The voice for the global staffing industry

GR
THE GLOBAL RECRUITER

TECHNOLOGY SPECIAL 2021

STACKING UP

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SIMON KENT
EDITOR

You don't need a technology special magazine to tell you that the use and potential of technology has sky-rocketed over the past 18 months. Technology has always been important to recruitment – from simple databases to the first inklings of email. But what's happened to technology as a result of the pandemic, and what is still to come does require a technology special.

The fact is recruitment, along with many other parts of the economy, successfully transferred online during the months of lockdown. The impact of this has been two-fold. Firstly there are some aspects of recruitment and some recruitment projects which are unlikely to ever be done in any other way – there is no way back to where we were pre-pandemic.

Secondly, technologies such as AI, and candidate facing platforms which exploit social media are still developing at pace, and their use being exploited and explored by the recruitment function. And naturally, it's not just agencies doing this – it's end users too. So agencies who ignore tech now will lose out, significantly and rapidly.

For this reason, The Global Recruiter's Technology Special brings together some of the industry's leading edge thinkers and users to illustrate how today's and tomorrow's technology should be used by recruiters. It gives you a head start on up and coming trends and is designed to inspire you to take the next step forward. These may be unchartered territories, but this Special is your blueprint for the future.

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JASON MARTIN
STRATEGY DIRECTOR, ACCESS RECRUITMENT

Covid and the global lockdowns that have accompanied it have wreaked havoc on personal and work lives across the globe, leading us all into uncharted territory. Combine this with the impact of Brexit on UK businesses and it's fair to say the demand/supply relationship is firmly back in the candidate camp. Businesses and recruitment firms are fighting to find, hire and retain workers.

As a result, it's essential recruitment firms critically review what's working well and what they could do better; learn from their in-house counterparts and adopt technological innovation faster than them to stay ahead of the curve and realign how they interact and engage with candidates by curating their customer journeys. Not just to look good online or keep up with their peers, but because the statistics prove that a positive candidate experience translates directly to better business performance and profitability.

This means tracking the entire journey of bringing candidates through the recruitment process, right the way through to sending out an invoice and paying workers in a timely and accurate fashion. And then, once you've got that fundamental business process sorted, overlaying technology on it to see how it can all work together.

That's why we have mapped our integrated software solutions through our new concept of "Attract. Manage. Pay", making it easier for our customers to first analyse and then improve their processes by moving away from individual siloed products to a better joined-up suite of software solutions.

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PEOPLE, NOT PROCESS

John W Healy, Vice President, World Employment Confederation on what matters when introducing technology into recruitment.

Technological advances have afforded many opportunities to improve the hiring and employment experience for both workers and companies. Key to the successful introduction of any new technology is to ensure that it focuses on the experience of the people interacting with it, not on the specific process itself. For us, in the private employment and recruitment industry, this means that digitalisation must bring benefits that add value for individuals, companies and society.

It is important to take a human-centric design approach, placing the people using the technology at the very heart of any innovation. There is little point in designing a piece of software that works efficiently but which provides the end-consumer with a horrible experience that they will be reticent to repeat. User-friendly technologies that leverage new, emerging digital platforms have the potential to revolutionise the recruitment and employment process for everyone involved and improve the way in which we match supply with demand in labour markets around the world. Let me explain.

The Covid impact

The arrival of the Covid pandemic in early 2020 served to shine a light on some of the challenges that labour markets face in pairing workers with work. When the crisis hit, there was a mass loss of jobs in communities throughout the world as many sectors closed completely. However, at the same time, there was a comparable demand for new jobs with different employers. Many of these jobs required skills that were very similar – for example, people who previously worked in manufacturing jobs could be retrained to work in factories producing PPE. Later, workers with experience in the hospitality sector were well-suited to work as guides in vaccination centres.

The difficulty that governments, employers, and public and private employment agencies experienced in moving people from one sector to another was a clear illustration of the level of friction that exists within labour markets. We were not able to make work transitions happen as smoothly and as swiftly as we needed - and this was damaging for everyone concerned: individuals found themselves without work and income; businesses were finding it difficult to operate because they were not able to secure the workforce they needed to meet new market demand; and governments had to earmark significant funds to social support in order to keep families and communities afloat. This was a zero-sum game and caused a massive sense of loss.

But it doesn't have to be like this. We have the chance to use technology to smooth out the process of connecting people with work and to also speed it up considerably. One area of tech that is receiving a lot of attention right now is digital wallets. We have seen a real interest in these from economies around the world recently as they have embraced digital apps as a means of tracking the vaccination status of their citizens.

Digital wallets are trusted, secure and easy to use. Most of us have already accepted them as a normal part of the process of ecommerce to facilitate our online purchases – and the whole area has boomed over the past 18 months as a result of lockdowns. We all recognise digital wallets as a necessary part of modern life and indeed the New York Times has described the Covid-vaccine app as the must-have accessory this summer.

Connecting people

While digital wallets are already widely used as a means of transacting commercially, they also have the ability to connect people with work quickly and efficiently – and this should be top of the list for their further expansion. Indeed, International Labour Organisation (ILO) director general, Guy Ryder, has challenged our sector to set standards for how this emerging technology can be leveraged for the good of all, not just any of our individual members. He judged that as so many people either enter, or re-enter, the workforce through private employment agencies, our sector was perfectly placed to take the lead and we have. The World Employment Confederation (WEC) has created a blockchain taskforce, which I am honoured to chair, where we have gathered leaders in our industry to work together to solve the problem.

Our work to-date has shown that digital wallets have the potential to take make a quantifiable difference by taking a full two weeks out of the process of connecting people with work! We need to agree on operational standards and ensure that they can be adapted to local needs. The standards should adhere to some basic principles: Data privacy and trust are essential, systems must be interoperable across the ecosystem, not exclusive, and as work is delivered locally the operational standards for using digital wallets will need to be set locally with communities coming together to agree how they can improve work prospects for all.

At WEC, one example to highlight is our partnership with Velocity Network Federation. Velocity's network of members shares our common interest and is actively building the capabilities that will transform the experience for both workers and hiring companies. The process is user-friendly and ensures a positive experience for all those who utilise it – claiming credentials, having them verified, and choosing to share them with the relevant parties, at the relevant point in time. Identity, work history, education, certifications and licenses – all of the

information that must be verified before engaging a worker. Leaving the human element of defining the right 'fit', conducting a personal interview and coaching an individual on their career goals, or a hiring manager on labour market conditions as the priority for the parties making decisions, rather than the bureaucratic steps needed to meet regulatory compliance. In matching people with work digital wallets offer a win-win situation for everyone: a smoother and faster application and hiring process for both workers and employers and efficient labour markets that afford governments high levels of participation with the result that they reduce their social security payments while increasing their tax revenues.

The fact that the information contained within a blockchain or digital wallet remains first and foremost the property of the individual is a key element as it heightens trust and consumer confidence in the system. In a year where the annual Edelman Trust Barometer revealed very low levels of trust in employers I would hope that the use of such technology could help to build and maintain confidence in organisations.

As with so many technological innovations and advances, the rise of digital wallets has been further fast-tracked by the Covid crisis. We now have the opportunity to make it a reality and to run with it for the benefit of people, society, employers, governments – and most importantly for the future of work itself.

WEC has created a series of video case-studies illustrating the use of digital wallets for both workers and hiring companies. They detail the process of claims, verification and issuing. Check out the stories of Marko and Michelle! ∎

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GIVE YOUR GUT A BREAK

David Savage, technology evangelist, Harvey Nash Group on bringing talent hiring and retention into the digital age without bias.

I started working at Harvey Nash in September 2007. I joined a contract desk recruiting 'PC support professionals'. The technology we were discussing, and the status of the 'IT department' has transformed over the years. How we recruit people into those same organisations has not. It isn't just how we find and hire talent that increasingly seems dated, but how we develop the skills in people to take the business and employer forward.

Given the huge scale of change and transformation, you'd have expected the processes used to hire talent would have had to adapt. But we're using legacy techniques I used in 2007 when LinkedIn was still restricted from our consultants! This lack of progress has only entrenched ideas and biases, stopping organisations from finding and competing for the best talent to take them forward.

'Gut feeling' is the champion of bias

The first bias to tackle is your gut, not easy when one of those phrases we learn from a young age is, "trust your gut". I hired hundreds of contractors for clients based on my gut feeling. That's why they asked for my help right? I had experience, and instinctively had a feel for how someone might fit into a particular client's environment. But as fair as I felt I was during my initial screening of candidates, bias would naturally creep in. My own unavoidable criteria, and my understanding of what the client did or did not want; not based on data but on a collection of subjective observations. When I managed a team, I (arrogantly) looked for traits I saw in myself; after all I'd been successful! Funnily enough, on reflection, I don't think I had the best track record as a manager.

When we're building teams based on instinct, and not data, we're lucky if we stumble on the high-performing group we want. I recently spoke to Applied CEO Khyati Sundaram, and she painted a compelling picture that urges us to trust data. Applied believe we need to 're-architect a hiring process that perpetuates bias'; they exist to fix the intertwined issue that the way we hire today is inefficient, and it's unethical. It is their company's belief that managers today are looking for the best, most diverse team.

Bin the CV

To date Applied's tools have been used by organisations to make 10,000 hires, and the turnover of staff is five times lower than the UK average. That's the kind of outcome you can't simply ignore. So what are they doing? The first piece of advice is don't use CVs. As Khyati points out CVs were created in the 1400s and aren't fit for purpose: "We spend 6 six seconds on a CV. It's obvious that we'd be relying on mental shortcuts to sift based on what our brains like. And all the science in the world tells us that shortcuts in people decisions are catastrophic."

Applied's solution is to assess skills throughout the process, providing a better outcome than judging someone on a piece of paper.

I feel it fits into a wider narrative where the industry is moving away from assessing candidates' experience, but rather looking to hire on potential. Joe Griston led the talent team at Arrival, named LinkedIn's number one startup of the year in 2020, but he did it by largely rejecting the approach LinkedIn evangelised. I mean take a moment and look at your LinkedIn profile, it's a CV. So how do you replace the CV with a process that assesses skills, allowing the hiring manager to screen and select candidates that will genuinely hit the mark?

"Applied is grounded in the belief that talent is universal and opportunity is not," says Khyati. "Skills over credentials and science over status quo is what makes opportunities accessible. We test on skills, attitudes and mission alignment; after all a track record is a proxy of skill and we should be able to test for the best indicators of ability to do that job well."

The tests Khyati references here comprise of three to five predictive questions, based on actual data from making thousands of hires, which are put to the candidates. No form filling out, instead a completely different experience to one they've previously been exposed to. That in itself could be an advantage when you're competing for the best talent and everything feels so similar.

The answers to the questions are then sent to a selection panel, but they are first anonymised and randomised. Why randomised? Applied are the guard-rail against bias at each step, and whether we mean to or not, we discriminate against candidates at the back of the process. So the hiring managers are asked to judge each question and answer on its own merit before an anonymised leaderboard is produced where the best candidates are predicted.

Joe Griston put forward the argument that using traditional recruitment methods means you're simply baking everyone else's problems into your processes. By focusing on experience you will continually find candidates who are limited, only ever as good as the competition and not building a truly innovative organisation. Now we have the tools to test this.

Data can help develop and retain your team too

Data isn't just being used to change how we assess and identify talent. I have often been asked "what skills do you think you need to work on?" or "what training do you think you need?". Perfectly reasonable questions, but you need wonderful self-awareness to answer them, and bias creeps back in.

Marc Howells, head of global talent and development at AstraZeneca, was a recent guest on the Harvey Nash Group podcast, Tech Talks. In that discussion he described the clear acceleration of digital we've witnessed during the pandemic, and took that observation a step further by talking about the need to develop learning agility and building digital and data analytics skills within AstraZeneca.

Adaptive learning tools use machine learning to profile an individual against their role. Most people learn due to passion or a clearly defined need, but we ultimately don't know what we don't know.

