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How Job Descriptions, Titles, and the Apply Process Impact Conversion Rates and Sourcing Costs

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Recruiters have two significant roles within their job. Like salespeople, they must sell a product. That product is the opportunity for new blood to join an organization, and the process of converting talent into contracted employees is the lynchpin of any recruitment function.

Employees, of course, have the power to boost a brand or damage it. That makes HR a marketing function as much as it is a sales one. Every day, recruiters are responsible for finding the right candidates for their organization. They do this by placing recruitment advertisements, measuring the return on investment (ROI) of those advertisements and making strategic decisions in order to boost their campaign's success. In marketing speak, they are responsible for turning over leads and converting those leads into sales.

Such duality of function is unusual. Outside the human resources space, sales people rarely do marketing work, and marketing people rarely sell the leads they turn over. It's a real testament to the business savvy and talents of recruiters that they are able to combine both functions. But managing these two processes also presents distinct challenges for recruiters who may not be versed in marketing analysis.

In our view, recruiters can take great inspiration from the online marketing playbook. Direct response marketers, whose objective is not brand-building but generating a physical lead or a sale, expend a tremendous amount of time, energy and expense making sure the business process is as efficient as possible so they get the highest level of conversion. A good example is the Amazon "one-click" buy button. It seems obvious that consumers who can buy things with one click will buy more, but that wonderfully efficient process came about through massive market analysis and a thorough understanding of consumer psychology.

Recruiters don't have a one-click buy button. What they do have is a job advertisement, comprising a title and a job description, and an online recruitment platform that allows candidates physically to submit an application once they click through from the ad. This is the recruiter's sales funnel, and good decisions along the pipeline can amplify the brand message, positively influence candidate behavior and boost the efficacy of the business process.

Appcast.io analyzed around 400,000 job seekers looking at job advertisements on the web and the 30,000 applies that resulted from those searches. Appcast.io found that the length of the job description, job title and application process, as well as the mobile-enablement of the apply portal, had a material impact on the candidate's decision to apply. Marketing analytics, applied to your apply processes, can really help to capture your audience's attention, boost conversion (apply) rates and drive recruitment ROI — as this white paper shows.

I do hope you find it useful.

Chris Forman,
Founder and CEO
of Appcast

Executive Summary

▸ Recruiters can directly improve the return on investment (ROI) of their recruitment spend by testing the conversion rate of their job advertisements and apply processes.

▸ A principal measure of the return achieved from a job advertisement is the click-to-apply ratio (CTA) which measures the number of candidates viewing a job advertisement who go on to complete a job application.

▸ Data suggests a "Goldilocks" formula for the length of a job description, with massive CTA spikes for scripts containing 2,000 to 10,000 characters.

▸ Data similarly suggests a ROI hot spot for job titles containing 50-60 characters.

▸ Recruiters can boost conversion rates by up to 365% by reducing the length of the apply process to five minutes or less.

▸ Optimizing the apply platform for mobile job seekers can boost conversion rates, and cut recruitment costs, by up to 2,000% in some industries.

Introduction

Once upon a time recruiters could post a job advertisement then sit back and watch the applications come flooding in. Those days are gone. Today's online job advertisement market is robust and postings must compete for visibility in a sea of similar ads.

For recruiters whose job is to attract the right candidates in sufficient volume, drive those candidates to the company's recruitment portal via streamlined processes, to apply, online recruitment presents a particular challenge. The ad-to-hire pipeline is long. Along the way, recruiters must make strategic decisions such as:

> *In many ways, recruiters must think, act and analyze like an online marketer to boost the conversion rates of a recruitment campaign.*

▸ where to place job advertisements

▸ the advertisement pricing model

▸ the length and content of the advertisement copy

▸ the structure of the application process

Those decisions have the ability to positively or negatively impact a candidate's decision to apply. What we are actually asking is that recruiters think, act and analyze like an online marketer to boost the conversion rates of a recruitment campaign.

A principal measure of the return achieved from recruitment advertising is the click-to-apply ratio. CTA measures the number of candidates viewing a job advertisement who go on to complete a job application. This paper looks at the CTA of job advertisements and apply portals across every major applicant tracking system in every major industry and asks the question: which job titles, descriptions and apply processes deliver the greatest ROI?

