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WELCOME



SIMON KENT
EDITOR

The recruitment technology market is a complex one, full of possibilities, promises, successes, innovations, efficiencies and pitfalls. While sometimes viewed as a late-comer, human resource related functions can now enjoy the attention of leading suppliers and cutting edge ideas and tech. Having commenced with spreadsheets and admin oriented solutions, the sector has been subject to in-roads from external solution providers which have some times claimed that they will see the end of the traditional recruiter. Job boards, professional and social networking platforms have established themselves and now, AI, machine learning and even blockchain technology are leaning into the space offering to lighten the load of the recruiter.

Many times the recruiter has been threatened with extinction by a certain type of technology, but every time that treat has been shrugged off. The fact is, technology works better when there's a human behind it – whether that's simply from a communication perspective or because, ultimately, a decision about a person is better taken by a person. And so technology is there to enhance and make more efficient the work of the recruiter.

In this special we look at what works. We've asked recruiters to contribute their thoughts from the frontline, giving us an insight into what works, how, where and when. Of course, no two implementations are the same and recruiters can't always expect the same results, but with every example it is more that possible to learn something – to understand the potential of technology and how to get it to work for you.

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TECH & TOUCH

Francis Padamadan, Partner, TritonExec gives an insight into the evolving partnership of recruitment and technology.

Technology is now an integral part of the recruitment process, with a growing trend towards data-based and predictive analysis-driven hiring. With an array of digital tools to help improve the selection process, technology can ease some of the pressures facing recruiters. However, human intervention is still a pivotal part of the process of placing the best talent in a role, and from our position in hiring senior leadership, we know that it is the partnership of technology and the human touch – Tech & Touch – that is driving recruitment and in fact the whole lifecycle of employment, from recruitment to retention.

Technology and high-touch recruiting is a two-sided approach that allows us to provide insights around talent pools to better define our client's market strategy and to drive client-specific initiatives, such as improving diversity. Technology allows us to improve hiring efficiency at the core of the process, and collaborative communication tools allow us to efficiently share information globally. The tell-tale sign of success in executive search is candidate retention, and our process of Tech & Touch allows us to utilise data-driven decisions and go beyond intuition to ensure that clients' hires are successful.

Using this precise combination of technology and high-touch recruitment, we have created processes that allow us to optimise and increase the efficiency of executive hiring at scale. Our Executive RPO as a service is an executive hiring platform that works with enterprise strategy.

Market Strategy

The evolution of Tech and Touch is heavily dependent on collecting and utilising market intelligence and data. Previously, businesses would spend huge amounts of time and money focusing on client background and core skills, but without the data to help them understand whether those core skills are the best indicators of the talent needed to successfully fill their business needs. We recognise the benefits of using technology combined with high touch point relationships with our stakeholders to provide data-led insights that improve decision making for executive hiring. By utilising and optimising the data we collect regarding the correlation between cultural fit and placement success, we can offer comparative insights to help identify what talent is available in the market and more specifically how that talent aligns with the client's expectations.

Using data that has been gathered, not just from all candidates that were interviewed or hired, but also those who succeeded in the position, AI can look for traits and signs in new candidates and compare them to those of previous hires. The AI looks at data from the entire life cycle and does so in seconds to deliver valuable information and insights. It would take hours for a human to complete the same task.

We also use technology tools that drive diversity and inclusion as well as improve the engagement of candidates within specific geographies and functions. By removing language that is gender biased, or even functionally biased, we can ensure that we can target and engage the right candidates.

Hiring Efficiency

Recruiters are under constant pressure to reduce their hiring time and improve the quality of their hires. Technology can help them do both. Finding leaders with the

right future-ready traits, in-depth industry knowledge, and years of professional experience, is a huge challenge for recruiters, and recruitment technology that helps with this challenge is invaluable in proving and quantifying the impact of bringing senior leaders into an organisation.

Tech-driven screening and interviewing speeds up the recruitment process and creates efficiencies that result in higher placement accuracy. Tech-enabled dashboards create a more collaborative relationship that results in faster time-to-hire, a more efficient hiring process, and better attrition rates. Pre-employment aptitude, cognitive, domain, and psychometric assessments can all be handled by technology. Candidates can be sourced by using AI to sift through a pool of CVs, much faster, more thoroughly, and more cost-effectively than a human could do.

What recruitment technology hasn't yet mastered is the assessment of a candidate's personal branding issues and the soft skills that drive innovation, such as creativity, collaboration, persuasion, and adaptability, the qualities that are crucial for senior leaders, but also define them as unique individuals – and this is where the personal element of Tech & Touch is important. Candidate success can be measured in several ways, but ultimately it requires the involvement of a well-qualified team that is an embedded partner in your business.

Candidate Success

One of the benefits of using AI in recruitment is data-driven decisions. Frontline recruiters are no longer completely reliant on their intuition as to whether a candidate will succeed in the role or not. Predictive analytics, the process of using historical data to make predictions about future hiring activities and candidates, is becoming an increasingly important tool in recruitment and can be used to measure the probability of how well a candidate will perform if they are hired, as well as modelling what an organisation's future talent and skills needs will be.

By capturing these predictive analytics we can validate our strategy based on candidate performance over time. This allows continual tweaks to a strategy that is specific to our client. To do this, we utilise technology to report on the comparison of attributes we identified as key to success with the performance of employees. Over time we can change our targets based on the actual attributes that strong performers have shown.

Identifying specific behaviour parameters in addition to technical skills and knowledge further improves the efficiency of candidate selection. Competency frameworks give recruiters an outline of what success looks like in a role, allowing them to map candidates to behaviour rather than looking for a generic profile.

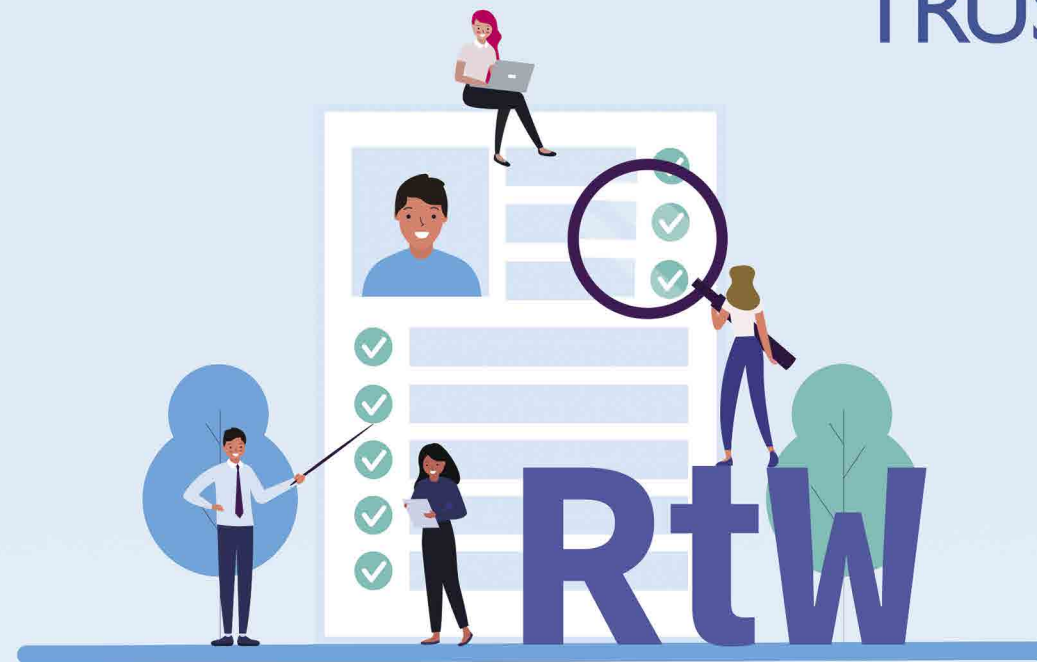
Collaboration and Communication

We couldn't talk about Tech & Touch without mentioning the collaboration communication tools that allow us to truly accomplish our job on a global scale.