Insight from data is constantly helping AstraZeneca understand the gaps in its workforce. Because the business is continually looking three to five years out in its strategy, Marc's team can use adaptive learning platforms to understand what skills the business needs to build, buy, or borrow (or automate) so they can predict how to push staff to the content needed to allow the business to grow.

If we can use data to better understand how to develop staff, we should be able to retain staff and reduce the need to buy or borrow skills into the organisation.

Challenge the norm

What's clear from the discussion I've had recently is that organisations are under pressure. Time is precious, and the cost of hiring the wrong individual, or failing to keep hold of staff is more keenly felt than ever.

Data is helping augment the way we hire and train our people, just as it's changing working practises in many other departments. It's time for talent teams to embrace the insight data provides to drive better outcomes. ■

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ENDLESS CHANGE

Lauren B. Jones, founder & CEO, Leap Consulting Solutions, Inc on how and why recruitment must engage with technology.

Just when businesses, employees, leaders and the like thought the world was going back to 'normal', another series of lock downs, travel bans, vaccine requirements and the like continue to challenge how we do business now and impact the way we do business moving forward. Trends from 2020 showed us a 524 per cent growth in communication tools like Slack, Teams, and the like as well as video interviewing tools seeing a 159 per cent increase cementing what we knew was coming but we in the staffing and recruiting industry were resistant to, technology is here to stay.

But with all of the new technologies emerging every single day a business and its leaders are left faced with a barrage of questions; What does a business leader focus on? How do you maintain growth? How do you continue to lead and get remote employees excited about the vision? How will you innovate? How will you create a culture in this 'hybrid' world? What technology project should we start with first? The world of work is changing, expectations of employees, employers are evolving, and I believe our industry is poised for greatness if we do it right. Gone are the days of living to work, people have found that they can work to live and build their work life around their home life and enjoy all the flexibility they desire. Staffing and recruiting is the perfect enabler for this movement but there are two things I think will be necessary to be successful in our new world.

Focus and Urgency

Laser focus on what matters to your business, culture, and establishing your value propositions and creating a roadmap fueled by urgency.

Over the course of this last year, I have helped many firms evaluate where they are today and create a plan for where they want to be tomorrow. I want to review the 'soft skills' required to digitally transform their business. The soft skills are of equal importance to the business requirements we will review later on and these soft skills are as follows:

· Be Humble – a team that from the top down is willing to openly and honestly evaluate the current state of their business can objectively see where there is opportunity.
· Be Willing to Change – a team that creates a culture and acceptance to change can embrace the pace it requires to stay current and innovate.
· Flexibility – understanding that no technical implementation is perfect will ensure a team does not get stuck in analysis paralysis.
· Experiment – a team that is willing to experiment (no matter how small) and create small user groups to beta new tools on will always come out ahead.

· Done is better than perfect – understanding that (as Robert Mann says) a 'bias towards action' is always better than waiting until it is perfect – because it will never be perfect.
· Empathy & Mindfulness – understanding that looking for work is in the Top 3 most stressful life events that people will endure. How do YOU as a business ease the pain?

Now that we understand the soft skills needed to embrace a culture of change as it relates to technology, how do we tactically make it happen? What do we need to be prepared for? How does a business do it right?

In a recent study, Forbes showed us that 70 per cent of business will fail at change and listed a 'who's who' list of massive failures like Blockbuster, Kodak, Borders and beyond. I've created a Digital Transformation checklist designed at leveraging all of the soft skills we named above and combining them with the more tactical and strategic requirements of any successful transformation:

· Technical Roadmap – this should be aligned to your long-term vision and culture.
· Resources – you will need resources from operations, training, IT, marketing and all departments your transformation will impact (this is usually everyone).

· Systems Integration Support – a proper implementation cannot be undervalued, from conversion to go live post support this is the most common misstep in underinvestment I see regularly.
· Requirements – If you do not have technical requirements for your technology, I believe it is destined to fail, even creating the most basic needs and documenting them with your technology partner can help you create mutually beneficial expectations.
· Rules of Engagement – Every vendor partnership should have rules of engagement inclusive of a support hierarchy, escalation chart, and emergency preparedness measures included.
· Metrics – Probably the most important is creating metrics for success for your internal teams and your external partners.

In any digital transformation I support, the above list are the basic tools I look to leave my customers equipped with for the short- and long-term success of their ongoing technical investment. This brings me to my final point of digital transformation.

It never ends. It should never end.

I believe now more than ever that if a business can focus on the technology needed to support our ever evolving world of work and urgently navigate through change, they will come out on top. ■
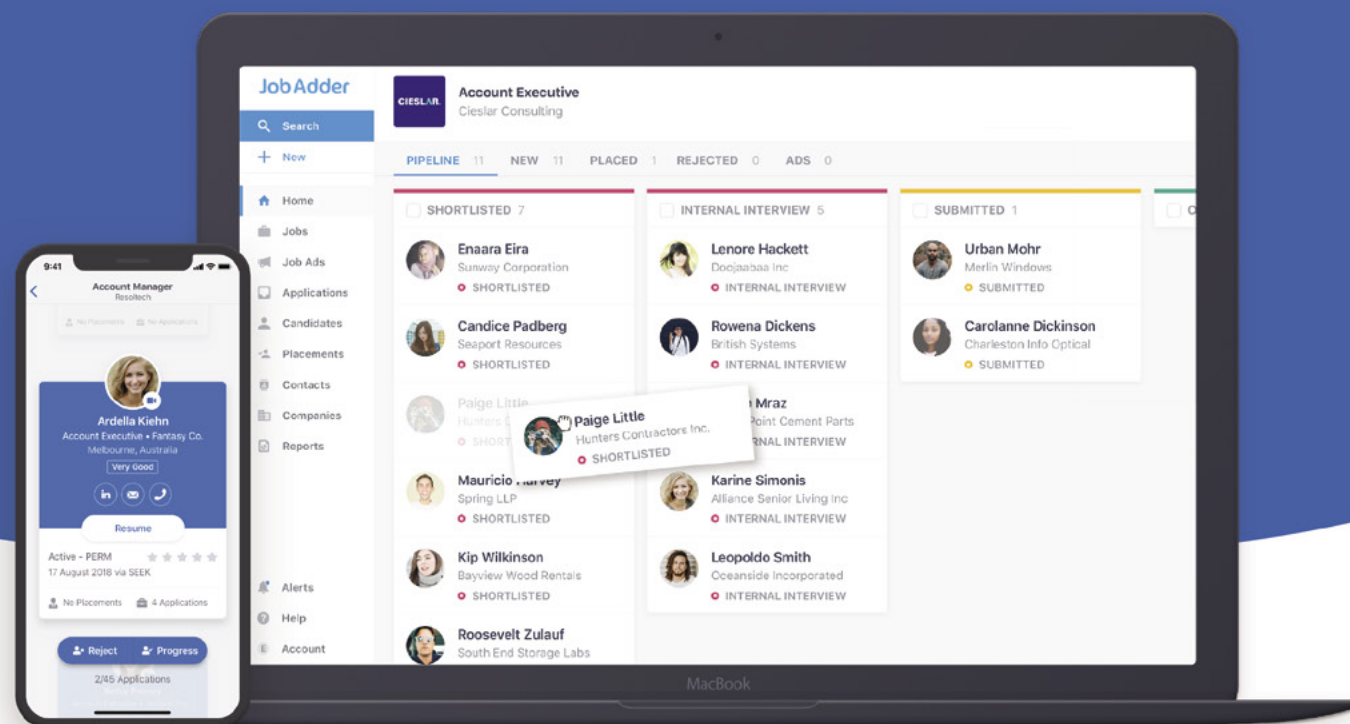
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FASTER, BETTER, STRONGER

Toby Babb, Harrington Starr on why man and machine is the future of recruitment.

Would an average recruiter with excellent technology outperform an excellent recruiter with average technology?

It's an interesting debate as we move with ever increasing velocity to an automated world with the recruitment sector. Straw poll this in almost any office in the industry and you'll be looking at 90% in favour of the excellent recruiter. I'm inclined to agree. Recruitment is, at heart, far more than just a matching engine. That's why job boards, LinkedIn and bots haven't killed the industry but augmented it. It is the ultimate sales job, influencing two sides to make a deal and heavily built around the power of influence, networking and relationships. To quote Richard Branson, a great recruiter needs to sell the sizzle. Tech can never replicate that.

That said, is there an ultimate tech stack that would make an average recruiter compete at a level with the very best in the industry? What would it need to look like?

We recently pulled together a number of clients, industry experts, technologists and consultants and asked them what they thought the future of recruitment would look like. Would man be usurped by machine? After a fascinating morning of debate, we decided that the future was far less man vs machine and far more man and machine working together to create the future. It became clear that the future of recruitment needed the best of both. It was about being faster, better and stronger. With in house teams, automation and increased expectations in the digital age, speed and instant gratification are key motivators. Agency recruitment has to be faster allowing rapid solutions to the ever-increasing demands and expectations of hiring companies. Tech will drive that velocity, dramatically increasing time to hire and allowing those who use the tech the best to unearth the diamonds that their customers seek.

Tech limits

Technology cannot, however, influence, sell the dream, build and nurture long term trust. Relationships and communities are the cornerstone of this great industry and we are trusted to help tell the story, visualise the future, create the picture. Stronger relationships with candidates and hiring managers are the uniquely human element that we have to improve. Automation allows us to forge and build those relationships. Social media allows us to fill the funnel, nurture and convert. Great tech affords us to become stronger consultants.

And so to better. Quite simply, the best will need to continue to be better. Expectations are high and only getting higher. We are a professional services industry that has, for many years, lacked much of the professional aspect. But we are changing. Companies are recognising the importance of talent as the prime cornerstone of the success of their business. Heavy is the head that wears the crown. Recruiters define the success of their clients. We are solving acute business issues. So we have to be better. Better advisors, better people, better consultants, better at listening, better at every aspect of the job. A great recruiter is a Swiss Army Knife. Marketeer, brand builder, sourcer, adviser, salesperson, content creator, advertiser, management consultant, career consul, psychologist and more. With tech to help every aspect of that multi-faceted role, those who adapt to using systems better will get trading advantage. The role is getting bigger and with that the standard and quality of a great recruiter has to get better. That is exciting.

Tech is not there to disrupt humans, it is there to augment us. To make us faster, to help us form stronger relationships and to allow us to be better at providing world class solutions for out customers. >

access Recruitment

Building the ultimate rectech stack

Jason Martin, Strategy Director for Access Recruitment, on what to consider when choosing recruitment technology.

For recruitment agencies that are typically margin tight businesses, investing in tech has tended to be a lower priority. Instead they struggled along with hosted software that often doesn't gel well with new solutions. Cue the pandemic, the arrival overnight of a new world of hybrid working, and an urgent need for recruitment businesses to shift to cloud-based software that really delivers for them.

Given the bewildering speed with which this fundamental change in how we work happened, we asked Access Recruitment's Strategy Director, Jason Martin, for his advice on how recruitment leaders can make the right software decisions for today's 'new normal'.

What should recruitment businesses consider when buying their next software solution?

"The biggest decision businesses face, especially in the UK market, is whether they should buy software solutions from different suppliers. If they do, how will the disparate systems mesh together – through APIs? Or should they buy software from one supplier that offers a suite of integrated solutions, such as Access Recruitment?

If purchasing a CRM from one supplier, a screening solution from another and a website from someone else, recruiters need to consider how they can knit everything together – or whether they need to rely on the suppliers to get the systems to talk to each other. And, are these suppliers going to be partners forever? And if they fall out, will the integration be jeopardised? And will the recruiter need to manage three different contracts and data hosted in three different places?

The benefits of taking a suite approach include software which will be more tightly integrated, streamlined, hosted and managed by one supplier, under one agreement. The only consideration is whether you want to put all your eggs in one basket."

What efficiencies can be achieved through a suite solution?