Impact of Job Descriptions on CTA

Appcast.io tracked almost 400,000 job seekers looking at online job advertisements across various platforms and the 30,051 applications that resulted from those views. The data supports a "Goldilocks" logic when it comes to optimizing the ROI of job descriptions.

> *The data supports a "Goldilocks" logic when it comes to optimizing the ROI of job descriptions.*

▶ **Too-short** job descriptions of 1,000 to 2,000 characters (170-250 words) returned a CTA of just 6.7%. For job descriptions containing less than 1,000 characters, CTA dropped to 3.0%.

▶ **Too-long** job descriptions over 10,000 characters (around 2,000 words) achieved a similar CTA of 6.6%.

▶ **Just right** job descriptions between 2,000 to 10,000 characters (250 to 2,000 words) achieved click-through rates up to five times higher than comparable job descriptions of less than 1,000 characters. For descriptions between 4,000 and 5,000 characters, CTA spikes at 15.0%.

In other words, the length of the job description has a material impact on click-to apply ratios. We extrapolate that too-short applications do not influence candidates who need sufficient context in order to make an application decision. Conversely, too-long job descriptions may suggest a stifling working environment and demand too much effort from candidates who already are investing a great deal of time in their job search. The Goldilocks description is detailed, without being too long, as Figure 1 shows.

> *Job descriptions containing 4,000 to 5,000 characters (500 to 600 words) achieved click-to-apply ratios five times higher than very short or very long job descriptions.*

**Figure 1:** Average click-to-apply ratios across all industries based on character length of job description
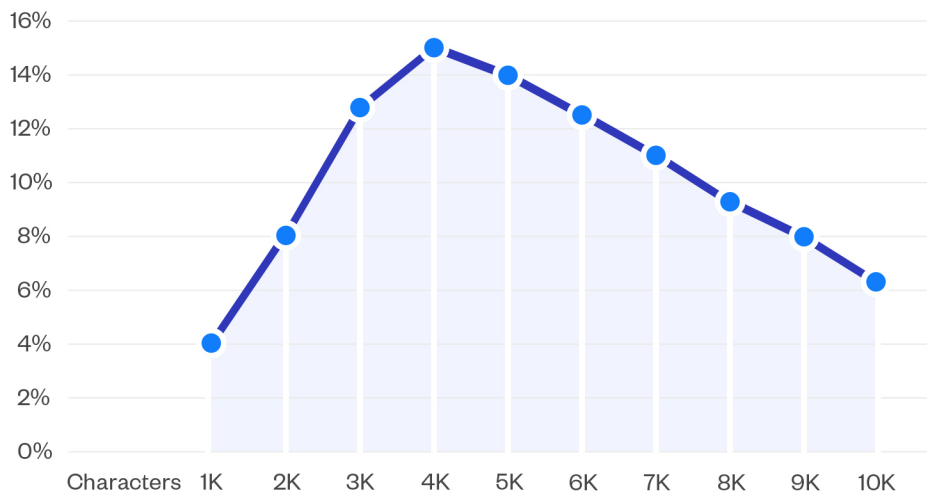
Impact of Job Titles on CTA

The job title is a job seeker's first exposure to the recruiting organization. We expected to see a clear CTA spike for titles of a certain length, similar to the job description bell curve. In fact, the data relating to job titles is slightly murkier.

> *Titles containing 40 to 50 characters outperform other title lengths by, on average, 30 to 40%.*

▶ Our data shows a clear hot spot for titles containing 50-60 characters. Titles of this length outperform other title lengths by, on average, 30 to 40%.

▶ However, very short job titles (less than 30 characters) and very long titles (80 characters or more) do not suffer the sharp CTA deviation experienced by non-optimal job descriptions, as Figure 2 shows.