Interviews are routinely conducted virtually; panel video interviews and virtual roundtable events can provide the recruiter with a much clearer sense of candidate behaviour and personality than a telephone interview would. AI technology can be applied to video interviews to analyse facial expressions and grade verbal responses to predict job performance and provide a more detailed assessment of personality traits. This, in turn, speeds up the recruitment process, allows for better personality and behaviour matching, and ultimately a more successful outcome.

Utilising Tech & Touch allows us to optimise and increase the efficiency of executive hiring. As senior leadership recruiters our job is not to just place individuals in a role, but to find the right fit, both professionally and culturally. To do this we know that while the touch element is crucial, data and technology help to reach the goal more efficiently and ultimately, more accurately. Our candidates of today are our clients of tomorrow, so establishing a personal connection and building a rapport is critical.

In a partnership of Tech & Touch, the former creates economies of scale, the latter captures the finer detail, the nuances. Used in tandem they can completely reshape the recruitment landscape for the 21st century. ■



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TOOLS YOU CAN TRUST

Anthony Macey, Director at The Portfolio Group, examines the different stages of the recruitment process and the part technology can play.

The scope for technological innovation is plentiful within the recruitment sector. Not only is technology improving the hiring process, it is changing the way we work and how businesses operate. Once an industry built on face-to-face networking, recruitment has been transformed by the internet. The pandemic shifted things further by challenging operational limits and traditional processes. But what place does technology have in the hiring process? How far can or should it be used in recruitment and when does it start to become a hindrance?

Client Briefing

For us, this is where technology came into its own during the pandemic. It was a great facilitator when building relationships and maintaining open and honest communication remotely. During lockdowns, using video to discuss hiring requirements helped give insight into businesses and their culture when face to face visits weren't possible. Whilst this cannot replicate the experience of being in a client's 'world', a video call has two key benefits: it provides focus during information gathering allowing multiple stakeholders to attend but, more significantly, it speeds up the process. Embracing video allowed us to continue delivering our service to clients across the country without compromising on quality.

Advertising

Job adverts are heavily criticised. Recruiters are often accused of posting long, poorly written job descriptions lacking the information needed to entice candidates to business or role. With ever-changing search engine technology, the challenge of producing quality adverts grows. Not only does an ad have to describe the role, but the content of that ad will define where and how it will be shown or found by prospective candidates. Marketing terms including SEO & 'keywords' are infiltrating recruitment; agencies that don't focus on improving adverts in line with technological advances could find applicant volumes dwindling and the search for talent harder.

Applications

One of the most cumbersome early stages of the recruitment process is application filtering. There's a fine balance between attracting the right quantity and quality of applicants, which differs from role to role. This is where appetite for the next ground-breaking invention/platform is fierce, with AI promising to assist with automation and more comprehensive solutions.

AI resourcing strategies are a key focus for many global entities looking to streamline the application process, improve hiring time, target specific skill sets, and address diversity of application pools. The use of AI in the screening and sourcing process is often combined with chatbots and testing programmes to pre-qualify candidates' suitability, well before any human contact. The nature of machine learning means that the level of data analysis, identification of key data touch points and testing all take time to perfect but can be a highly effective approach when combined with the talent and knowledge of experienced recruiters.

It can be argued that, in a talent shortage, it's fruitful to attract candidates who partially fit the client's requirements, so features like this could limit and hinder your success. Whilst improving application quality is important, the reality is that businesses need to consider candidates with interchangeable skills and perhaps compromise, offering training on missing or inexperienced skillsets.

Sourcing & Qualifying

One of the most critical skills for recruiters is the ability to screen/appraise a CV or candidate profile. With resumes varying in quality, assessing content can be a complex process. The debate around whether technology could replicate skills needed to read the nuances of language, decipher job patterns (including movement between sectors and understanding career changes), evaluate missing content and read between the lines, is inconclusive. >

We are certainly seeing those businesses who embrace and invest in technology winning the talent war.



Where technology falls is that it can only read what a candidate has shared. With many candidates failing to include basic information and keywords, it could be considered futile trying to replicate the complex decisions and judgements that a person makes, both consciously and subconsciously, when shortlisting candidates. Recruiters add value to both clients and applicants through effective interview techniques, drawing out any additional experience, aptitude, key attributes, or achievements that have been missed from a CV.

Any platform or system that can categorise and organise candidate data, making it easier and quicker to mine, will be invaluable to a recruiter. That technology will be the most successful in this industry, particularly in current conditions where competition is rife, and speed of hiring is vital.

Another area with a significant impact on the sector is agile recruitment processes. Taking the lead from established IT and technology project methodology, agile recruitment teams are disrupting the traditional 360 recruiter model or talent role, with recruiters working in collaboration as project teams focused on a collective approach to sourcing projects. Through a series of sprints, recruitment teams can identify potential candidate pools more efficiently, gather current market intelligence or quickly re-prioritise the sourcing strategy, depending on market conditions. This can be particularly effective in addressing volume hires, international requirements, or niche skill sets. At each point throughout the process the sprint teams can provide the hiring manager/client with key feedback to address hiring challenges.

Interviewing

Video interviewing was critical to maintaining recruitment throughout the pandemic.

Whilst initially using video software was a necessity; it's now evident that this is an effective tool as it mitigates the need for stakeholders to be in the same location, reducing travel time/expense for all parties. It's easier internally for clients to find a mutually beneficial time and for candidates to covertly manage their interview times.

Businesses with historically cumbersome recruitment processes are being encouraged to use remote interviewing technology, making the process about three times faster and reducing hiring time to days/weeks rather than months.

Remote Working

The pandemic heavily inspired attitudes towards flexible working and fast-tracked the technological infrastructure to support this change. If a role can be effectively performed outside a traditional office environment with remote onboarding, training, and online support, clients are able to attract leading professionals more easily and without compromise from a national talent pool.

By utilising many tools businesses already had access to and investing in a plethora of tech to strength functions and meet shortfalls, this flexibility is also meeting candidate expectations and improving employee satisfaction levels and work-life balance.