"For a recruitment firm, it's all about trying to have a really efficient system that enables them to execute and do the job they do with lower costs and as fast as they can.

If they choose a suite solution from one supplier, all elements of the software are integrated and developed in partnership with each other, presenting a better, faster, smarter, more cohesive platform.

What's more, all those solutions are hosted in the cloud and all the management is by one supplier. So effectively the recruiter becomes a consumer of the functionality for a set fee per month – a much more cost effective and efficient solution."

What advice would you give to recruitment leaders when looking at their tech stack?

"Simply put, be sure your tech enables you to harmonise your processes and business, and ensure your tech strategy encompasses mobile. Ask yourself how you want to communicate with your workers and clients in the future. How does your operational software fit into place around that?

Mobile is critical in recruitment and its application is constantly evolving. Our customers are seeing well over 80% of engagements with their temps happen via mobile. Top billers all recruit differently from their peers – some recruit via WhatsApp, some LinkedIn, referrals and so on - but one thing they all have in common is that they are communicating with candidates via their mobile. Mobile is central both today and for future recruitment – ignore it at your peril!

In summary, don't just think about today's challenges. Think about tomorrow's business, and how you want your organisation to look in three years' time. It's with this mindset that you'll be able to best evaluate the technology that you want to invest in, ensuring that in three years' time you'll feel ahead of the game rather than just the same as everyone else."

To learn more about how Access Recruitment can help your business visit www.theaccessgroup.com/ recruitment or call 0845 345 3300.

Stacking it up

So if the robots are not going to change the industry today and man is truly going to work hand in hand with machine, what would a great tech stack look like? I always turn to Amazon for inspiration. To me, a great, truly world class recruiter is like Amazon. It makes the process pain free, makes your life easier, learns with you as you buy more, creates great customer service and provides super fast solutions.

Imagine, as a recruiter, being armed with the same data, intelligence and content that Amazon provides. Imagine a CRM that instantly and intuitively narrows down your search, matches candidates with well suited roles and companies that you can sell them in to. When candidates in your database are looking, you are alerted. When companies are thinking of hiring you are alerted. Clients and candidates are nurtured and converted while you sleep giving you a constant drum beat of inbound business. Content is delivered to your inbox every morning that you can re-purpose to engage your clients. Websites and social channels that drive inbound business. Video that allows you to connect and build your brand. Intelligence reported to you so you know who is hiring and when. Information to build credibility at your fingertips before every call. Contact details easily sought to allow connection. Tech to cut lost time going to meetings. Marketing tools to build long term relationships and keep the black hole of the database alive and engaged. Contact automated to create incredible on-boarding journeys for your customers. Data intelligence and business insight to help you improve your quality, quantity or direction of work and steer you on to the right path. Constant intelligence giving you probability and accuracy in prediction. Automation and searching tools to source the best talent quicker.

I love the expression "a rising tide lifts all boats." The suite above will make an average recruiter perform. I have no doubt in my mind that a great tech stack amplifies performance but the key is that it will do so only if it is used to its full potential to make consultants faster, better and stronger in what they do. Average recruiters use a fraction of the great tech put in front of them. The best use it to their advantage to get better. Tech doesn't narrow the recruitment skills gap, it creates a gaping chasm that makes the best even better.

Imagine all of the above in the hands of a great relationship builder, a strong brand builder, a grafter, a negotiator, a wonderful sales professional and an influencer. The potential is huge. This is why Rob Grant, COO of the Harrington Starr Group, is obsessively looking to partner with the very best technology firms in rec tech and creating workflows to increase efficiency in our business and give a trading advantage that increases their hit rates, improves their speed and makes the job as easy at is possibly can be. The results have been spectacular so far but the best is yet to come.

There are so many great tech innovations in recruitment. Bullhorn, Cube19, Sourcebreaker, Odro, Herefish, Broadbean, LinkedIn, Staffing Future, Volcanic, Cloudcall, Jiminy and many many more are helping to make the job easier for our team but every day they are also becoming faster, better and stronger. I've never been more excited about the potential of the industry.

I am convinced that with increasing costs of sale (salaries, commission, tech, rent etc) tech investment and increasing operating efficiency should be at the centre of any recruitment leader's agenda.

The future of recruitment is machine led… but only in the hands of incredible people to drive it. ■

STACKING BENEFITS

James Osborne, co-founder of The Recruitment Network discusses how to make technology part of a recruiter's every day life.

It was Bill Gates who famously said that the "advance of technology is based on making it fit in so that you don't really even notice it, so it's part of everyday life." This is so true now more than ever in the world of recruitment, where consultants are spending more time in front of their tech stack than they are in front of their clients and candidates.

Is that wrong for an industry built on the premise of human interaction? I don't believe it is.

That's because what the right technology enables us to do is ensure that those human interactions that our consultants do have with clients and candidates are simply better – more targeted, more specific, more effective – and that can only be a good thing for everyone involved. First word of warning here – technology should enhance, not replace, the human interaction we have with our clients and candidates, so always be careful that what you end up building from a technological standpoint doesn't dumb down the relationships we have with our customers, nor make our recruiters lazy. The phone is still the best bit of tech in any recruiter's toolkit and face to face meetings are still the best way to nurture relationships and do business.

The question is not really one of should or shouldn't we be a tech-heavy industry, or how much tech should we employ in our businesses. Instead, the question should focus around what technology will enhance each of the different components of the recruitment supply chain for both our recruiters (efficiency) as well as our clients and candidates (user experience).

This is less about reducing our technology spend, and more about maximising our technology ROI. Decide what is essential and what is desirable, what is cosmetic and what is functional, what will create the biggest ROI… and prioritise accordingly.

Shiny new tech

My second word of warning. If you are on a journey of reviewing, defining, or even redefining, the technological make-up of your business (which I recommend you should be doing regularly to maintain the appropriate cadence) then don't get distracted by the myriad of shiny new tech offerings in the market (we'll come back to those shortly and I would be very happy to give anyone reading this an insider's view to the various tech vendors and products out there). Instead, start by breaking down your business into a series of workflows (from sourcing to account penetration, marketing to sales, front office to back office), that together make up your core operating model. Draw out an end-to-end process map to understand each component of those workflows and how your business currently functions (and should function). Each component across each workflow should deliver a minimum output standard that you define, benchmark and improve continuously.

Each component should ensure your business is on a journey of continuous improvement (if you're not familiar with the concept of Kaizen then go and check it out) and allows you to truly understand the intricate make-up of your business (how do you actually generate revenue and profit?). Things like:

- How do your customers like to engage with you?
- Where do you get the most success from?
- How should your consultants be sourcing and searching?
- What is not happening enough of in your business?
- How much time is spent on non-core / repetitive activities?
- How much wastage exists within your business currently?
- Where is that wastage?

This will present to you a series of gaps (to reduce wastage) and opportunities (to increase efficiencies and effectiveness) based on what you currently do. That's a good start.

However, and I am coming on to my third warning now – be careful you don't build your tech stack based just on what you do today. You need to take one very lengthy leap into tomorrow to define where your business is going and what it will need to be able to do when it gets there.

- What is happening in your market and how is it evolving?
- Is your offering progressing from just standard search and placement services into other service lines to maximise customer yield?
- Will you be expanding your delivery to other geographical territories?
- From one site or multiple sites?
- Will your internal org charts change (perhaps 360 to 180 / 120 models or offshore delivery)?
- Will your customers' needs change?
- And so it goes on.

Recruitment businesses really need to understand the trajectory that both your market and your business is on and develop a tech stack that will be an enabler of that, not an anchor.

Looking to the future

What excites me right now about technology and where I think it is going. I am excited by the increased commitment of recruitment businesses to invest in technology that nurtures and puts their data to use, internally to encourage both critical and curious thinking and externally to educate their customers (at a potential cost).

I am fascinated by the trajectory of the use of video technology and how that will soon shift deeper into the world of Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR), where recruiters can give candidates immersive tours of potential new workplaces from the comfort of their local coffee shop, and employers can real time interview and assess candidates in virtual reality from anywhere in the world.

I like the idea of making the often gruelling process of searching and applying for jobs becoming more fun for jobseekers, so know gamification will play a far bigger part in how recruiters attract, assess and engage talent in the future.

I am in love with Automation and how it can improve the efficiency, consistency and speed of how a recruiter works to allow them to spend more time in front of clients and candidates, doing the human thing.

I am intrigued by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) and the part they could play in reducing bias and discrimination throughout the screening process.

I am cautiously fascinated by the emergence now of Intelligent (Smart) spaces where our homes, our offices, that local coffee shop are becoming increasingly connected, allowing work to be done on demand anytime, anywhere.

Overall, I am really excited that recruitment business leaders are embracing technology more so than ever.

The events of the last 18 months or so have given us a unique time to review and assess our businesses like never before. We are forensic when it comes to looking for wastage. We now expect greater ROI from every part of our businesses. We are fixated on efficiency and maximising performance. And we are in a time where the opportunity to capitalise on the market buoyancy is intrinsically linked to a recruiter's capacity (to deliver). This is where technology, the right technology, can give you the edge.

And to create that edge, we should build our future strategies around tech intensive workflows that enable and enhance human capability. ■

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STACK IT UP

David Vincent, Randstad Sourceright's managing director for the UK & Ireland on adapting the stack for a personal experience.

The global economic downturn and virtual work environments brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic forced businesses to radically change the way they attract, source, recruit, screen, and onboard new hires. Businesses were forced to accelerate their already-in-progress digitisation efforts – including their talent acquisition and engagement practices. Even now, a year and a half after workplaces have been transformed, businesses are faced with trying to understand which recruitment technologies and data can help make the strongest positive impact for candidates, new employees, hiring managers, and the C-suite. Ultimately, the goal for your organisation should be to build a robust, comprehensive technology stack that provides a relevant and personalised experience for talent. This strategy utilises talent analytics and market insights to make smarter hiring decisions via tools like:

- AI assisted engagement and screening technologies that help human capital leaders develop multi-channel talent sourcing strategies
- Talent marketing and employer branding approaches that deliver a consumer grade experience
- Technologies that deliver realistic job previews
- Chatbots that address candidate questions 24/7
- Onboarding tools to help your organisation gain a competitive advantage

Talent analytics to drive decisions

Over the last seven years, a consistent refrain has emerged from Randstad Sourceright's annual global Talent Trends survey: talent analytics are one of the top areas of investment for many of the companies we talk to, and 2021 was no exception. Thirty-six per cent of the employers we surveyed say they are keeping their predictive analytics budgets steady, while another 42 per cent say they are increasing their investments this year.

This is a direct result of more and more organisations realising that data should serve as the driving force behind any agile workforce strategy. As a result, 1 in 4 C-suite and talent leaders we surveyed say that they are integrating talent analytics into their technology stacks.

Employers can analyse data to understand, and even predict, what skills the business will need and when they will need them. This exercise can not only help identify potential candidates faster, but also offer greater clarity into whether a particular role is best filled by a contingent or contract worker – or if a permanent hire could bring more long-term value to the organisation. >

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Additionally, talent analytics should be a key component of any organisation's diversity and inclusion strategy to help create a more equitable and inclusive recruitment experience. Analytics can help you better examine and understand the diversity of your existing workforce, as well as provide actionable data around pay parity. During recruitment, you can use analytics and market intelligence to set and track goals to ensure your applicant pool mirrors your markets. If it doesn't, it sends the clear message that something in your recruitment process – from your employer brand to job descriptions, qualifications and requirements, or your sourcing strategies – needs to be adjusted to be more inclusive and equitable.

The transforming power of AI

Advances in automation and artificial intelligence technologies are dramatically transforming the ways in which recruiters interact with talent – particularly because of AI's ability to quickly and automatically perform time consuming tasks – which in turn frees up human talent leaders to focus on more high-value projects that benefit from a personal touch.

