most other categories, so this represented a windfall of résumés.
- ❑ *More qualified, engaged candidates.* "The quality of candidates blew me away," said Newman. "I expected to have to make some big compromises between technical and marketing skill sets. I talked to a lot of people who were excited and engaged, and who told me the approach increased their level of interest in the position."
- ❑ *Case closed ... quickly.* Even with holiday schedules to contend with, the Fidelity team was able to complete the hiring process quickly. Newman received enough qualified candidates to complete nearly two dozen screening interviews in the short time before she left. This positioned the company to keep the process moving quickly through final interviews. Newman's backfill started just a few weeks after her last day.

These results will be used to evaluate future hiring approaches should a similar

situation arise. They may also be used to develop new ideas, as well as to encourage recruiters and hiring managers to keep getting creative. This isn't the first time the company has broken with tradition.

OTHER CREATIVE RECRUITING TECHNIQUES

Letting the incumbent lead the charge for finding his or her backfill is just one of the unique approaches to recruiting at this unified communications industry leader. Other examples include:

- ❑ *Creating a new hire class.* When bringing in new hires to an established team, consider hiring in groups. That's the approach Fonality took after realizing new hires brought in individually to the customer support team were struggling to fit in. They were joining an established group where the previous employees had been with the company for three or four years. It was like being the new kid in school. This inspired the idea of hiring a "class" of support staff instead of one at a time. Bringing in a group of new hires helped them bond with one another and successfully integrate with the existing team. The first class consisted of a dozen support team members. Subsequent classes have ranged from six to eight, as that original class moved up in the organization.
 - ❑ *Redoing the job description.* Another key to the success of Fonality's support team is that it redid the job description to focus on what candidates will get out of the role instead of just on skills. It focused on the opportunity to learn, as well as opportunities for advancement. At Fonality, support team members can become systems
- engineers much faster than at other organizations, for example. This has been a huge selling point for the position—one that was missing in the original job description. The strategy paid off. A whopping 10 of the 12 support team members from the first class in 2011 are still with the company. Nine of them have been promoted, including two directors. Recent classes have been smaller, consisting of managers primarily needed to backfill for internal promotions.
- ❑ *Embedding a call to action.* To combat "résumé spam" and help the HR team and hiring managers quickly evaluate candidates, the company has been known to include a call to action in the job description. For example, candidates for some past marketing positions have been asked to include the Fonality logo in the header of their résumés (instructions were hidden somewhere near the third paragraph, of course). Hiring managers were able to see instantly whether candidates read the job description thoroughly and cared enough to change their résumés. In other areas, engineering candidates have been asked to include their GitHub pages in their submission so the hiring manager could get a sense of past projects and real-world application of needed skills.
 - ❑ *Providing direct access.* Several years ago, Fonality posted sales positions on Craig's List, so candidates could not automatically submit their résumé. Instead, the ad included contact information, and interested candidates were instructed to call the sales manager and pitch the company's product. Those with strong phone skills and a solid sales pitch were asked for their résumés and entered the recruiting process.

Although no single technique has been applied to every role or department, Fonality has learned some valuable lessons and had far more successes than failures from its willingness to try new things.

BREAKING RECRUITING RULES THE RIGHT WAY

Snodgrass offered insight for other HR leaders as a result of this recruiting effort and the other approaches the company has taken: "There shouldn't be one set way of recruiting. The best recruiters are willing to approach every position differently. If the hiring manager has ideas of how you can do that and how to attract candidates, listen. It's also important as an HR professional to know what works for different roles and departments."

In addition to Snodgrass's counsel, here are four ways to apply Fonality's lessons learned to organizations across industries and sizes:

1. *Culture fit.* Fonality has a bold, risk-approved side to its culture. The company is willing to try new things, whether that's marketing methods or new hiring high jinks. Ensure that any "creative" recruiting approaches fit the company's culture, of course. If they don't, look for ways to adapt nontraditional recruiting methods as appropriate.
2. *Right for the role.* The hiring approach needs to fit the role, as Snodgrass noted.

The approach taken in the case of this senior position could be a disaster for an entry-level position or even in other departments. The other approaches detailed above would not have driven the same results for the marketing director opening.

The HR team needs to know it can trust and train the hiring manager and that the hiring manager will uphold his or her role in the process.

3. *Partnership.* The HR team needs to know it can trust and train the hiring manager and that the hiring manager will uphold his or her role in the process. Finding a great fit won't be nearly as big a win if the company is exposed to potential legal action.
4. *Conflict-free zone.* If you're going to try marketing a vacancy as we did, the departing employee can't be going to a competitor and, ideally, won't be in the same industry. In our case, Newman was transitioning from telecommunications to a real estate management software company. She was also a beloved and trusted person in the role who knew what it would take to succeed. She was personally invested in finding her successor.

Using these criteria and the included examples, which recruiting rules will your company break to fill its next opening?

Jeff Valentine is chief marketing officer with Fonality, the innovative provider of business phone systems and integrated communications solutions that make it easier for small- to medium-sized businesses to increase internal collaboration, sell more effectively, and deliver superior customer service. For information, visit www.fonality.com.