First hand experience

As a company, Portfolio has actively chosen to uphold remote recruitment practises and endorse remote/hybrid working with the desire to modernise attitudes in the industry.

We are certainly seeing those businesses who embrace and invest in technology winning the talent war. Heightened demand in the current environment reinforces the need to move quickly when recruiting, to secure desired talent before the competition.

Whilst technology will continue to play a fundamental part in shaping the sector, we do not believe it can – or should – completely replace any human element of the recruitment process. Too much automation devalues expert consultants with honed skillsets who can accurately assess and qualify candidates.

Matching talent, experience, and the long-term potential of a candidate, along with cultural fit should remain central to the recruiters brief. In an ever-changing digital world the recruitment sector needs to continue embracing the balance of technology with traditional talent acquisition methods tailored to the unique hiring requirements of the agency/ employer or to pro-actively navigate recruitment challenges and market volatility.

Combining consultants' skills and industry knowledge with advancements in technology allows us to add value to our clients in a highly competitive recruitment market with a more agile recruitment process. We believe this is fundamental. Above all, quality of service and client experience should be paramount. ■



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THE STORY SO FAR

Jonathan Kestenbaum, MD for Technology Strategy & Partnerships at AMS charts the progress of recruitment technology.

It's common knowledge that there have been billions of dollars invested in recruitment technology. In fact, a new report from Straits Research reveals that the global applicant tracking system market alone reported a revenue of \$1.43 billion in 2021 and is predicted to grow at a CAGR of 9.05 per cent from 2022 to 2030. However, while there is clearly an abundance of recruitment tech available to firms, none yet provide the 'magic bullet' solution to today's hiring challenges. So, how far has recruitment technology come, where are there opportunities for growth and how can you make sure your software works best for your firm?

Significant consolidation

As we navigate through a post-pandemic world of work, we are starting to see greater consolidation of recruitment tech – or at least a desire for it. Despite this, many multi-national businesses are still using disparate platforms across the globe, with multiple ATS's being utilised across a number of geographical locations, alongside systems that do not integrate with their other tools. Moving forwards, we expect to see more firms begin to consolidate and streamline these tools so that they are suitable in the modern world and live up to the demands of forward-thinking firms and their talent pools.

This consolidation is also being driven by a reassessment of what tech is working and whether it really solves the problems faced by businesses in the staffing sector and in-house hiring teams. Talent mapping continues to be one of the toughest challenges that companies face as the skills information companies keep is often out of date, with some attributes – particularly softer skills – left unacknowledged and unrecorded. However, an effective tracking platform needs to be able to track beyond the immediate

attributes needed for specific roles and the ability to capture the entire potential talent pool, including internal skills and global resources.

Where are the opportunities?

Despite already having an abundance of technology, opportunities to build new tech and improve upon existing software remain ample. Analytics in particular is an area of significant potential. Hiring teams have a wealth of data to hand, but few are using this to its full potential. It's essential to be able to use the data you have across various databases to be able to accurately identify where you have talent gaps, what talent you have internally and build a clear talent portfolio. Ideally, a joined-up approach is needed to this data analytics approach. However, there's currently no leading software that can collate the information from every platform and provide an easy-to-digest analysis for hiring managers and recruiters. While it may prove difficult to create a platform that gets all data onto one platform, the staffing sector would greatly benefit from a way of doing this and we're likely to see this become a focus of development in the new world of work. There's also a real opportunity to centralise marketing systems into one platform. While much of the consolidation we're seeing at the moment is focused on data and information structures, communication and candidate experience through marketing systems is critical. Again, a joined-up approach will mean that businesses are making the most of every touchpoint within their talent pools, but as of yet there's no software to consolidate this globally that also takes into account the need for regionalisation. There's also a real opportunity to evolve software that can track and engage contractors and freelancers. In the current world

of work, the flexible workforce is heavily relied on, but many firms don't yet have systems in place that can accommodate this community. While we are seeing an emergence of some contractor and freelancer systems, such as Hourly by AMS, there is still plenty of room to build systems that focus on attracting and managing these personas.

While there's clearly a plethora of recruitment technology in the market, there's still room for innovation and evolution. Shifts in tech generally happen every five to seven years and I'd estimate that we are about three years away from another significant change that will likely be driven by blockchain, web 3.0 or quantum computing.

Knowing how to optimise tech

It's important to remember that every business is different, so not everything is going to work and not all of the tech currently on offer will be a match to the needs of all, but there are ways that hiring teams and recruiters can optimise the software they have or are investing in:

1. Understand the business problem: Before you start investing in tech, make sure that you have identified the real problems that your business or its clients are facing so that you can better identify the best tools to help your individual needs. This will also make it easier to assess what tech is working and where consolidation is needed.
2. Have a strategy: During the pandemic we saw an uptick in tech investment as businesses were forced to shift how they operate into a remote environment. While this was a necessity, it's crucial that any investments in or changes to a tech stack have a strategy behind them. Without a clear purpose, software investment can spiral.

3. Make sure you're utilising the right tools: It's also important to keep in mind that not all software will work for your firm. The latest recruitment software may sound great on paper, but will it deliver what you need and how well will it integrate with existing platforms?

4. Align your people and processes: While technology and automation have a significant role to play in providing a streamlined recruitment process, human touch is still important in both the design of recruitment software and the user experience. No technology should be utilised without people in mind.

5. Stay on top of updates and new features: Tech is constantly evolving and in order to make sure it is still having the impact you need, someone needs to 'own' the management of updates and the communication around new features. Having new functionality in your tech stack that staff aren't utilising is less than ideal, but having a dedicated person or team to stay on top of updates can ensure the entire business is making the most of the tech itself.

Investment in the right technology will definitely be critical for those looking to stand out in the staffing arena. However, the success of this will depend on whether your organisation has a sound strategy and has also invested in process consolidation, alongside well configured and implemented software and a plan that will ensure that their chosen tech can continue to evolve in line with individual business demands and changing candidate needs. With scope to still improve the software that's already available, the next few years will be an exciting time for tech innovation in recruitment, one that AMS is looking forward to continue to drive. ■

DATA LED

Curry Chern, Co-Founder of operating system Navis, explains how The Big Search leverage their data for better recruitment.

Recruitment firms rely on a talent/candidate relationship management software (T/CRM) or applicant tracking system (ATS) to collect, track, and process data on candidates. These systems are very good at requiring the user to store data – there are hundreds of fields where you can store all kinds of information – interview notes, candidate details, role details, etc. On top of this, there are also hundreds of other data points that are being tracked – activities, candidate and search progression, etc. The data is there, but where these systems fall short is in enabling the user to make sense of their data. These software systems have reporting features. The problem with these reports is they are often set up for a general theoretical use case, but rarely work so well in real life. A lot of the time, you find yourself viewing only a few reports on a consistent basis out of dozens of predefined reports – most of which do not really fit your needs. These reports are very good at giving you numbers – spitting out information that was already put in. However, in order to actually make strategic decisions based on these reports, you have to think deeply about the data points and translate them into actions. In actuality, this is something that a minority of people are good at doing or frankly have time to do. We believe that people would benefit more by having more actionable insights that can help them do their work better and help them make the right decisions at the right time.