When used appropriately, AI technologies like chatbots can effectively manage a variety of tasks in the early stages of the applicant screening process, such as candidate capture, tests and assessments, reference checking, and interview scheduling, allowing human recruiters to focus on selecting the very best candidates for shortlisting. With its ability to source a number of candidate databases and utilise hundreds of data points to create personalised communications with candidates through various social channels, chatbots can source, engage, and communicate with hundreds of candidates in the time it would take a human recruiter to connect with only a few, dramatically reducing time to hire.

As the technology improves, talent sourcing will become exponentially faster, with AI being able to pull a variety of candidates instantaneously using just a few keywords and search parameters, such as location and salary range.

Once potential candidates are identified, chatbot recruiters can further interact with talent at any time of the day or night – gaining valuable information about their qualifications and level of interest in the position – and can even conduct video interviews at the candidate's convenience. Machine learning can also analyse these interactions to identify what types of messages are most effective and adapt how the chatbot engages with candidates over time, ultimately offering a more personalised, interactive, on-demand experience for applicants even though there is technically less human interaction involved.

Talent marketing for a great experience

Just as technology that automates talent acquisition tasks can save time for recruiters, talent marketing and employer branding tools allow brand managers to focus on more strategic activities like developing a compelling employee value proposition.

Tech tools like recruitment marketing platforms can offer tremendous value when integrated with an organisations' applicant tracking system (ATS). Recruitment marketing platforms can improve communication with candidates, create the ability to better track brand building activities, provide visualisation dashboards for key analytics, and assist with the management of career sites, SEO, and talent communities.

Additionally, technology can help deliver a more consumer-focused candidate experience that is akin to what job seekers are used to when using things like ecommerce, ridesharing, and digital streaming platforms. Consumers have come to expect the ability to read and compare reviews for products and services, shop online at any time of the day or night, and track the status of their orders, and candidates are increasingly looking for that same experience in their job search and application process.

From platforms that can engage more frequently with candidates via text message, to employee referral technologies that allow workers to easily share job openings across social networks at scale, to virtual job fairs that help recruiters connect with prospective applicants in more convenient and efficient ways, recruiters now have the ability to reach candidates via channels and technologies that they have become accustomed to using in their daily lives.

Optimising onboarding

The onboarding process can have a major impact on employee engagement, retention and productivity, and leave an indelible impression on new hires that will shape how they view an organisation for their entire career.

Technology now allows talent leaders to automate some of the mundane administrative aspects of onboarding so they can focus more on engaging with new hires. Additionally, given the rise in popularity of remote and borderless work, remote onboarding technology is essential for new hires who may never set foot in a company's physical office.

Onboarding technology tools include platforms that provide orientation videos and frequently asked questions that can be accessed on demand, as well as software that can provide functions like welcome emails, IT checklists, and electronic document signature for contracts. Additionally, chat and video conference software can help new hires get acquainted with new colleagues even if they aren't in the same physical space.

Ultimately, it is important to remember that all of these tech tools are designed to enhance human interaction and relationship building, not replace it. While adding AI and automation technologies to your tech stack can be a great way to streamline a variety of your human capital and recruiting functions by making them more cost effective and less labour intensive, the goal is to develop a tech and touch approach that helps talent leaders better engage with candidates and employees alike at key touch points throughout their career journey. Implementing these tools into your technology stack can play a huge part in creating a more personalised experience for candidates, while simultaneously making your recruiting and onboarding functions more efficient and strengthening your employer brand in the process. ■

POWERED UP

Dal Bamford, chief customer officer of cloud talent specialists Tenth Revolution Group on digital transformation for recruitment.

While the last 12 months has accelerated processes across almost every industry on the planet, recruitment is a sector that has spent well over a decade being truly transformed by technology.

The core function of what we do will always remain the same – finding fantastic opportunities and matching them with the perfect candidate – but the array of digital innovations available mean we can now do it better, more productively, and across an even greater geographical spread.

It's all well and good to champion tech as a transformative business tool, but I know it can sometimes be difficult to specify exactly how and, as with any investment, there has to be a tangible purpose to it, an end result. We could kit our offices out with state-of-the-art machines, software and other innovations, but that won't automatically produce end results. Think about the last hire you made – you'll nearly always have one specific outcome in mind when you make that job offer, beyond just filling desks.

The year that changed the game

Although 2020 was undoubtedly a year of disruption for many industries, it was also a year that saw tech adoption dramatically improve the hiring cycle. For us, that has been transformative. While businesses initially put the brakes on recruitment as the world was shrouded in uncertainty, it quickly became apparent that regardless of whether their goal was to survive or thrive, that a highly-skilled workforce was the way to accomplish it.

Thankfully, in a world where video calls had quickly become a part of everyday life, virtual job interviews also became the norm. Despite initial wariness, our experience was overwhelmingly positive – businesses needed access to talent fast, and a Zoom meeting is far easier to schedule into a person's day than a physical interview. It significantly reduced the time to hire for our clients that had time sensitive projects, and it's an evolution in the hiring process that looks set to outlast the pandemic

It's also provided a real opportunity for levelling up when it comes to hiring beyond the usual talent pools. Those candidates who have struggled to travel to and work on site full-time, for a number of reasons, are now accessible to businesses that have embraced remote working permanently. The result will, hopefully, be far more diverse workforces in the long-term. **>**
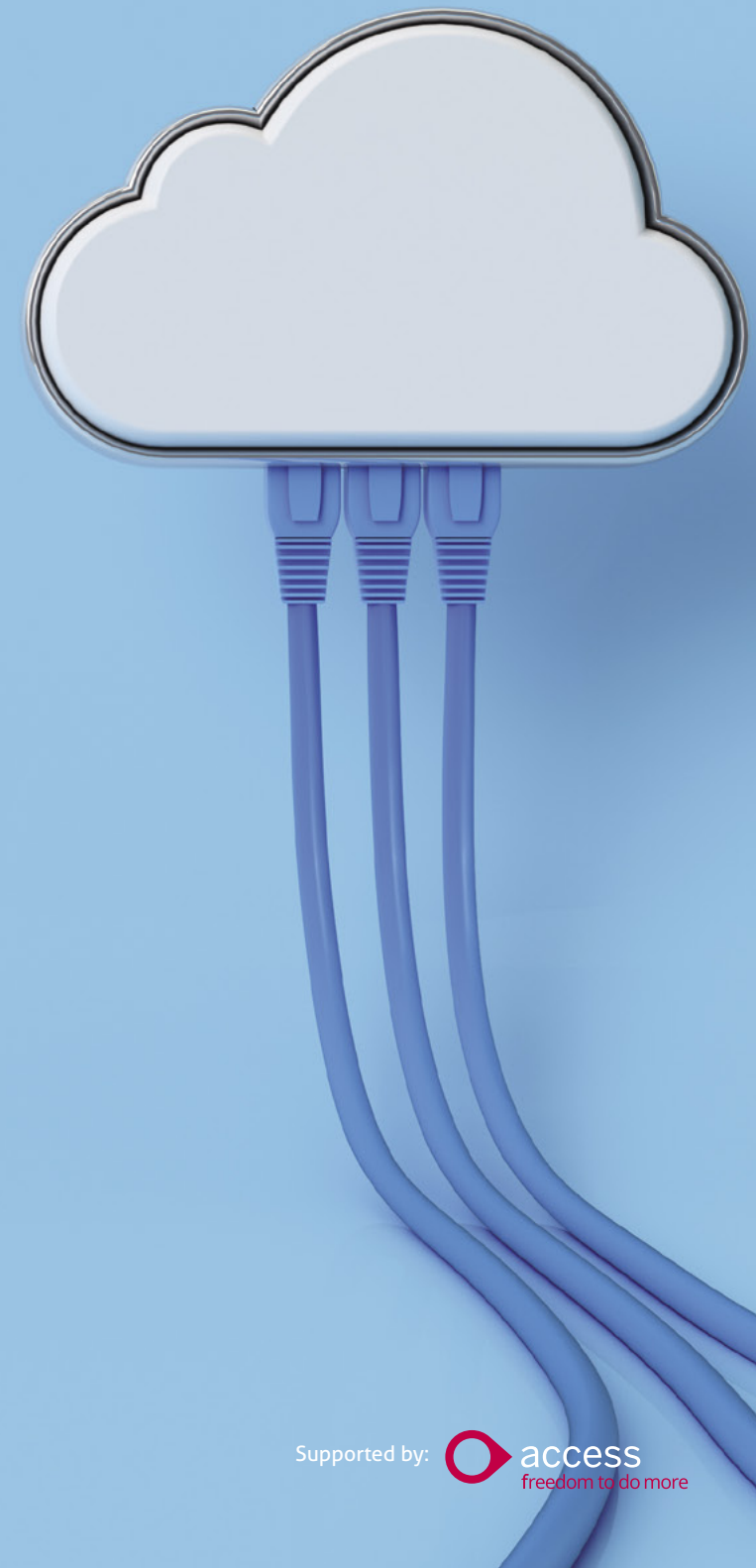
Getting it right

Of course, it's not just the last year that things have changed when it comes to tech. For us, the biggest adjustment we've made to our digital infrastructure was overhauling and installing a new CRM. Custom-built using Salesforce, it gives the entire business better visibility and functionality. Our consultants can see when and how a candidate or client has been contacted, in fact they can use it to organise their entire day and it's very much a cornerstone of the entire business.

Further up the chain, we can see how effective any changes we make within the organisation are. Any decision we make is with the aim of being a more productive and better unit, and having a handle on both productivity and success is vital. Moving towards a solution that was more than just a database was vital to enable us to grow at the speed we have.

Another benefit of a custom-built solution was that we could ensure the end result was something that benefitted all areas of the business. We've always been an organisation that has relied on teamwork, and so aligning everyone and everything together in the same place was an obvious goal. Unfortunately there's no shortcut when it comes to your own implementation – proper due diligence is the best way to marry up the needs of your business with the right solution. The best advice here would be to involve everyone that will use the product when researching the answer for your own organisation. Without knowing their specific needs, you're taking a guess based on a combination of your own opinion and a sales pitch, and I think you can probably figure out the traditional success rate that has!

To the cloud

As a business that is spread across the globe, it was also important to us that we had something that was cloud-based, for easy but secure access. While we certainly didn't have a pandemic in mind when opting for it, it's safe to say that the cloud has really shone over the last year. As businesses have ramped up digital processes to help them pivot and respond to different demands, being able to do that without requiring physical updates from an IT team is priceless.

It seems unlikely now that we'll ever go back to a world where software exists physically, and having solutions that people can literally just log into, from any device, has also been a gamechanger for us. We can pull live statistics from any area of the business, against a number of different metrics. Any decisions we make are based on real-time data, that's available at the touch of a button, no matter where in the world we are. As we look to expand and open in even more locations this year, we know that in simplistic terms, all our people need in order to be truly connected to the business is a web browser.

Beyond the surface

So what about once you get past our CRM? It goes without saying that there are other areas of the business that also rely heavily on tech innovation. Our marketing department, for example, produce industry-leading salary surveys on an annual basis. They are the largest independent studies of tech professionals on the planet, covering hundreds of thousands of data points. Without a way to carefully scrutinise that data, the task would be close to impossible. As it is, they're industry-leading resources that vendors such as Microsoft regularly refer to, and are very much the cornerstone of our marketing output.

We have access to platforms such as LinkedIn and XING, allowing us to connect with more professionals around the globe at the touch of a button, and means we get to be part of our customers and clients' daily lives. Our marketing team are also able to use automation to provide a truly tailored experience when communicating with people, to add true value to them, which creates warmer leads for our sales teams in the process. For example, using Pardot allows us to carefully scrutinise the way people interact with the content we send them, and can adjust the way we communicate based on those responses. Email campaigns have far more nuance, and purpose, as a result of this.

Because of tech, everything we do, we're now able to do it bigger, better and faster. And it hasn't replaced people – it's used as a platform to allow our employees to do more.