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Figure 2: Average click-to-apply ratios across all
industries based on character length of job title.
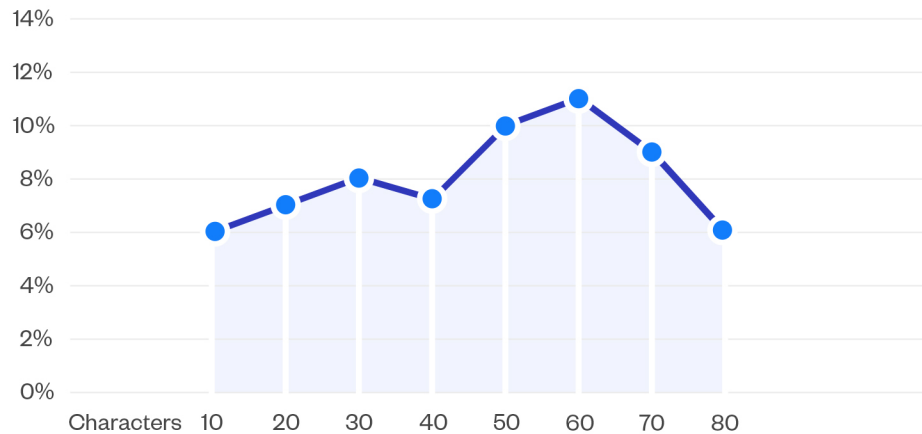
So, while opportunities exist to optimize the length of job titles, clear and descriptive title content may
have greater influence on a candidate's decision to apply.

Impact of Weak
Apply Processes on CTA

A job seeker who clicks on a recruitment advertisement arrives
at the organization's apply portal. At this juncture, ill-conceived
apply processes can seriously deter candidates, many of whom
will abandon an application before they submit it.

*Applicants are 365% less likely
to complete an application
that takes 15 minutes or more
to fill out.*

Our data shows that lengthy, complex and time consuming applications act as a barrier to applicants.
Applications that take more than 15 minutes to complete experience a 365% degradation in completion
rates, as Figure 3 shows.

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Figure 3: Average job application completion rates across all industries based on the length of time it takes to complete an application (in minutes).
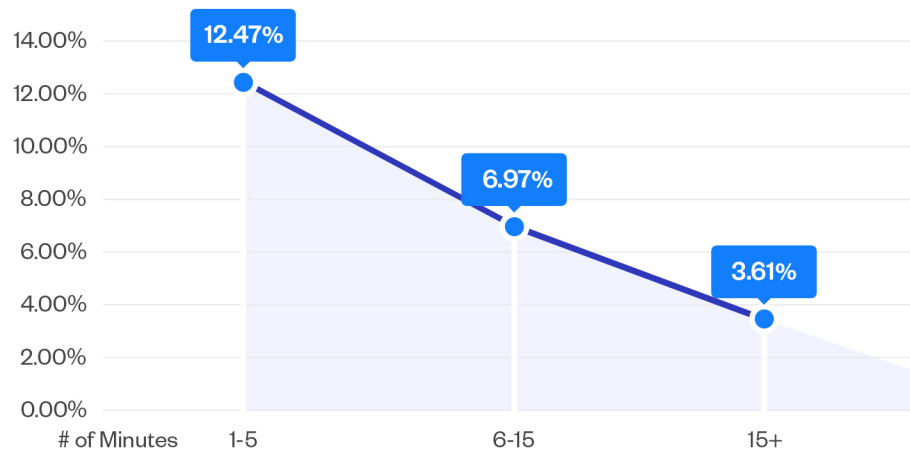
On a cost-per-click pricing model, recruiters pay per click regardless of what the candidate does next. When completion rates are low, applicant sourcing costs are commensurately high. Our data suggests that recruiters can slash their cost-per-applicant by 250% simply by reducing the time it takes to complete an application from 15 minutes to 5 minutes, as Figure 4 shows.