Report right

To give an example, many of these systems will allow you to store the rejection reason for individual candidates. This is useful to track, but where these systems fall short is showing the most common rejection reasons for a given search. Such information can be very valuable when identifying why a certain role is not going well, and where the bottlenecks are. However, in many systems you would have to go through each candidate individually to collect this insight.

Empowering consultants

At The Big Search, we have been empowering our consultants with real-time, automated reports that are designed for them to take actions to improve the likelihood of a successful hire. There are a few reasons why we do this. Having a clear overview of key indicators for a search (response and interest rate, rejection reasons, current pipeline) empowers the consultant to quickly identify when and where a search might be struggling, and provides them the information to make the necessary change. It also allows them to provide data-driven strategic advice to their

clients and additional insights into the market that is based on data, and not just opinion. Additionally, with high transparency across the business it also allows us to clearly define 'what good looks like' and share insights from searches that overcame certain problems with those that are currently experiencing it. For us, data analytics and data collaboration helped to improve our operations, processes, and customer experiences. Some of the benefits include increased transparency – everyone in the business knows exactly how many client projects we are running and how they are progressing. This allows everyone to make better decisions without having to ask individual people and chase information scattered all around the company and it empowers everyone in the business to work better. Another benefit was the ability to identify opportunities for high impact changes – we use data that we collect around client projects to identify the biggest challenges. This allows us to focus our improvement efforts on the areas that truly matter, rather than just working on some improvements that seem like they could have a high impact. In the end, we know exactly what effect we expect and we can measure if our solution delivered that effect. A third benefit is our strategic advice to clients – based on the client project data we have, we can much better understand if a certain project is not going well and why that is. In turn, we are able to come up with suggestions on how the problems can be fixed. All of our suggestions are backed by data.

To drive and actually improve outcomes, we need to move data from being merely reporting – here is the information – to being actionable – this is what you need to do based on data. In a world where data is everywhere, there is too much information to process. Data collection is becoming less and less of an issue. The issue is in data interpretation. The companies that succeed in the future will be those that are best at taking information and making informed decisions based on the data they have collected.

We always say that good hiring decisions cannot be made without accurate information to base those decisions on. We have invested heavily into building a comprehensive data ecosystem that combines public sources such as Dealroom, LinkedIn, Crunchbase, and more with our own internally collected proprietary dataset. This provides us with insights into market trends and the talent landscape that enables us not only to find the best candidates fast, but also to become a true consulting partner to our clients. The bottom line is that the best hiring practices include the best data management practices. ■

The Big Search have launched and scaled development teams and placed sought-after executives at over 30 unicorns.

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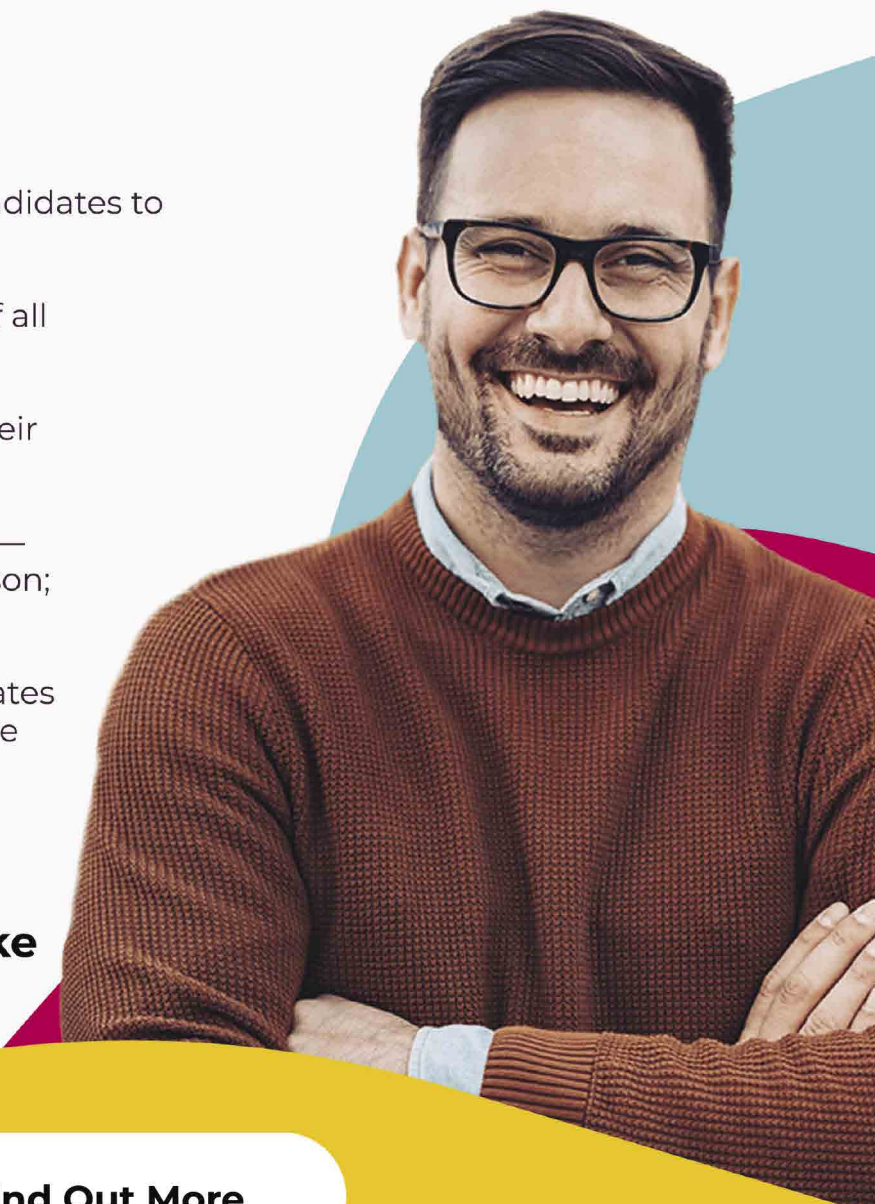
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SCREEN DREAM

Deepak Shukla, founder of Pearl Lemon Recruitment on how CRM and AI tools help screen potential candidates.

Q: How are you using technology to enhance candidate search and selection?

A: For technology to enhance candidate search and selection, we use onboarding forms. We use multiple search sites, we use WhatsApp as well. That's the technology stack. And what that does is look at multiple job sites, of course providing us with multiple candidates. The onboarding forms help centralise our applications, but also require our candidates to upload and send videos. So there's a technological component to the work that they need to do. And then we're also requesting them to follow up with us on WhatsApp and send us a combination of voice notes, as well as the video link of their recording. So there are multiple tools that we use to ultimately determine who would be the most appropriate candidate for our business and using technology to whittle down those actual candidates who are digital natives themselves.