No longer a coin toss

As a company that works closely with technology, I can't think of any sectors that haven't ramped up their tech infrastructure in recent years and the same goes for recruitment. There can be a common misconception that tech is being used to replace people, and I think that's fundamentally untrue. When used correctly, digital innovation will improve processes rather than simply replace them. The true dilemma now isn't whether it can have a transformative effect on your business, it's choosing the right tools to ensure that it does. Recruitment won't change into a solely virtual industry as a result of digital transformation, but it will make life easier and better for everyone involved in it. ◻

> As a business that is spread across the globe, it was also important to us that we had something that was cloud-based, for easy but secure access.

BUILD A BETTER CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE.

Providing a positive candidate experience needs to be a top priority for recruiters in today's tight talent market.

An IBM Smarter Workforce Institute study found that over 60% of candidates share their experience with others, and 38% were more likely to accept a job with a company that made an effort to provide a positive candidate experience.

At JobAdder, we're focused on making the recruitment process more positive and joyful, simplifying manual processes and improving the candidate experience. Below, we detail how recruiters can design and build a better candidate experience.

According to our Head of Product, Tom Dyson, the key areas where recruiters fall short are:

- Poor attraction practices
- Poor communication
- Not enough personal touches
- A lack of joyful moments
- Poor training

The first step to be remedied is the job ad itself, which Tom says triggers a "waterfall of heartbreak" whereby generic loveless job ads lead to poorly qualified applicants, causing recruiters to blame the job boards or candidates, which then makes candidates feel bad and recruiters feel stressed.

Generic job ads lead to generic candidates as they provide very little meaningful information, not enough focus on the abilities and skills needed in the role, no salary information and no explanation of the recruitment process.

It's a good idea to interview the hiring manager and top performers and understand what they think is important in the role, including expectations, reporting structure, company mission, unique value proposition, salary information and the recruitment process and timeline.

The next step is to ensure that your touch points are personal, joyful and frequent. Take a look at your automated response email and see if you can personalise it and add more information so applicants feel like they're being offered value.

A well crafted, detailed auto response email should be tailored to each job and include: your client's address, office hours, dress code, reviews, anything a job seeker might find engaging, salary information, recruitment processes and time frames and a way for candidates to provide any additional information.

It's crucial that you and your clients are providing enough information before the interview, sending reminders to candidates, detailing how the interview will be conducted, following up post-interview and providing helpful feedback. If the candidate isn't a match, it's important that they're treated with compassion.

Create email templates for unsuccessful applicants that detail why they weren't put through for an interview, such as that they didn't have the right skills or experience. Additionally, you should call all candidates who attended an interview and provide constructive feedback on why they're not progressing through the recruitment process.

Finally, your recruitment agency can formalise and standardise these strategies by making it an essential part of its day-to-day operations, including:

- Establishing executive buy in
- Embedding it into the agency's mission
- Mapping out the candidate experience and identifying gaps or missed opportunities
- Planning and implementing improvements to this process
- Training both new and existing recruiters on these behaviours
- Measuring candidate satisfaction on an ongoing basis
- Establishing incentives for recruiters based on candidate satisfaction
- Celebrating the recruiters that are leading the way!

By prioritising the candidate experience and making it a significant long-term focus, recruiters and recruitment agency owners can build and nurture a better candidate experience, ensuring a healthy talent pool and improved candidate sourcing for the future.

A REASON FOR TECH

Dan Davenport, CEO, Randstad RiseSmart believes technology should be used to focus on agility and skills.

The pandemic has accelerated urgency for organisations to drive workforce agility while also supporting individuals' long-term employability. As the growing talent shortage and skills gaps impact more businesses, organisations are quickly realising that their focus should be less on hiring for specific roles and more on hiring for the skills needed to support long-term business success. One key to addressing these challenges is for organisations to reskill their current workers with the competencies the company needs – and essentially recruit internally.

To build a sustainable workforce that blends external skills recruitment with internal mobility, companies need to both determine what skills they need and empower individuals to acquire those competencies. The good news is that organisations are increasingly aware of the importance of skill-building. According to Randstad RiseSmart's recent Skilling Today survey of more than 1,000 HR leaders and workers around the world, 68 per cent of organisations that offered skilling in 2020 require employees to upskill or reskill to meet changing business needs, while 72 per cent have made skilling opportunities continuously available to aid workers in their career development.

However, exactly how to implement those skilling initiatives continues to pose a challenge for many organisations. Businesses often struggle with a variety of questions, from which employees are most in need of training opportunities, to what is the best way to go about helping workers acquire new competencies, to which skills are simultaneously the most pressing for business needs and are most useful for individual workers?

Supporting democratised skilling

It's important for all employees – not just senior leaders or managers – to be included in an organisations' reskilling and upskilling strategy – and have equal access to skilling opportunities. Only through a democratised approach to skilling will businesses establish true internal mobility and drive workforce agility needed to weather difficult labour market conditions and unforeseen challenges like the global pandemic.

It can be challenging to implement an effective skilling strategy that focuses on the right skills for the business and provides employees with the necessary resources to learn these relevant skills. In fact, the Skilling Today survey referenced above found that only nine per cent of HR leaders believe that employees can effectively guide their own skilling journeys. Further complicating the issue is the continuously evolving Fourth Industrial Revolution, which is driving ongoing shifts in the competencies that workers need now and makes it difficult to predict what skills will be most in-demand in the future. In fact, according to Gartner, the number of skills required for a single job has increased 10 per cent year-over-year since 2017 – and the global pandemic has further exacerbated employee skills gaps.

These challenges can often result in haphazard reskilling initiatives that prioritise training for some workers – such as those labeled as "high potential" – while leaving others behind. Or, leaving it up to employees to build their own skilling roadmaps, which can leave employees feeling overwhelmed by available options and result in >
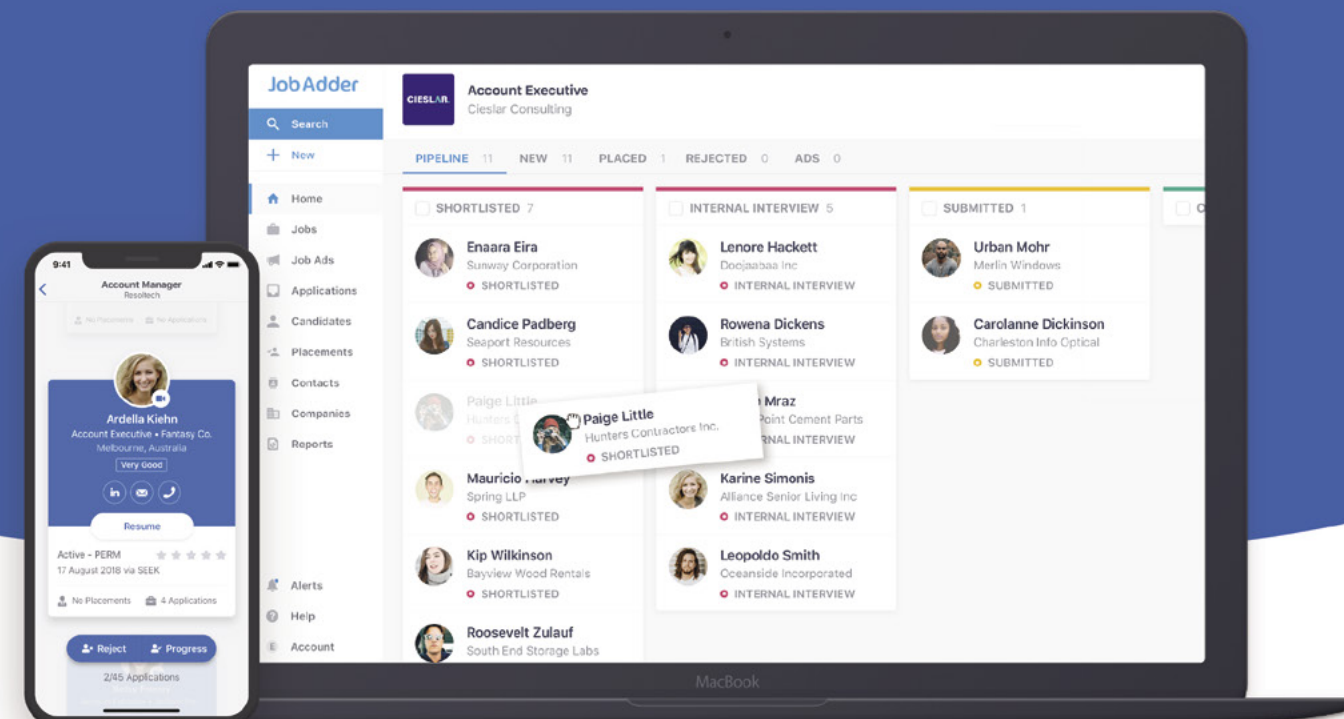
learning skills that have a limited shelf life and may not be useful to workers or the organisation down the road.

Given the current skills gap and labour shortage, incorporating reskilling and redeployment programs – in which HR encourages employees to find new roles within the organisation – is crucial to your talent strategy at a time when buying the needed skill sets through external talent acquisition is becoming increasingly difficult and costly. In Randstad RiseSmart's 2021 Guide to Severance and Workforce Transition report, 77 per cent of the 2,000 global HR leaders surveyed said they now have redeployment programs to help workers find new roles internally – a 28 per cent increase from 2019 – while more than half said they've used redeployment to address business needs. Additionally, 88 per cent of HR leaders surveyed encourage workers to apply to new roles internally.

Despite the success of these programs – 97 per cent of HR leaders reported that redeployment programs were at least somewhat effective – nearly half said there's room for improvement when it comes to how they match employees to open positions.

Embracing predictive insights and personalised coaching

How can organisations improve the effectiveness of their skilling initiatives? One way to do so is by leveraging predictive insights to both analyse real-time market data to determine which skills are most in demand now – and will be in the future – and compare that with individuals' competencies in the skills that are most relevant. Such technology can help identify workers' strengths and weaknesses and guide them toward career paths with the most growth potential, while providing personalised learning opportunities and suggested courses based on their skills gaps and proficiency levels.

To make skilling initiatives even more effective, it's important to pair this data with career coaches and learning advisors to help individuals leverage these insights, create actionable, personalised learning plans, and stay on track to achieve their reskilling, and ultimately, career goals.

To bring these capabilities together in a single platform, RiseSmart developed BrightFit, the first-of-its-kind predictive career exploration technology that combines extensive labour market data with personalised skills assessments to guide individuals to careers with a bright market outlook and a strong skills fit.

Such technology provides each employee with a customised report that rates existing and anticipated demand and growth potential for their current – or desired – role, as well as how at risk that position is for automation. Individuals also receive a score for how well their current skillset matches their current or desired role, as well as

recommended skills they need to acquire and courses they should consider to

future-proof their careers.

Paired with career coaches and learning advisors, individuals can develop a learning plan, also known as a strategic skilling roadmap. Personalised guidance from coaches and learning advisors also helps motivate workers to follow their plans and ensures employees acquire the skilling that both they and their organisation need for current and future success.

This type of organisational support and employee-first mindset is essential to empowering employees to develop their skills and supporting internal mobility. By continuously helping workers acquire new and in-demand skills, organisations can achieve greater agility and create an environment where internal redeployment and mobility can be used as a valuable alternative to recruiting external talent.

Additionally, by helping workers both see the internal opportunities available to them and partnering with them to map out a roadmap to career advancement, companies can boost their employer brand and improve worker retention. In fact, according to a recent survey from Prudential Financial, of employees considering leaving their current companies this year, "mobility opportunities" ranked as a top factor that would encourage them to stay. And even in instances when a worker may take their newfound skills to another company, the overall investment in the long-term employability of the entire workforce only serves to enhance your employer brand and corporate reputation.

