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... Recruit New Workers

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When it comes to recruiting online, corporate hiring managers have discovered that there's no place like home.

Help-wanted advertising has moved to the Web in a big way; job boards such as Monster.com (www.monster.com) and CareerBuilder.com (www.careerbuilder.com) attract thousands of job postings every month. That means an employer has a huge, nationwide pool of job candidates to draw from, far bigger than what an advertisement in a local newspaper could generate.

But recruiters say the big online job boards aren't always the best places to find the most-qualified candidates. The reason: Companies get quickly inundated with resumes, making the winnowing process even more work for recruiters.

Instead, many companies say their best candidates come to them through job listings on their own corporate Web sites, where they attract candidates who were motivated enough to go directly to the company in the first place.

Companies find plenty of advantages to relying on their own Web sites. For instance, even when Procter & Gamble Co. posts openings on job boards, applicants are directed back to the company's own site (www.pg.com) for more information, says Scott Read, senior manager for recruiting and staffing at the Cincinnati-based consumer-products maker.

"It's a way for people to self-select in or out as they see and read content" on the site, Mr. Read says. "Everything we do is focused on getting people back to PG.com."

Once applications are submitted, recruiters can sort resumes, follow up with questions, screen and eliminate candidates and create a manageable pool of applicants to be interviewed.

Will Somebody Read It?

Nearly 60% of all Internet hires come through a company's own Web site, according to a 2002 study by CareerXroads, an online-recruiting consulting firm in Kendall Park, N.J. That compares with 21% for niche job boards that cater to specific professions (such as Dice.com (www.dice.com) or Techies.com (www.techies.com), two sites for information-technology careers), 14% for Monster, 5.7% for CareerBuilder and 1.9% for HotJobs.com (www.hotjobs.com).

For anxious job seekers, it's a leap of faith to believe that a less-than-personal online application will find its way into the hands of someone who will give it a thorough read, let alone offer a job.

While job applicants may feel their resumes go into a black hole after they hit the "submit" key, there's far more going on than they realize. Receiving applications electronically helps companies process and stay in better contact with prospective employees, recruiters say. John Dooney, human-resources manager with the Society for Human Resource Management, an Alexandria, Va., industry trade group, says hiring managers can more easily handle and inspect resumes that come through the Web, because they can be archived and indexed electronically.

"It may feel impersonal, but the reality is that it's being more heavily searched than a paper resume," Mr. Dooney says. "On paper, it's so hard to sift through all that and pick out the buzzwords."

Even though companies say they get their best prospects from their own sites, that hasn't stopped them from casting a wider net when hunting for employees. A 2002 study by the Society for Human Resource Management found that online ads now outpace newspapers as the best outlet for generating high-quality applications.

IMlogic Inc., a Waltham, Mass.-based provider of instant-messaging software, earlier this year posted jobs on Monster and CareerBuilder for the start-up's sales force. Francis diSouza, the company's chief executive, figured the depressed job market would mean a bonanza of responses, but he didn't expect the tidal wave of resumes that poured in. He received more than 200 in the first hour, and a total of 750 within two days.

"We weren't ready for that," Mr. diSouza says. "The biggest thing [the ads] generated was a rethinking of the process."

The next time he needed to hire people, Mr. diSouza fell back on personal recommendations from contacts or other employees instead of posting jobs at online boards.

Turn On the Filters

To avoid overload, companies can take advantage of filtering capabilities offered for each job posting to help them sort through the piles of candidates. At Monster, for example, many employers skip posting jobs altogether and go directly to its database of job seekers for potential candidates. Those who choose to advertise for positions ask applicants to complete questionnaires and rank them by their answers, says Steve Pogorzelski, president of North American operations for New York-based Monster Worldwide Inc.

Other hiring managers, such as Diana Meisenhelter, vice president of staffing and talent acquisition for Wyndham International Inc., the Dallas hotel chain, have learned it's necessary to strike the right balance when posting jobs online. Through trial and error, she's discovered that Monster is the best for finding candidates for more-general roles, such as for accounting, administrative support and information-technology positions. Management positions get the best response when posted on the company's recruiting Web site, Wyndham-Recruiting.com (www.wyndham-recruiting.com). And to find employees with special experience working at hotels, she goes to HCareers.com(www.hcareers.com), which focuses on jobs in the hospitality industry.