Q: How do you select and determine the technology you'll use and how are the end-users (consultants and clients) included in this consideration?

A: The technology we use is a reflection of the way we operate as a company. We do a lot of asynchronous communication so WhatsApp is an appropriate vehicle for this. What's also great about WhatsApp is its very wide and very deep market penetration. Many, many people use WhatsApp as part of their day-to-day lives. So it kills two birds with one stone and to that extent, there's also business WhatsApp now which most of our companies are using. So that's one of the ways that we consider it ease of use, as well as familiarity as well as its ability to solve

our actual challenges. And then outside of that, it's also cross-platform compatibility. So we make sure that the tools that we use work across devices, that something else that's important, and then in terms of clients being considered we use just, again, similar principles, Google Drive, Google email accounts.

Q: What do you feel are the strengths and limitations of technology in recruitment?

A: The strengths of Technology In Recruitment is that you can very quickly whittle down candidates so it's more efficient. Qualitatively it's never going to replace an in-person experience when you get to know someone so from a cultural aspect it's there's a limitation. However, if as a company you're never going to meet face to face anyway, then, arguably not meeting face to face is a better proxy for how you'll actually work. The limitation of the technology is that human social animals were designed for real-world communication. Technology is not the real world as much as it might try to be now with 3D and the metaverse and the like, VR. But that would be some of those.

Q: How do you expect technology to develop and grow in use for recruiters in the future?

A: Technology will develop through the use of virtual reality through meeting in the metaverse and then also augmented reality. So VR AR and meta are going to help make the recruitment process feel the more real-world and that will ultimately in a way become the real world in that people are going to be just accustomed to using that as a means of communication. Anything outside of that you can add to its purchase. ■

STAYING PERSONAL

Elaine Orlor, Managing Director of Consulting, Cielo on how automation helps de-liver the best candidate experience.

The working world is experiencing a high rate of change. This is in no small part due to the rapid developments in technology which enable a greater degree of automation in recruitment processes. As a result, hiring managers have wider, deeper access to the available talent pool. But it is also important that recruitment firms do not lose sight of what truly matters to candidates – a personalised experience.

The recruitment market as it stands today

In the midst of the current skills shortage, multiple industries are feeling the pressure to fill talent gaps. To meet the surge in demand, we have seen a rise in both automated processes and persona-based engagement. Firms that take a more data-driven approach have some advantages. Firstly, they have a better overall view of the talent that is out there, allowing them to focus efforts on candidates most open to new opportunities. Secondly, this approach enables firms to ascertain a set of talent “archetypes” and find both active and passive job seekers that fit them.

In the changing recruitment landscape, it is more than ever the job of employers to win over candidates than it is the other way round. This change has forced the recruitment industry to shift away from what they think employees need and towards what the candidates want. Automation solutions are allowing for the consumer-style experience that candidates are looking for; they want a recruitment experience with the efficiency of online shopping and a high degree of personalisation.

The technology available to recruiters today means that candidates can be effortlessly segmented, and messages personalised to draw in each one. But recruiters must be mindful of the need for a top-quality content strategy to accompany these solutions. A personal touch is now a critical incentive for candidates and a main driver of best-in-class results for recruitment firms. That is why it is crucial that, while automation certainly does allow firms greater success, they do not allow it to negatively affect personalisation.

Finding a middle ground

One of the best ways to achieve a balance in this area is to always consider the process from the candidate’s point of view. In certain situations, such as buying groceries or paying for petrol, many customers prefer efficiency over personalisation. However, if a parent’s child is sick, they will want a personalised (and indeed in-person) GP experience – the picture is fundamentally different. Being able to “read” the situation and knowing what level of personalisation it calls for is key if a firm is to strike the best compromise between humans and machines.

For sake of simplicity, we can reduce talent acquisition down to two processes. The first are enabling processes and are ones that can benefit the most from automation. Why is this? The reason is that these processes consist largely of repetitive tasks that drive the operational side of a firm’s activity. Because these tasks are mainly administrative, they generally do not require personalisation and are therefore best suited to automation. Think how much more efficient it is using an AI to provide a wide database of suitable candidates compared to doing it yourself.

The second area is customer-facing processes. These processes require greater consideration as far as automation is concerned. Again, being able to “read the room” is important here. For example, sectors such as retail operate on a high-volume, high-turnover basis and offer low-skilled positions. Therefore, a more expedient automated recruitment process would work well here. On the other hand, candidates applying to skilled roles tend to invest more time and attention into the process and their potential future in the job, making a standardised impersonal approach far less palatable.

Even though we can make a distinction between these two approaches, it is still the case that fostering commitment among candidates for any role requires some degree of personalisation – a healthy balance must be struck. In order to achieve this, firms must constantly monitor feedback from candidates on their experience and then use this to make improvements to the service. The emphasis here really is on continuous assessment – the world is not static and recruitment trends will shift over time. The real value of automation is in the talent search, as firms can segment candidates into “roles of best fit” groups and then focus on the messaging for each.

Interview: Better for employers

Interviews are something of a pain point given the planning and time allocation they require. That’s why firms should explore technologies that can alleviate the time pressures the process brings. Cielo’s technology, for example, has been proven to save employers around nine minutes of scheduling time per candidate. When an average of 20 – 30 candidates per role is taken, that amounts to four-and-a-half hours saved on interview time. This is an example of automation having a tangible effect on process efficiency, but it is essential that these benefits are plain to see so that a clear case for automation can be made. Therefore, firms must ask themselves exactly how (and indeed if) automating a process is going to show real benefits to all parties – be they employees, candidates, stakeholders or hiring managers.

Client-side benefits

The more we automate, the more we risk viewing people as just numbers. Candidates are curious about the company, the role and the team, and want to show recruiters and hiring managers their unique qualities. It is often forgotten that candidates are also using the interview process – to assess if the company fits them. If companies remove personalisation from the recruitment process, they also risk hiring someone who may leave after deeming the culture the wrong fit for them. The consequences of this can be long-term and damage engagement, morale, and satisfaction in the company.

To secure the highest-quality hire possible and form fruitful relationships between parties in the recruitment space, personalisation is mandatory. Part of this process is making the client feel valued so that they are more likely to commit. The way this is achieved is through constant communication and the right amount of information so that the candidate has a sound understanding of the firm’s culture. Candidates can also personalise their experience through this information. Companies that focus on their own internal process when designing the experience mostly result in bad candidate experiences. With the innovations in automated solutions over the last few years, processes such as sourcing candidates have become more straightforward than ever before. However, it is imperative that this efficiency never undermines personalisation in customer-facing operations. Sourcing and screening candidates are examples of how automation can play a positive role, but firms should also be aware that, even here, a balance must be struck. Similarly, while over-automation runs the risk of appearing impersonal, relying solely on human interaction at all stages is not scalable and guaranteed to have negative effects on process efficiency. Jobseekers’ expectations are changing, especially in this economy where they own their own journey and outcomes. They’re going to select a company that’s the fastest and that treats them the best. But speed for the sake of speed should be avoided. So, you have to ask yourself: “who is the automation for? Whose time is it supposed to save? How will this change impact the candidate?” If something makes it harder or slower for someone to connect with us, remove it.