From the ongoing labour shortage to growing skills gaps, recruiting externally to find the best talent with the right skills has become more difficult and expensive. As a result, organisations are increasingly identifying new ways to retain talent to preserve their institutional knowledge, reduce long-term talent acquisition costs and future-proof their workforce. But to drive success with employee skilling and internal mobility initiatives, it's important for organisations to tap into

technology-driven predictive insights to match workers with the most relevant skills while also providing employees with personalised guidance and motivation to ensure they are on the best trajectory for both for their careers and the business. ■

> **To make skilling initiatives even more effective, it's important to pair this data with career coaches and learning advisors to help individuals leverage these insights, create actionable, personalised learning plans, and stay on track to achieve their reskilling, and ultimately, career goals.**

#INSTAREC

Noura Dadzie, VP Sales UK & International Markets at Talent.com on how recruiters should use Instagram.

Social media tools have become integral to our day-to-day lives. Research from Statista suggests we spend around 145 minutes per day scrolling through social media feeds – with some people staying glued to their screens for much longer! For recruiters, these channels have become a crucial part of the hiring process. Engaging candidates on LinkedIn or pushing job posts on Facebook is commonplace.

But visual platforms such as Insta and Tik Tok are growing in popularity, particularly for Millennials and 'Zoomers' (Gen Z). Imagery and videos are fast becoming popular means of getting messages across. But how can recruiters use a platform like Instagram to hire?

Why Insta?

Before we go into tip tops to make Instagram work for you, it's important to first build the business case for using the platform. The war for talent is raging and competition for candidate attention is rife. Visual images and video content is immensely powerful when trying catch someone's eye and gain interest. So, aside from the fact that Insta is widely used by emerging talent pools, it is designed to be more engaging than the likes of Twitter.

But if you're building a truly robust business case, you just need to take a look at the numbers. According to digital marketing firm, Omnicore Agency, Instagram has one billion monthly active users and 500 million active daily users. That's a significant audience that can be reached if you're using your profile correctly. This latter point is where many staffing firms are falling at the starting line. We're seeing more recruiters using Instagram, but not all are doing so effectively.

Making your profile work for you

There's a number of considerations that are needed to make Insta work. One particularly common query is whether to have a separate business and job account. If you're planning to push multiple jobs out on a daily basis, then a separate jobs account will prevent you from 'spamming' followers and will ensure that followers are getting the content they find most valuable. In these instances, cross-posting content will help build your follower base on the job posting pages. Knowing when to post content is also important. While Instagram is used as a personal posting platform as well as a professional one, when people are most likely to engage with content will depend on which category the posts fall into. As a case in point, posting recruitment content on a Friday night or Saturday morning isn't advisable as most people do tend to avoid consuming professional content during this time, choosing instead to switch off from work as the week ends. Look instead at spacing out posts throughout weekdays at varied times to reach as wide of an audience as possible.

Publishing the right type of content is equally as important as the time of your posts. While there needs to be an element of professionalism maintained on a corporate or job posting channel, it's also important that it is engaging. Balance posts that include stock images or are self-promotional with more authentic messaging such as employee meet the team videos or 'behind the scenes' videos that show the personal side of the company. While the objective may be to recruit through the channel, people engage with people, so bringing the >

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human element out in posts will help increase your following, which in turn will ensure future ads reach a greater audience.

Most users will also tend to scroll through their feed with the sound disabled, so subtitles should be included on any video content to encourage people to stop and take note of the content, rather than continue scrolling.

Using Insta's features correctly

Those familiar with using Instagram on a personal level will know of the varied functionalities that it offers, but from a recruitment perspective, there are a number of features that should be utilised. The usual feed posts are the basic posts that you can add to your profile. They'll appear in followers' feeds and will permanently be on your profile.

However, you can add links to these, which often makes these less-valuable for job posts (unless you're including contact details – but that can be much harder to track). It's possible to add links in your bio that you can direct applicants to, though be mindful of the fact that this requires people to take multiple steps to apply which isn't ideal. As a result, feed posts should focus more on engaging talent to fill the upper-recruitment-funnel by accessing leads through new followers and latest interactions.

In comparison, stories provide the best opportunity for job posts. While these are designed to only be accessible for 24 hours, they can be added to your highlights reel to capture the information in a location permanently. The value in stories is two-fold. First and foremost, it encourages immediate action as users are aware that the story is only available temporarily, so results are much more immediate.

Perhaps more importantly, though, the swipe up function enables you to direct users to an application form off the platform, generating direct leads to follow up with.

Instagram reels is a functionality that the platform introduced in order to compete with Tik Tok. These are short 15-30 second videos that can be edited on the platform itself. As with Tik Tok, these reels are relatively under-utilised by brands at the moment, but they are a fantastic method of grabbing attention.

'Lives' (when a users broadcasts a live video) are also a useful engagement tool, but they are deemed as more of a temporary engagement feature. You can save lives to your IGTC, but the interaction is generally earned during the live post itself, so using them to push jobs isn't advisable. However, as followers are notified when you go live, they can be a great way to get people to engage with your brand in real-time and assess who in your following is open to new job opportunities at the moment.

Hashtag usage

The correct use of hashtags can be pivotal in growing your audience. It's important that you're using meaningful hashtags – you can use up to 30 but only if they are relevant to your post. As you enter one into your draft it will show you how many posts have used that particular hashtag. As a rule of thumb, you want to select ones that range from between 1,000 to 100,000 posts so that you're not being drowned out by others, but also not overly narrowing your reach.

While the above provides a guide to the current recruitment opportunities on Instagram, it's important to add that the platform is continuously expanding and improving its functionality. For any business using this channel to connect with applicants it's important to evolve as the platform changes to make sure you're getting the most out of your profile. ■

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A QUESTION OF BALANCE

Interlink Recruitment discusses the use of video in recruitment.

The use of video has risen to an essential aspect of recruitment during the coronavirus pandemic through creating the ability to meet clients and candidates, facilitate interviews and allow key decision makers to discuss options from anywhere in the world, despite travel restrictions. Here at Interlink Recruitment we use video on a daily basis which has allowed us to thrive throughout the pandemic and continue to place the top candidates in the best firms internationally. In this article some of our legal recruitment consultants discuss the use of video within their jobs and how it has allowed them to do their job to the best of their ability.

The adjustment from face-to-face to video

International legal recruitment consultant Ciaran Connolly identifies that "before the pandemic it was generally accepted that in person client and candidate meetings were the norm but as everyone has grown accustomed to the use of video in the legal sphere, they have also grown accustomed to speaking with recruiters over video call as well."
This dramatic increase in the use of video has both advantages and disadvantages but has been identified by our consultants as a necessary adaptation due to the challenges faced throughout the pandemic, leaving no option but to embrace the new technology.

The use of video

Video has served a variety of uses for recruiters. Principal legal recruitment consultant George Langford says "we're now seeing clients mostly going through the interview process virtually, then only at the final stage inviting candidates to meet face to face. This hybrid approach allows the process to move forward quickly and still

combines the human element of client and candidate relationships." Interviews are a crucial part of the process for clients to see if the candidate is suitable for the role both with their knowledge and if they will suit the atmosphere and culture of their team. The use of video allows a good insight into this, meaning that they are able to reduce the number of face-to-face meetings required in the process of choosing the ideal candidate. This makes the process far more time efficient.
However, the use of video does not stop at interviews. When working on team moves, mergers and acquisitions or the placement of Founding Partners there are many more things that need to be discussed and considered. Video has enabled many firms to consider international growth due to the ability to connect globally just as easily as if they are national. For this reason, video has also allowed the key decision makers of firms to be in the same call and discuss all the aspects of their firm including where they want to be in the future and what areas of their firm need developing.
International legal recruitment consultant Emma Su identifies that the people in these roles "tend to have a very busy schedule, making video a much easier way for me to make my introduction" as video is more flexible and travel isn't required it can take much less time to reach the same outcome.

Benefits of video

Langford identifies the change as "largely positive for the recruitment sector, as it has meant deals can move forward a lot quicker than previously. No longer do candidates have to come up with an excuse to sneak out of their office for an extended lunch break, with home working and the opportunity to jump on a quick Zoom call, it's now a lot easier to quickly arrange interviews, especially at short notice."

Home working has been a big adjustment for lawyers around the world but it has created opportunities for recruiters as candidates are no longer restricted to specific time slots for calls and meetings. Therefore, recruiters can access more candidates within a day and ensure that progress is quick and easy for candidates. Su also picks up on this, suggesting that lawyers and clients can "interact with each other from the comfort of their homes" and are "able to have the confidential conversations required when looking into new job opportunities". Connolly furthers "With the shift towards homeworking, it also makes it far more practical to have a video call as it can be difficult for lawyers to have these discreet conversations while still at the office, whereas this is mitigated when working at home."
Another strong benefit to video that we have seen here at Interlink Recruitment comes for our international team. Su states that "I focus on the Asia-Pacific Region, therefore, it would be very difficult to travel for face-to-face meetings, especially when there are travel restrictions in place." This idea is furthered by Connolly who says "as my work is all done outside of the UK it simply isn't feasible to go off to another country regularly but with the increased use and acceptance of video call for all aspects of business it has been a blessing as I can remain globally connected without sacrificing personal connection both with Lawyers and clients."

Negatives of video

While there are many positives to the use of video in recruitment there are also some downsides to the change. "Although the legal sector is now comfortable in going through the whole recruitment process virtually via video calls," notes Langford, "face to face meetings cannot be matched for the ability to really get to know someone." Interlink Recruitment places a very high value on creating

relationships with both clients and candidates to deliver a tailored recruitment effort and ensure they are placed in the most suitable position. Su agrees: "the downside of using video calls for meetings and interviews, is the connection, it is difficult to make sure the signal is strong throughout the entire call and therefore it is also difficult to create a human connection and build relationships without face-to-face conversations." The use of video does not go as far in creating the trust that is required in the recruitment process, however it does make a significant improvement on the use of just phone calls. Connolly says "many lawyers enjoy speaking with recruiters and building up a personal connection that can be left lacking just using audio."

Hybrid future

In conclusion video has facilitated the continuation of recruitment throughout the pandemic and proven it has great benefits in certain stages of the process. As Connolly says, "the use of video has been an incredibly helpful tool in the post covid world and frankly has made recruitment on a global scale extremely effective." However, as Langford says: "face to face meetings cannot be matched for the ability to really get to know someone." Therefore, moving forward we are likely to see a hybrid approach to recruitment using a combination of video and face-to-face meetings to make the process as seamless as possible. Su concludes: "video is a great option if face-to-face is not appropriate or achievable." ◼

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TO BOT OR NOT TO BOT

Laurie Padua, managing director, advisory at AMS, discusses the march of AI.

The use of technology in the hiring process has been a subject of debate for some time now. While some argue that tech can provide a better candidate experience than people as it automates processes and allows for speed of response, others make the (valid) point that hiring is all about people, so it needs to be run by a human.
The general consensus has landed on a hybrid approach between the people and robot element – or as it's been coined, the cyborg effect. But when is technology better than the human approach, and what circumstances dictate the need for person-to-person elements?

Valuable tech

There's now a significant wealth of talent tech that employers are using. It's almost commonplace to interact with a Bot on a company website, directing you to relevant FAQ's and webpages to handle enquires without the involvement of a person. Applicant management and interview scheduling is also commonly handled by automation now.
But tech innovation is about so much more than eliminating administrative tasks in the recruitment process. Bots, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) are being used to deliver value that people can't. As a case in point, applicant tracking systems and social monitoring platforms are becoming more sophisticated, enabling employers to use predictive analytics to track when a passive candidate is likely to be interested in a new role based on their online behaviours – a task that could not be undertaken by any one individual.
Technology also has the ability to eliminate some of the down-sides to human behaviours such as unconscious bias – and I'm not just talking about the ability of tech to match an individual against criteria without being influenced by protected characteristics. It's also an

enabler of diverse collaboration. HR tech platforms such as WayUp, for example, provides a platform for employers to directly engage with under-represented groups in a way that suits them.
This ability of technology to streamline the candidate experience extends to almost every type of tech. Voice activated searches and applications are increasingly being utilised. Take the McDonalds integration of Alexa to allow people to start an application for jobs through the voice-enabled technology. In a few simple commands, applicants are able to submit their details for a role quickly and easily, without any human interaction.