"They're all good sites, but you have to pick your battles and find which [one] is most successful for our needs," she says.

When applicants submit their information through a company's own Web site, hiring managers sit back and let the computer do the sorting and ranking.

At Sprint Corp., for example, each application includes a set of screening questions specific to that job -- Do you know C++ programming? Have you sold to Fortune 500 companies? -- and candidates are ranked as their applications are submitted. Recruiters for the telecommunications company receive the applications of the top 25% of candidates, says Scott Biggerstaff, manager of electronic sourcing for the Overland Park, Kan.-based Sprint.

The rest are sent to a database of candidates, and the process allows hiring managers to quickly narrow the field to the most-qualified candidates. Meanwhile, questions tailored for each job give context to the application. "Often they look at that first, and it makes a resume much more understandable," Mr. Biggerstaff says.

Bob Lanza, vice president of sales and marketing for Pomerantz Staffing Services, a Watchung, N.J., firm with about 200 employees, relies on an online-assessment tool developed by the Brooks Group, a Greensboro, N.C., sales-management training firm, to evaluate candidates.

To hire members of his sales force, Mr. Lanza had a handful of Pomerantz's most successful salespeople complete personality and behavioral profiles and tests, then determined which characteristics and qualities translated to success at the company. Now, applicants are asked to complete a questionnaire intended to identify those with similar characteristics. Those whose answers most closely mirror the salespeople already working at the company rank higher and are more likely to hear from a recruiter, Mr. Lanza says.

'The Best Hire'

Such back-end solutions aren't the sexiest on the Web, but they can have a dramatic impact on the hiring process. Much of the guesswork about new employees has been eliminated, and Pomerantz's turnover rate has dropped since it started using the system, Mr. Lanza says. "We want to make sure we're making the best hire that we can, because we're about to invest several hundred thousand dollars in this person [in training and salary] before they make us money," he says.

Similar technology has cut the hiring process from weeks to as few as three days at Lockheed Martin Corp., which receives more than one million resumes a year and has about 3,000 jobs open at any given time. Having an infrastructure that allows recruiters to sort through candidates based on a certain set of skills or experiences is essential, says Teri Matzkin, a manager of talent sourcing for the Bethesda, Md., aerospace giant.

"It frees them up from having to deal with the paper, and we're able to get back to those people more quickly," Ms. Matzkin says.

Filtering and indexing tools especially come into play when hiring for international positions, P&G's Mr. Read says. With citizenship and visa issues to be considered, recruiters can immediately weed out those candidates who can't be cleared to work in a particular country.

Or say a Spanish student attends an American university and submits a resume to P&G. Because a Spaniard can work in any of the 15 countries in the European Union, a P&G recruiter can press a button and pull up the student's record when there are openings in other EU countries. Before the job-application process was automated, recruiting was done on a country-by-country basis, Mr. Read says.

"It's allowed us to shift the labor pool to where our needs are," he says.

Career sections of corporate Web sites also offer ways for interested applicants to learn about other opportunities at a company. Lockheed Martin sends updates with information about job fairs, or registers past and present candidates with a job-search agent that will forward information about other job openings. This keeps potential employees interested in the company, Ms. Matzkin says.

Technology should eventually allow companies to have even better relationships with job seekers, hiring managers say. Sprint's Mr. Biggerstaff says applicants will soon receive automated responses when a job has been filled, or even notes telling them how they ranked among all candidates.

But online relationships must ultimately migrate offline. Much like Internet dating, only part of the process can be done on the Web; eventually the two parties will have to meet in person to be sure they are a right fit.

"It's about the technology and having the computer do as much as it can to keep track of all this, but we don't want to lose the personal interaction," Ms. Meisenhelter of Wyndham says.

-- Ms. Forster is a reporter for *The Wall Street Journal Online* in New York.