To sum up – both automation and human interaction are essential components to a successful recruitment operation; firms must find an approach that plays to the strengths of both.

What is the difference between Automation and AI in recruitment?

Helge Bjorland shares his view on the **usage of automation and artificial intelligence (AI)**

Recently, we had a chat with Helge Bjorland, CEO and Co-Founder at Globus.ai, a software company that delivers an AI-powered candidate deployment solution for staffing agencies and why recruiters should embrace this technology.

What is the difference between automation and AI in recruitment?

Automation involves the use of technology to automate processes with little to no human intervention. In recruitment, software that parses resumes, schedules interviews or meetings, and makes job descriptions more inclusive, are all good examples of what automation can do for recruiters.

AI, on the other hand, involves using machines to solve problems and accomplish some tasks that are too complicated for human recruiters to do alone. In many ways, it becomes a colleague on the team who can pick up a lot of the heavy lifting — the time-consuming, manual work. Using AI, recruiters have more time to focus on things they are uniquely qualified for as human beings like relationship-building and strategic decision making.

What are the top benefits for recruitment companies?

With AI and automation, organizations can boost productivity and provide more

creative, strategic work for their employees. They will have more time to spend on value-added tasks and growing the business, with AI doing much of the manual, time-consuming, and mundane work.

The technologies will also change the nature of work for many other jobs, allowing workers to focus on higher-value and higher-touch tasks that often require interpersonal interactions. These newly enhanced jobs will create benefits for both businesses and individuals who will have more time to be creative, strategic, and entrepreneurial.

Automation and AI: should recruiters worry?

We are always going to need unique human skills, like critical thinking, empathy, and strategic decision-making skills. 72% of business decision-makers expect to see AI and automation used to enable humans to concentrate on more meaningful work.

So, instead of replacing human intelligence, both complement it. For instance, when looking for candidates, an agency can quickly find matches with the use of AI and then have candidates checked by humans. Both allow organizations to avoid high-risk candidates and proactively resource skills gaps before they impact day-to-day productivity.

With automation and AI working behind the scenes, recruiters will find that their work adds more value to the bottom line (as they aren't spending time on admin or



Helge Bjorland

CEO and Co-Founder at Globus.ai

sifting through job orders). Because they'll have more time to deepen relationships with candidates and clients, you may also find that their job satisfaction increases — particularly as they see time-to-hire and successful placements increase.

How does Globus.ai use automation and artificial intelligence to positively impact your clients' businesses?

A great example that immediately springs to mind is the case of the leading healthcare staffing agency in the Nordics – Dedicare. By using Globus.ai, their team receives pre-selected candidates based on competencies. This drastically cuts the time taken to manually find suitable candidates for a role by up to 90%. Dedicare can respond quickly to incoming orders and utilize their candidate database better which has shown to increase revenues by as much as 30-40%.

Visit our website www.globus.ai to learn more about how Globus.ai empowers candidates to reach their full potential by automatically assigning them to tasks that match their skills, experience, dreams, and aspirations.

THE SEAMLESS JOURNEY

Recruitment needs a new frame of mind says George Barnes, Co-Founder & Director, Hamilton Barnes who created an app for candidates.

Traditionally, recruitment has struggled to adopt a technology-first mindset. As a sector driven by sales, leaders and employees can become hung up on the 'hand to mouth' transactions, aiming to tie up as many leads and make as much money as possible. In this technology-driven and data-driven world, the agencies that do not think about the bigger picture, considering their business as a whole rather than just through its bottom line, are likely to be the ones left behind in a few short years' time. So, what's the answer? It's time for recruitment agencies to think of themselves first and foremost as technology agencies which leverage data for the greater good and heightened success of the business.

Technology for agencies

Most medium- to large-scale recruitment agencies will have an incredible wealth of data on both candidates and clients. Looking at our own statistics, we have over 100,000 business development leads on file and nearly 90,000 candidate CVs – an incredible amount of data. And, when looked at through a technology- and data-driven lens, it's an invaluable source of insight into what makes our customers and candidates tick.

However, the greatest hurdle we, and any recruitment agency, face with such a huge pool of data is ensuring it remains up to date. One of the biggest gripes candidates have with recruiters, and a key reason why the sector still has such a bad reputation, is poorly managed candidate databases which, in turn, mean recruiters are reaching out to people who simply aren't relevant to a role. For every inadequately targeted outreach, agencies lose a potentially valuable candidate and in such a competitive market, this needs to be avoided at all costs.

Solving this problem needn't be like climbing Everest; it simply requires a technology-focused mindset and the drive to invest in making the agency more efficient. Automation is vital, as is training your team to be able to understand and integrate evolving technologies. Bringing on board data analysts or, better yet, training and upskilling recruiters to become certified software developers and data analysts who can build automation code to seamlessly update databases automatically, will not only save your business precious time but hard-earned money.

Technology for candidates

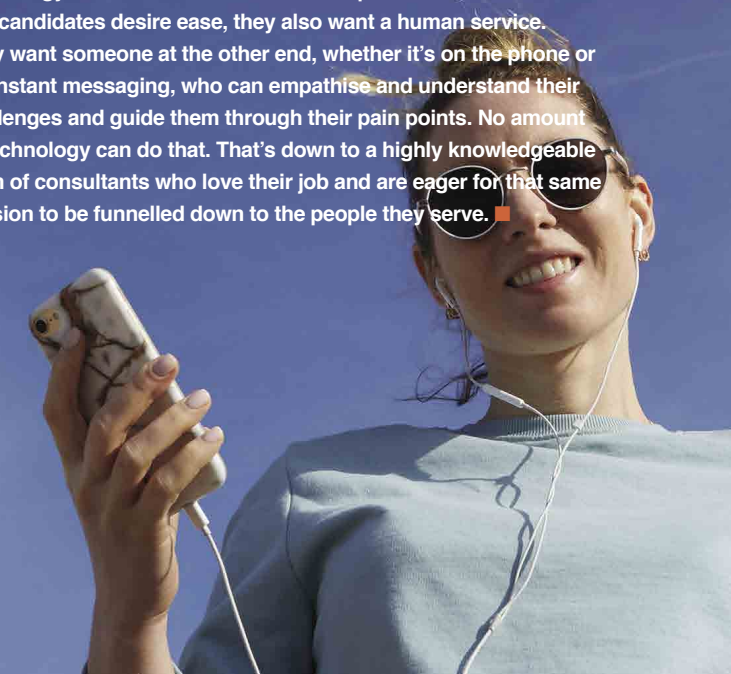
Finding a job is never a stress-free time in a candidate's life and, with many agencies, it can be a case of having multiple touch points to consider, potentially before you've even begun interviewing.