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Figure 4: Average cost-per-applicant across all industries based on the length of time it takes to complete an application (in minutes). Assumes a cost-per-click of $0.50
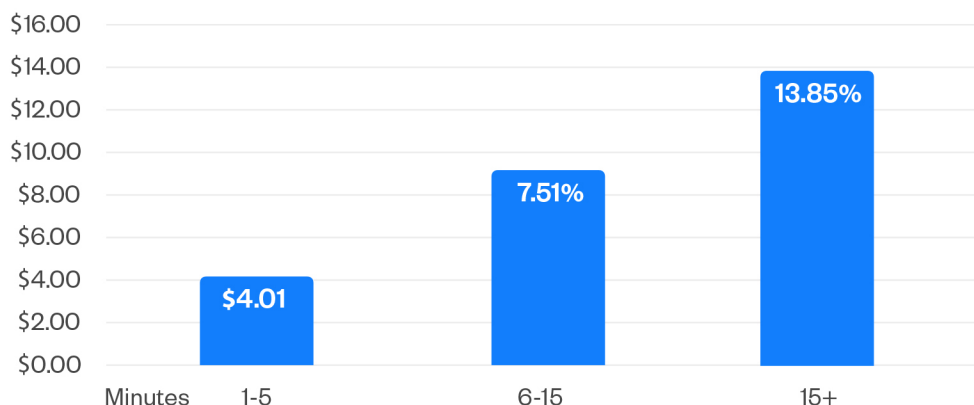
Impact of Mobile Recruiting on CTA

Today around 50% of the traffic arriving at a recruiter's online application portal comes from mobile devices. Yet just 1.5% of mobile traffic completes a job application, compared to 8.3% for desktop candidates. In the technology industry, a candidate is 2,209% more likely to apply from a desktop than they are from a mobile device, as Figure 5 shows.

In the sales industry, a candidate is 807% more likely to apply from a desktop than they are from a mobile device. In the technology sector, that figure rises to 2,209%.

Figure 5: Mobile versus desktop CTA (conversion) rates, by sector

Name	Blended	Desktop	Mobile	CTA Delta
Aircraft Manufacturing	5%	8%	0%	-
Auto Sales	15%	18%	10%	76%
Banking	13%	20%	3%	650%
Consulting	4%	7%	0%	-
Consumer Telecom	9%	14%	2%	489%
Food Service	7%	13%	2%	430%
Healthcare	5%	9%	2%	417%
Insurance	10%	12%	7%	78%
Retail	5%	8%	1%	547%
Sales	5%	7%	1%	807%
Staffing	2%	3%	0%	-
Technology	16%	19%	1%	2209%
Transportation	5%	7%	4%	72%

The reason is simple: it is far harder to apply from a mobile device than it is from a desktop. This may be due to:

▶ Platform issues, such as the inability to store a resume on a mobile device

▶ The length of the apply process, which becomes exaggerated when performed on a mobile device.

▶ Other issues, such as the apply portal not rendering correctly on a small screen.

The mobile disconnect is costly when advertising is bought on a cost-per-click pricing model. In the technology sector for example, 19% of desktop candidates complete a job application, compared to just 1% of mobile candidates. Assuming a cost-per-click of $0.50, sourcing costs are $2.63 per desktop applicant ($0.50 CPC/19% CTA) compared to $50.00 ($0.50 CPC/1% CTA) for mobile candidates — an increase of 1,801%.

> *On a cost-per-click advertising pricing model, a mobile applicant in the technology sector costs 1,805% more to convert than a desktop candidate.*

Conclusion

Marketers spend a huge amount of time and resources analyzing their conversion path. Recruiters should do the same to make sure that applicants have both an interest in the job (creating a lead) and actually toss their hat into the ring (making a sale.) In this respect, data suggests that:

▶ Job descriptions and titles should be "Goldilocks" length to boost click-through rates by up to 500%.

▶ Removing every "nice-to-have" job application question that is not required to evaluate a candidate can boost conversion rates by up to 365%.

▶ Measuring mobile degradation rates is the first step towards boosting conversion. Higher conversion may be achieved through platform changes, negotiating better advertising rates based on the conversion data or switching to a pay-per-applicant pricing model that charges only when a candidate submits an application.

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Appcast is a leading provider of recruitment advertising technology and related managed services. We help businesses of all sizes find the right job candidates fast with our advanced programmatic technology and easy-to-use, data-driven analytics.

Appcast helps you to be agile and effective in uncertain times. To learn how we can help make job ads work for your company and get the recruiting results you need, **sign up for a demo** of our programmatic recruiting solutions!