Striking the balance

While the above examples certainly demonstrate the power of technology for recruitment processes, a balance with human intervention should still be struck. People are sociable by nature and potential candidates want to know they are speaking to a human during the hiring process as it sets the tone for a new role.
But how do you know when to bring people into the technology mix, or vice versa?
As a disclaimer, the advice here is general guidance. Every business is different and there is no silver bullet solution. While company A may rely more on technology due to the volume of its resourcing needs, company B might need more of the people approach to attract hard to find skills and engage passive candidates.
But as a general rule of thumb, there should be human touchpoints at almost every stage of the hiring process. Whether that's the opportunity to request a call from a person (organised through a Bot) or a dedicated 'check-in' communication with an applicant on their first day in a new job. If you look through your candidate journey and see there is no potential opportunity to bring a person into the

conversation until someone is being interviewed, it's advisable to take another look at where there should be the option for person-to-person interaction.
This is particularly the case where there's an issue in the process, a complaint arises or there's an enquiry from an applicant that a Bot can't handle. If the tech isn't working for the candidate, there needs to be some form of human touch point. Not everyone is comfortable directing queries through online chatrooms, for example, so there will need to be some leeway. There are pros and cons to using both Bots and humans in the recruitment process. While a hybrid approach that has the appropriate balance for a specific firms' requirements and target audiences is needed, on the question of 'To Bot or Not to Bot', I'm firmly in the Bot's corner. ■

There should be human touchpoints at almost every stage of the hiring process. Whether that's the opportunity to request a call from a person or a dedicated 'check-in' communication with an applicant on their first day in a new job.

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THE FUTURE IS NOW

Samantha Hurley, operations director at APSCo discusses AI & Automation.

No facet of the consumer or business world is immune to the opportunities presented by rapidly advancing technological evolution. According to research shared by Gartner in 2019, 37 per cent of organisations have implemented AI in some form, representing a 270 per cent increase over the previous four years. Against this backdrop, how are recruitment firms responding? Previous research by LinkedIn suggests that 76 per cent of recruiters believe that AI's impact on the sector will be significant – but are businesses already taking advantage of the tools at their disposal?

Last year, just before the COVID-19 pandemic turned all of our lives upside down, APSCo carried out research among its members to determine adoption rates across the sector. We also explored where staffing firms see the greatest potential in AI and automation and how the fourth industrial revolution is impacting skills demand. Our results suggested that, while the potential associated with these innovations is no doubt exciting, we are still a long way from universal adoption. It seems that the plethora of options available – coupled with scepticism around the capabilities of tools currently on the market – mean that many firms, while aware of the benefits of new technologies, are yet to take the plunge.

What's more, this sentiment is echoed across the wider talent management sector: Deloitte's most recent Human Capital Trends report found that, although 74 per cent of HR leaders say it is important to rethink their HR technology strategy through 'exploring innovative new platforms, automation and AI-based tools to complement their core systems', under half (41 per cent) believed they are ready to do so.

Adoption

Looking at talent acquisition specifically, our research found that, overall, 61 per cent of staffing firms were either currently utilising AI and automation in the recruitment process (28 per cent), or had plans to introduce new technology in the next 12 months (33 per cent). Unsurprisingly, the proportion of companies harnessing the power of AI broadly increased in line with business size: among firms with an annual turnover of less than £2m, 39 per cent were – or said they would soon be – using AI. For firms with an annual turnover of over

£50m, this figure jumped to 88 per cent. Interestingly, a slightly higher percentage of firms in the lowest turnover bracket were currently using AI and automation compared to those in the £2m – £10m turnover bracket (27 per cent vs. 22 per cent). This may be due to the fact that those with less complex internal structures are able to implement change more swiftly.

When asked what tools they were currently harnessing to automate elements of their operations, our respondents highlighted various 'off the shelf' products to assist with a whole spectrum of tasks. These included generalist software platforms, which incorporate robotic process automation, as well as universal psychometric and aptitude testing tools, chatbots and social media management tools. Unsurprisingly, many of those surveyed also mentioned products that have been designed and developed specifically for talent acquisition. These included: specialist recruitment CRM software, ATSs, matching platforms, sector-specific automation platforms, subscription services, video-enabled recruitment platforms, and timesheet automation software.

Benefits

When quizzed on the greatest benefits of using AI and automation in the recruitment process, the top three identified across the board were: 'greater efficiency'; 'positive impact on time-to hire'; and 'reduction in human error' However, other potential perks were considered more favourably by the largest firms. For example, 60 per cent of businesses with a turnover of between £10m and £50m recognised that technology could have a 'positive impact on candidate experience'. Among the smallest firms, this figure stood at just 23 per cent. Similarly, 66 per cent of the biggest players saw 'reduction in human error' as a benefit of introducing AI and automation. In businesses with a turnover of less than £2m, just 18 per cent thought this to be the case. Other benefits highlighted by respondents included: 'more robust processes', 'reduction in unconscious bias' and 'reduced overheads'. Interestingly, a 'positive impact on quality of hire' was perceived as a benefit by just 16 per cent of respondents overall – and only 6 per cent of respondents in the lowest turnover bracket.

Drawbacks

While those surveyed were clear on the benefits they hoped to achieve by exploring new technologies, our research also identified several concerns associated with incorporating AI and automation into the recruitment process. Among our respondents, 59 per cent said 'a less personal experience for candidates' could be a disadvantage; 56 per cent said the 'level of financial investment required' was a barrier to implementation; and 43 per cent believed 'the complexity of layering new technology with existing systems' could be a challenge. Other perceived difficulties associated with AI adoption included 'getting buy-in from the team', 'level of time investment required' and 'technical ability of the team'.

Adding Value

Despite widespread agreement that emerging technologies – for the time being at least – have their limitations, our respondents were clear on where in the recruitment process they believe AI and automation can add the most value. When quizzed on what elements of talent acquisition can – or should – be automated, 76 per cent cited 'candidate identification', 58 per cent said 'CV sifting' and 44 per cent said 'candidate engagement'. Other stages where our respondents admitted that new technologies could be beneficial were: 'interview scheduling (40 per cent); 'application stage' (36 per cent); 'assessment' (36 per cent); and 'onboarding' (31 per cent). Just 4 per cent of those surveyed believed that AI and automation could add value at interview stage – however, among the largest firms this figure jumped to 11 per cent. This suggests that many respondents are not yet fully aware of the capabilities of the tools which are now available – something that may well have changed since the pandemic.

Impact on the Talent Eco-System

According to the Economist, 47 per cent of all jobs will be automated by 2034. It is no surprise, then, that rapid technological advancement is not only impacting the way that recruiters work today – but also the nature of the roles we are recruiting for. A government survey,

published in Spring 2021 looking at the UK AI market found that skills shortages were the biggest threat identified with almost half of firms saying that job applicants lacked the technical skills needed. Skill gaps included the understanding of AI concepts and algorithms; programming skills and languages; software and systems engineering and user experience. Last year saw the highest figures to date for the number of job vacancies related to AI and data science with an increase of 16 per cent from 2109 levels.

According to LinkedIn. 'Artificial Intelligence Specialist' ranked as the number one 'emerging job' in the UK in 2019. Other roles to appear in LinkedIn's top 10 included 'Cloud Engineer', 'Cyber Security Specialist' and 'Data Scientist'. One in four of our respondents revealed that they had noted the emergence of new job titles for professionals to work within AI and automation. Examples given included, 'AI Data Scientist', 'Automation Consultant', 'VP of Platforms' and 'Knowledge Engineer'.

The Future?

By 2024, Gartner predicts that AI and emerging technologies such as virtual personal assistants and chatbots will replace almost 69 per cent of managers' workload. Amid this new landscape, recruiters must adapt to survive. This means not only evolving to meet the staffing needs of the future, but also ensuring that they are harnessing the power of technology to drive service levels, efficiencies and profitability. While it is clear that the recruitment profession does not yet have complete faith in the capabilities of available tools and resources – and we are far from a time when the role of recruiters can be eliminated – AI and automation are already beginning to relieve consultants from mundane and repetitive tasks. In doing so, technology is freeing up valuable time which can be better spent engaging with clients and candidates in a way which no machine ever could. Of course, it is inevitable that the rise of AI and automation will continue to impact the talent landscape. Recruiters are vital to ensuring that businesses have the skills they need to navigate the future of work – and they must call on the technology at their disposal to make it happen. ■

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CONNECTING THE DISPERSED WORKFORCE

Stephanie Cavanagh, marketing manager at Phaidon International discussed the role of social media in recruitment.

Social media has become pervasive in most aspects of life – from day-to-day communication, to shopping, news, and more – people around the world use social media to stay connected from the palm of their hands. So why should looking for a job or hiring talent be any different?

Social media has always played a pivotal role in recruitment. Platforms like LinkedIn, particularly as an application, created access to professional networks right from your mobile device, making networking feel similar to scrolling through your Instagram or Facebook feed. LinkedIn, along with other fast-developing platforms, have become a primary hub to network and amplify business development, personal branding, and thought leadership. With hiring at your fingertips and around the clock accessibility, recruiting through social media has continued to grow in its use over the last several years.

The relevance of social media in the recruitment landscape became more apparent than ever as businesses faced the COVID-19 pandemic. Across all industries, social media took centre stage with

digital and virtual communication quickly becoming the new normal as businesses adapted to unprecedented circumstances and tried to compensate for the lack of in-person interaction many were accustomed to. At first, it could be perceived that the pandemic deep froze recruitment activity, yet with face-to-face contact suspended, recruiters, marketeers, and professionals alike took to media platforms as a way of crafting and maintaining connections while physically far apart.

The last 18 months have only accelerated the role that social media plays in recruitment. From a candidate lens, with geographic location less of a limitation, social media job searching has allowed for wider access to job opportunities. Additionally, from the hiring and recruitment perspective, professionals are more plugged in and accessible through social media than ever before, making it an agile platform for exchanging best practices and hiring solutions. The mobile-optimised social media experience is a robust and strategic recruitment weapon, the importance of which will undoubtedly continue to strengthen with the ever-increasing social platform use. >

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Upping your social media game in the war for talent

Recently, we sat down with Ben Coppin, ex-recruiter and now Digital Specialist at Volcanic, global leader in recruitment websites, to talk about the evolution of social media and how recruitment agencies should embrace its progress.

It's impossible to ignore social media, how has its use evolved in recruitment?

When I started in recruitment 20 years ago, the internet was in its infancy and social media was still a pipedream. Soon businesses in the sector were nervously dipping a toe in the water. Now, you're starting to see agencies really embracing what the platforms can do and being creative with it.

Facebook and Twitter were the preferred platforms for attracting temps in the multi-disciplinary agency I worked for. Interestingly over time they have gravitated to LinkedIn to develop client relationships and to build their profile for perm hiring.

Instagram, Snapchat, and the new kid on the block TikTok, have not typically been used to advertise roles, but are more catered to building brands and promoting personalities for an agency.

What are your thoughts on personal brands in recruitment?

Developing personal brands is a growth area for agencies in today's recruitment environment. Thankfully, long gone are the days where agency owners felt uncomfortable about consultants building their credibility and demonstrating their successes on LinkedIn as it highlighted them to rec-to-rec headhunters.

Now it's being actively encouraged because social selling can complement an agency's corporate brand. Alongside shorter, tactical

talent attraction strategies like advertising on job boards, building relationships via social media can help to identify passive candidates and foster engagement before discussing specific job opportunities. In this war for talent, clients still want quality. This is one way of achieving that.

Employees are 14x more likely to share content from their employers than other types of content on LinkedIn according to research from Hootsuite. Harnessing your team of advocates can help you seed your content further. It's also more likely that once your consultants start to share your articles and blogs that they may want to create their own, adding to the virtuous circle.