Here at Hamilton Barnes, we wanted to find a way to make the recruitment journey seamless for candidates but knew that embracing the power of technology would be the only way forward. If you think about online shopping, Amazon probably pops into your head first. Why? Because the customer journey is extremely straightforward, and items can be purchased with the touch of a button. There's no faffing around. We wanted the same idea to be brought into the recruitment world.

Through the creation of an app, we launched a one-touch system for job hunting. Not only is it as simple as uploading your CV and receiving notifications for vacancies that match your criteria, but there are also options to enter an instant messaging service with one of our team members instead of having to undergo the traditional phone call – allowing you to search for a job in working hours without a worry! The app is integrated with platforms like Calendly to make scheduling calls as easy as possible. In an era that is driven by technology and apps, it makes sense for recruiters to not only use technology to drive their own progress, but their candidate's success too. A smooth recruitment journey makes for a happy customer.

Is technology always the right way to go?

Recruitment is still very much a people-powered industry. The beauty of conversation and rapport will still get you further than any machine can – especially when it comes to client relations. Those recruiters who continue to thrive in the current market are those who take a blended approach between the excellence of technology and their own consultative experience. While clients and candidates desire ease, they also want a human service. They want someone at the other end, whether it's on the phone or via instant messaging, who can empathise and understand their challenges and guide them through their pain points. No amount of technology can do that. That's down to a highly knowledgeable team of consultants who love their job and are eager for that same passion to be funnelled down to the people they serve.



FINDING THE DIFFERENCE

Laura Davies, Bids & Quality Manager and Diversity Champion Sellick Partnership Limited on how tech can improve candidate diversity.

The recruitment sector has taken important steps in recent years to address historic issues of diversity and inclusion within the employment market. There has been a growing awareness that accessible, inclusive hiring practices cannot be delivered without recruiters making a strong commitment to prioritising candidate diversity.

In order to achieve this, recruiters are examining the most common challenges and barriers that candidates from underrepresented backgrounds face during the recruitment process, and taking action to fix them. This includes tackling unconscious biases within the recruitment team, rethinking adverts and application processes that are overly targeted at neurotypical white males, or changing interview processes that do not take into account reasonable adjustments or cultural norms. At the same time, a number of useful technological tools and innovations are emerging that can help recruiters to accelerate these efforts. These automated methods have the potential to make candidate diversity efforts more effective – unlocking significant benefits for recruiters, clients and candidates alike.

How are tech solutions addressing diversity?

Some examples of how technology enables recruiters to increase the inclusivity of their recruitment approach and tackle systematic biases include:

- Recruitment software platforms which help generate job descriptions and listings that feature more diverse language and media content, ensuring that adverts no longer use language and images that subconsciously prioritise white males.
- Artificial intelligence-assisted CV analysis tools that can automatically redact personal identity markers from documents, making it easier to overcome affinity bias and judge applicants fairly on their skills.
- Applicant tracking systems that collect and collate candidate demographic information to measure the diversity of their applicants at each stage, providing the evidence required to assess the effectiveness of improvements taken.
- Videoconferencing and remote working tools that allow candidates with mobility issues or family commitments to participate in interviews.

What are the limitations of tech solutions?

While these tools can be transformative when used correctly, they need to be carefully considered and utilised to be truly effective. Not all systems are created equally, and it is crucial to remember that some automated systems and algorithms reflect and reproduce the biases of their creators, meaning that thorough research is needed on the programmes that are available.

Once implemented, businesses will also need to critically review the impact that this technology is having when it comes to the diversity metrics that follow.

Our Recite Me story

Sellick Partnership took all of these factors into consideration when we recently entered a partnership with Recite Me, a respected leader in cloud-based web accessibility software, to make our web content and services more inclusive to all.

We worked with Recite Me to implement a site-wide toolbar, accessible with a single click in the top-right corner of each page on our website, that allows users to customise their digital experience with features including:

- Screen reading and text-to-speech functionality.
- In-built reading aids and styling options, including options to change the size, font, colour and formatting of the text.
- On-demand live translation, supporting more than 100 languages.
- Simple keyboard shortcuts across every page.

This technology has allowed Sellick Partnership to better meet the needs of the more than 20% of web users who may experience barriers online due to disabilities, learning difficulties, or those who speak English as a second language. In doing so, we are able to ensure that all of these individuals can enjoy a smooth candidate journey, eliminating the disadvantages they typically experience when accessing content online. This aligns with our equality, diversity and inclusion goals to tackle barriers that underrepresented demographics face in recruitment and progression, and to encourage the client companies we work with to improve how they recruit, retain and develop the careers of all candidates.

Why act now?

Over the last few years, matters relating to diversity, inclusion and societal fairness have become a key focus for businesses like never before. Companies from all sectors are working proactively to effect positive social change, as this is what staff, stakeholders, customers and clients expect. The recruitment sector must play its role in this important movement by ensuring that talented candidates are no longer excluded from the marketplace due to historic prejudices and discriminatory processes. Investing in technologies that have been proven to aid this process, such as the Recite Me toolbar, can help to achieve this goal as soon as possible. By utilising the available tools as effectively as possible, recruiters can show leadership on this issue, make their processes fairer and more inclusive, and gain access to the clear, actionable data and metrics that will show them what needs to be done to move forwards. ■

WHAT DOES DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION ACTUALLY MEAN FOR RECRUITERS?

Digital transformation is being spoken about everywhere right now, but what does it really mean? And how does digital transformation benefit recruiters? Discusses Bianca Evans, RSM InTime Marketing Executive.

Digital transformation in its simplest form is levelling up your technology, ensuring your systems work for you. Getting digital transformation right is about finding the best systems for each part of your business and having them all work together to give you a seamless, and often two-way, dataflow between your front and back office. Digital transformation is key for businesses of all sizes, it's no longer just about the biggest companies. From start-up agencies setting themselves up for future success, to agencies looking to scale up, there is market leading software available to help you.

The ways in which digital transformation can support your business are through –

- integration
- simplification
- future proofing
- security

Integrated systems will simplify your processes, provide greater visibility, and mitigate errors, saving you time and money. By finding the right technology, you will have a system where the data is entered just once, usually into your front office ATS software, and is then carried through to your payroll, billing and finance systems and across to other business platforms where required, keeping your data secure and reducing data entry errors.

With advancements in technologies, you no longer need to compromise functionality by going to a single supplier for integrated systems, software companies are working together to provide the right solution for you.

Most technology is now available in the cloud, supporting the increase in remote and hybrid working, but cloud technology gives you more than just flexibility and real-time processing, it also brings with it increased security measures with robust disaster recovery protocols.

RSM is supporting recruiters through digital transformation with our payroll and billing software, RSM InTime which has been specifically designed for the recruitment sector. Our development team recognise the importance of seamlessly integrated solutions, which is why RSM InTime benefits from real time API integrations with numerous leading ERP, ATS and Data analytics systems.

To find out more about RSM InTime and for more information on our technology partnerships, visit our website at www.rsmuk.com/InTime ■

PERSONALISED PURPOSE

Sam Price, Head of Client Solutions, RPOne by Morson Group, on how tech can elevate client and candidate relationships.

