

## **P&G's Innovative Student Recruiting**

The only way you can apply for a job at Procter & Gamble is through the Web, so the company does everything it can to make its site stand out from the cluttered corporate-employment Web landscape. Find out about P&G's latest gambit to attract young talent online, one that cost less than \$100,000. This new project, launched 10 days ago, has produced strong results early on. Recruiting consultant Mark Mehler says, "No one else is doing stuff like that."

By Joe Mullich

You may have heard the TV news slogan "Give us an hour, we'll give you the world." Procter & Gamble, the huge Cincinnati-based consumer products company, has a similar pitch for college students: "Give us an hour, and we'll give you the experience of working at P&G."

This pledge announced the October 20 launch of an online interactive case-study game--believed to be the first of its kind--in which teams of students can take a product (P&G's Swiffer WetJet floor-cleaning system) from initial idea to market launch.

During the one-hour sessions, students can hash out ideas about marketing, pricing and production. They should also get a good feel for the teamwork-oriented approach that P&G favors. At the same time, the game will help P&G home in on the best and the brightest job candidates. After all, before students can play the game, they must complete an online job application--and the best players can win a job interview.

### **Trying to stand out**

The online case-study game is part of P&G's ongoing search for innovative ways to lure job-seekers to its Web site, [www.pg.com](http://www.pg.com), which is the centerpiece of the firm's recruitment efforts. P&G made its first foray into Web recruiting in 1996, when the Internet was limited mostly to a few start-up career engines, such as the one that evolved into Monster.com.

"The corporate employment Web landscape has become so muddy and competitive that it's hard to distinguish one site from another," says Scott Read, P&G's senior recruiting manager of global talent supply. "We have to find creative ways to distinguish ourselves from the competition."

P&G was one of the first companies to patent an online application form that could be automatically evaluated. And three years ago, P&G launched free online classes dealing with issues that come up during job searches and the early stages of a career. These instructor-led classes teach everything from how to research a company for a successful interview to how to overcome shyness in the workplace.

"No one else is doing stuff like that," says Mark Mehler, co-author of *CareerXroads*, a book about job and résumé Web sites. "It appeals to the type of people that P&G wants--freshmen or sophomores who are really go-getters."

The classes have also been effective in landing top candidates. Web visitors who take the online classes are more likely to apply to the company than those who do not, Read says.

P&G hopes the online case study has a similar appeal. Playing the game in chatrooms with a P&G employee who is in the room monitoring gives the students the kind of personalization that is often missing from online recruiting, says Lisa Donnelly, P&G's recruiting manager, North America Talent.

During the trials for the game, Donnelly says, participants often stuck around for 15 or 20 minutes afterward, pelting the moderator with questions such as "What's the single life in Cincinnati like?"

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### **Big payoff**

Implementing the case-study game cost P&G about \$75,000 to \$90,000, with 75 percent of that amount going to create the Web site used for the game. However, P&G says that's small potatoes, considering the benefits of Web-based recruiting. Eliminating paper from the hiring process saves P&G money and promotes efficiencies.

Though Read declines to divulge specific dollar savings, he notes that using the Web has enabled P&G's recruitment organization to do more work with fewer people. The time needed to hire people has also been significantly reduced. "In a best-case scenario, it's literally been days from contact to hire," he says. "That means someone is up and productive more quickly for the company."

This is especially important for P&G because of its corporate culture of promoting from within. Whenever possible, P&G tries to fill positions with people who are already employed at a lower level in the company. So when a junior manager moves up to a more senior level, that creates another opening that must be filled, often at an entry level. "If we don't have a constant flow of new talent coming in, that will create a talent gap somewhere down the line," Read says.

Unlike most companies, P&G requires job-seekers to apply through the Web. No paper résumés are allowed. "We can do that because we are so exclusively focused on the college market," Read says, a market that's comfortable searching for jobs online. It's not surprising, given the down job market, that P&G's Web traffic is up threefold this year in comparison to most years.

### **E-mail campaign**

Though the Web is the focal point of hiring, P&G still sends recruiters to a number of college campuses. "No one chooses to work for P&G because we have a cool Web site," Read says. "We still need to have an individual shaking hands and meeting candidates on campus face-to-face."

However, everything comes back to the Web. Even when P&G posts openings on other online job boards, applicants are directed back to the company's site for more information. The case-study game is being touted at specific campuses and in banner ads on employment Web sites, particularly those aimed at MBA students.

To promote the game, P&G also sent e-mails to student organizations, stressing that the game is fun and that students can use the experience to "put yourself ahead of the pack." Another e-mail encouraged career-center professionals and professors to use the case study as a classroom assignment.

While 20 percent of P&G's yearly openings are for specific jobs, the company usually hires people with no clear position in mind, looking for soft skills and individuals who will grow with the company. Because of this approach, P&G takes great care that both the navigation of the site and the content it provides are helpful to applicants who might be unsure of precisely what jobs they want. The FAQ section gives a detailed overview of the interview process and the tests that applicants have to take. The site includes a section where a college intern talks about his summer experience at P&G, which can be heard through RealPlayer audio software. Visitors can also access videos of various locations of the company in both high and low bands.

An online "job placement advisor" gives overviews of different job areas of the company, such as plant technician or intellectual property, providing detailed information about the work and career paths for each. "That's great for college kids, many of whom have no idea what they want to be when they grow up," says Mehler of CareerXroads.

P&G constantly tinkers with the site, usually introducing changes during summer and winter holiday periods, when traffic is lighter. This December, P&G plans to implement technological changes to speed the initial assessment of applicants. Currently, job-seekers who apply for a specific opening typically answer three to five questions. A computer determines whether those answers match the job before notifying the applicant by e-mail to continue the process. Even though the e-mail notification never takes longer than 24 hours, some applicants drop out of the process.

Read says the company will change the system to provide "real-time" notification while the candidate is on the site. This seemingly simple change requires a significant amount of coding and process changes, primarily by more tightly integrating two application service providers that function behind the scenes.

After all, things like online classes and interactive case studies may seem like fun and games, but a lot of hard work goes into doing it right.