It's not just on LinkedIn where personal brands thrive. On recruitment agencies' websites now we encourage dedicated pages devoted to consultants' profiles. The better you position your consultants in your business increases the likelihood of clients and candidates wanting to work with you, as well as attracting new consultants.

Has LinkedIn replaced the CV?

Agencies are keen to make it easier for candidates to apply for roles. Is a candidate's CV always up to date? It's more likely their LinkedIn profile will be and that's why we've made it possible for a candidate to apply for a job on a Volcanic website using their LinkedIn account.

This increases the likelihood of passive candidates applying for a role as they no longer have

the hassle of creating a new CV. When I was recruiting, speculative applications came from candidates who were merely browsing, but once we started communicating about career preferences the candidate was often ready to move. These applications are gems.

Are agencies doing enough social advocacy to build their brands and extend their reach?

They can always do more! Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are key platforms to post blogs, testimonials, case studies and more because they complement your website and professional social media outreach. Using social media helps build your brand digitally, but brands must commit to their platforms – posting intermittently reflects poorly, as do brands that use their social media only as a jobs feed.

Any practical advice you could give to recruiters in using social media?

Look at all the platforms available – remember what's popular in the UK is not necessarily popular in APAC, for example, and decide how you're going to use the platform. TikTok is a recent phenomenon offering highly shareable content that could help agencies gain traction if their target audience is on this platform.

Finally, keep up to speed with social media. All the platforms and methodologies are constantly changing so keep your knowledge fresh.

Visit www.volcanic.com for more information or call 0845 340 4475

Recruitment Thought Leadership

Social media interfaces, particularly LinkedIn, continue to serve as a forum for recruitment experts to interchange ideas, best practices, and thought leadership content. This widely accessible form of communication is extremely valuable for recruitment, specifically at the dawn of the global pandemic, when the corporate experience for both employee and employer dramatically altered. Talent specialists scrambled to adjust their strategies, keep their candidate pipeline fluidly flowing, and chart a path forward in this entirely new landscape. At Phaidon International, and our group of specialist subsidiary brands, we immediately shifted our social media and content strategy, providing advice to our far-ranging network of clients and candidates as they navigated completely new waters. With a unique positioning and perspective as award-winning recruiters, we work alongside industry-leading clients across a variety of verticals and niche sectors, offering exclusive insights for hiring and job searching in the drastically altered recruitment landscape. For example, our topical content including, 'How to Onboard New Talent Remotely' and 'How to Ace a Virtual Interview' was not only extremely beneficial in providing advice to our client and candidate community, but ranked as the top performing content in our social media history, acting as a catalyst to nearly triple our following presence during the pandemic.

At a time where job seekers and organisations were both looking for answers on how to move forward, our content shared through social media allowed us to continue building connections through cutting-edge thought leadership. During this time, social media evolved as a powerful tool for sharing insights and learnings, further sparking an opportunity to elevate the personal branding of our expert recruitment consultants.

As a global specialist recruitment business, what truly sets us apart is our ability to present value-added input that not solely focuses on recruitment, but key market trends impacting the wider world around us. At Phaidon International, we continue to leverage social media platforms to provide our expansive network with the latest market research, career and hiring advice, ED&I best practices, salary guides, and much more. Social media platforms allow us to engage with candidates and clients outside of a job seeking process, and help them navigate all aspects of their career journey. Building this long-term connection allows us to be a true career partner, connecting them with not only job opportunities, but also tools to help drive lasting career success.

Engagement externally

At Phaidon International, dynamically engaging with our long-established network of followers is key to learn their motivations and pain points, and thereby offer solutions. By collating qualitative findings, numerical data, and research through online surveys and poll results, we keep our fingers on the pulse of sentiments in the market. In doing so, we can share these insights and offer them back to our international talent pool, helping professionals better understand the trends within their own industries.

Celebrating compelling events on social media including, National Engineering Week, Pride Month, International Women's Day, Black History Month, and more, gives us an opportunity to take time to reflect, move the needle on underrepresentation, and raise awareness for seismic social issues that may exist in the hiring landscape and the world. With the launch of LinkedIn's new events tool, this helped the team address imperative issues, share news about upcoming events and fuel the conversation with our network of followers.

From a business development standpoint, our internal hiring personnel and recruitment marketing teams leverage both paid and organic social media tools to sharpen our employer brand, but also construct a presence in new emerging markets or different geographies.

Connecting Talent with Opportunities

Beyond job advertisements, social media can be deployed to keep prospective candidates informed with the current trends characterising the market. From our experience, hot job postings in niche sectors perform remarkably well, leading to numerous applications for the roles our recruiters operate in. The specific job features can demonstrate to candidates that hiring activity is ripe, which was especially important during a period of mass layoffs and uncertainty in the job market, on the back of the global pandemic. As hiring has ramped up in the last several months, and with talent still geographically mobile, social media continues to be a powerful outlet to connect with both active and passive talent. Recruiters are able to keep their networks updated on hiring opportunities, and share best practices for virtual interviewing, negotiating flexible working arrangements, relocation, and more.

Employer Branding

Social media, particularly Facebook and Instagram, have been critical to help convey our corporate values, culture, and ethos to prospective candidates and our own employees. Through the different online interfaces, we are able to share employee achievements, company news and awards, CSR programs, and office events, to name a few. At Phaidon International, the 'Reimage Your Potential' campaign featured our very own employees from around the world – a snapshot into the life of a recruiter, their bright spots, and wealth of opportunities. This campaign attracted a magnitude of recent graduates to apply for a job; many of whom are now key leaders with us, today.

In today's world of hybrid and remote work, we utilise social media to engage with our own workforce, particularly with teams distant from one another. With teams across the globe feeling less connected, social media acted as a collaborative tool to sharpen employee engagement and rapport. Our dynamic culture is the cornerstone of what makes Phaidon International a great place to work, and social media allowed us to continue showcasing this despite not being physically together in our office hubs. We hosted exciting virtual activities, ranging from fitness challenges, cooking classes, to virtual deal times, which further helped bridge the gap - enhancing team motivation and morale.

The emphasis on more informal social media channels will only continue to grow as Instagram and newer platforms such as Tik Tok, make a play to enter the career and talent landscape. From Tik Tok video applications, to trending career advice influencers, this space will rapidly advance as companies explore the ropes and catapult their recruitment endeavours to the next level, which could be your edge to attract, retain, and secure industry-leading talent. ∎

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THE MEDIA AND THE MESSAGE

Tom White, founder and managing director, Paratus People, describes their online journey.

When we first set out on our social media journey, we found that certain platforms like LinkedIn presented a great opportunity for our consultants to reach out to their network. The professional audience it typically targets is a great fit for our industry. It enables them to both connect with candidates and to engage with prospective and existing clients. Over time, our approach has evolved however. From individual and ad hoc posts to our own creative content and a more strategic approach, our social media journey has been a fascinating one so far.

Social media as part of the marketing mix

As a business, we have always been keen to embrace all areas of marketing and communications, and social media for us is a core part of that.

Our focus from the start has been on using LinkedIn as our preferred social media platform. It's been important not just as a networking tool, but to raise awareness of the different aspects of our business, for example, our regular podcast series – the latter has seen significant growth as a result. We also use it to showcase our knowledge and expertise, share company news, and celebrate the variety of people that make up our teams and the wider industry.

Of course, this wasn't our starting point. Our approach to LinkedIn has had to adapt and change with the growth of our business and alongside the capabilities of the platform. But importantly, we chose to use LinkedIn from the inception of our business and have continued learning as we go. As a result, we are about to reach 25K followers.

More recently, the introduction of a new marketing executive into the business marks the start of a bigger commitment. Our experience to date has taught us that as with any aspect of business, we need to take a strategic approach and a long-term view to reach our ultimate goals. The new strategy we're implementing ensures we always create and post content with an audience and goal in mind, where in the early days, it may have been whatever we thought would work at the time.

Understanding your audience

We understand that our different audiences engage better with specific content and recognising this has helped us vary our content, to be more purposeful and ensure we're targeting each of our core audiences (candidates/clients/consultants) on a regular basis with information, news, posts that are going to resonate with them.

As examples, our clients engage best with hiring solutions, hiring hacks, podcasts with industry leaders. These all aim to create better relationships and partnerships and offer added value which sets us apart from our competitors.

Candidates engage with careers advice, industry advice and thought leadership pieces with the aim of building more exclusive relationships with candidates. We can also engage with prospective talent consultants, and to do this we showcase our culture, progression opportunities, benefits and life at Paratus.

Content is king

It's widely known how important it is to post good and engaging content that resonates with each audience. As mentioned, our day-to-day content varies and of course depends on the intended platform. Regular posts often include promoting our blog content, sharing podcast announcements, podcast interviews and footage, job adverts and company news.

Tactically we also aim for our content to be reactive and in response to what's going on in the world around us and the sector in which we operate. This can go as far as tailoring our podcast content to reflecting current topics of interest or writing dedicated blog content and launching topical campaigns.

The launch of our podcasts – the IoT and RDK podcasts – has been a proven positive step in further shaping our content strategy. Creating our own unique content gives us full ownership to explore topics and post relevant and engaging content that fits with the needs of our core

audiences, particularly on LinkedIn. The podcasts themselves also benefit from gaining a much wider reach.

In anticipation of the first RDK podcast we generated interest from over 100 followers before the episode was released. We then went on to smash our target for views on the first episode. Our other podcast, the IoT podcast, exceeds downloads by at least 30 per cent on each release. Having a social media strategy in place to promote these podcasts has proven fundamental to ensure they reach their intended audience and this has led to increased downloads.

Away from tech and educational content, we are also using our channels and reach to express ourselves within the industry. Earlier this summer, we launched a Pride campaign which saw us celebrate LGBTQ+ tech leaders who have paved the way in the industry. What started as a brand awareness/CSR focussed campaign driven by one of our team, turned into a brilliant client engagement piece with many of our current clients and targets sharing and supporting the campaign.

The response from testing out different content forced us to recognise the importance of reaching outside of our core business themes to support the industry more widely. It also helped our followers understand who we are and what we stand for – a more human approach that has felt very positive to contribute to and that clearly resonates with others.

Alongside our company accounts and pages, we also encourage the wider team to be active and responsible on their personal profiles, just as much as the marketing team. Employee advocacy, in our opinion, is probably the most important element in our social media strategy – and which has the potential to amplify the Paratus message further than through our followers alone. It's important, not just as a brand awareness piece for us, but also for our consultants and their personal brand.

Platform choice

There's no doubt that while LinkedIn is our bread and butter, we continue to explore the opportunities presented by other social media platforms including Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.

Initially, we set up and ran two separate Instagram accounts – one for client-facing posts, news and updates, and another to showcase life at Paratus and us as a business. As we started to understand the platform better, our use of it has evolved. For us, Instagram now brings most benefit as a brand awareness platform – giving insight into our culture, our brand and what we represent. Our aim is to share our stories and our successes and inspire more people to join the Paratus team.

Twitter and Facebook continue to be on our radar and are considered as part of our social media strategy, but they do not hold the same level of importance as they are less effective at reaching our core audiences. Together however, the Paratus social media platforms have a combined following of 26.5K. A number we are proud to have reached and have ambitions to grow.

What the future holds

Social media marketing is now an intrinsic part of our overall business strategy. It not only builds engagement with clients, candidates, and consultants, but also allows us to share creative content and build on our brand identity.

Like many others, we have learnt along the way and taken decisions to step out of our comfort zone and try new things and for the most part, with positive effect. To that end, we are always open to new and relevant ways to amplify our message and are always interested and open to exploring different platforms and content.

Social media has undoubtedly presented new opportunities for our business, and has arguably, been one of the most effective marketing tools to date. With a new and experienced marketeer on board we will continue to look to the future and proactively explore the exciting opportunities ahead. ■

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