Talent technology is becoming more sophisticated and in just a few short years has transformed many elements of recruitment, making clunky, outdated processes far more streamlined. This has enabled talent experts to focus more closely on developing strong client and candidate partnerships, which should be at the core of any great service. Because, while technology can automate, analyse and continue advancing, it is only as powerful as the human relationships sitting behind it; essentially, you only get out what you put in.

In particular, we're seeing technology being used to control more of the job authorisation process; it's now extremely rare to have an authorisation flow that isn't captured on some form of HR or recruitment tech platform. Our own proprietary software, Vencuro, is designed to capture not only that but enable a seamless candidate application process. In rapid scale-up organisations, or large businesses going through change, the job authorisation process isn't always clear and agencies with any form of autonomy can just be set to task with unclear parameters, which can go on to negatively impact the hiring experience.

Tech selection

Our technology solution experts play a vital role in selecting which technologies are used by RPOne, and from a client perspective, it centres on choosing platforms which make recruitment easy. We don't always have to use our own ATS, Vencuro; instead, we often work collaboratively with clients to help them find the right talent solution and support its implementation. Using technology to offer complete visibility of hiring activity in real time – whether that's how many CVs have been reviewed, providing feedback to candidates, accepting or rejecting applications – in one dashboard so they're not having to dip in and out of different systems, which would slow

down their day. One of the key ways that we look to implement technology is so that it underpins best practice behaviours such as issuing reminders at intervals encouraging engagement with new CVs or applicants. In a candidate-driven market where vacancies continue to outstrip supply, those who respond promptly will capture the best talent on offer and therefore improve their business.

We choose to use Vencuro as it's inherently intuitive; if a client has multiple roles available and is working with different teams within RPOne, all their company activity is available in the same dashboard for clarity and efficiency. As an organisation we're ahead of the curve in how we utilise the technology that's available to us to offer clients and candidates a more professional experience. For example, we record job briefing sessions via Teams and save them against jobs on Vencuro, so that when a job goes to second tier, it's readily available to save time in the process.

It's vital to ensure a hiring manager is informed as to what good will look like to a candidate – salary threshold and benefits package – and Vencuro can hold information against a role that enables data driven searching from the outset. We use a number of key technology platforms for this information, our own CRM (Talisman), LinkedIn Insights and Horsefly Analytics thereby giving us the ability to aggregate information helping us to manage client expectations, but the human element really comes into play here. If a role goes unfilled for some time, we can use the data to reinforce and guide as to what the industry standard looks like and advise the client on what might need to change to make the job more appealing. When used early enough, data is also critical in reducing time to hire periods and diversifying the target candidate audience. That consultative approach can only ever come from a human and is an example of why our input is so vital.

Video stars

Video technology is also set to play a bigger role in our future than it does currently. We're currently utilising Odro, a one-way video interviewing software to better facilitate large recruitment drives. It allows a hiring manager to ask two or three questions which are distributed to 20+ candidates, who then record their answers. You can't tell everything about a person from a CV – how they carry themselves, their aptitude and logical thinking – and conducting phone interviews takes a long time. Reviewing short, snappy videos is a more streamlined way of determining the best talent in what could be a pool of hundreds of applicants.

Another way in which we use technology to go beyond the typical scope of a recruitment partner is through our Digital Studio.

Today, we expect online experiences to be intuitive and seamless, and that should be reflected in recruitment; and with our Digital Studio, we offer a service which is both high tech and high touch and that gives back to both client and candidate.

It's mutually beneficial, for clients and candidates alike; we enable our clients' businesses to harness the power of digital and elevate their talent brand, while candidates have the opportunity to engage with brands offering roles they're qualified for and which we know they want to engage with.

We leverage a range of services – careers websites, visual marketing materials, including photography and video, social media, events, EVP and brand development – each curated to engage, nurture and create awesome candidate experiences through personification, personalisation, effortless application and interaction. In essence, we take the burden of recruitment marketing away from internal marketing teams who often don't have the time, resource or expertise to deliver impactful candidate attraction campaigns.

Handling high-volume

A superb example is when a long-term client of ours wished to launch a high-volume recruitment drive for its hospitality roles. More than 100 vacancies needed to be filled within 10 days. We delivered an Instagram advertising campaign, high impact video advertisements and quick apply landing pages to maximise application rates. The campaign achieved 1,300 applications in five days, 8,500 landing page visits and 2.1 million Instagram impressions, and all 100 vacancies were filled within the allocated timeframe.

We're currently in the process of reviewing our technological and digital architecture to see how we can optimise the experience for clients and candidates, including hyper-personalisation and integrated portals which add value to the contractor throughout their career. In the future, we'll see less reliance on the traditional CV, and in response, we're working to be ahead of this trend by enabling alternative methods of job application and candidate engagement. Certain jobs – like production operatives and graduate programmes – can never be filled by the best candidate if the leading method of application is with a CV; you can't get a feel for someone's purpose, how they articulate themselves or if their values match yours, some people simply don't sell themselves well in writing. And that means businesses are missing out on talent that would be perfect for their organisation. Technology can facilitate a new way of applying for jobs, but hires are made based on human qualities, and we want to use techniques that bring that to the fore.

Ultimately, we receive more feedback from candidates and clients on the experience they've had with our talent partners, than on the technology we provide them with. Yes, our industry couldn't operate without recruitment tech, but what's most important is how someone is made to feel after an experience with RPOne and the wider Morson Group. Because while technology can automate and analyse and continue advancing, it is only ever as powerful as the human relationships sitting behind it. ■

DELIVERING MORE

Alex Champion, group operations director of Affinity Workforce on how technology help deliver for their demanding clients.

Affinity Workforce Solutions (AWS) is at the helm of transforming educational staffing nationwide. Its innovative, tech-led solutions are helping multi-academy trusts and head teachers to tackle the skills shortage and take back control. Real-time workforce management plus fast, easy access to high-quality talent are vital to delivering this.

Recently, AWS partnered with People Dynamix to deliver some of the first-ever managed service contracts in the education space, utilising vendor management systems (VMS) technology to manage workflow.

“The benefits of the new VMS software have greatly enhanced how we handle all 10 of our managed service client bookings. We have done this in four ways,” says Alex Champion, group operations director at Affinity Workforce. “Firstly, the online portal allows us to receive and manage client bookings more efficiently, streamlining our services and giving our clients better peace of mind. Secondly, the software cascades jobs to our partner suppliers, whom we rely on to support the requirements of our educational clients. This directly benefits both the institutions and the breadth of talent we have on our roster.

“Thirdly, end-to-end timesheet and invoicing system capabilities, alongside valuable temporary staffing management information we receive from the VMS software, ensure we can evolve our practices to the advantage of our staff and clients. Without the VMS solution, it would be virtually impossible to manage every different set of booking requirements due to the sheer volume coming through each week.”

Champion also notes that as all candidate compliance documentation is securely stored within the system, AWS’ compliance functions can remotely audit the partner suppliers’ files at regular intervals. This bypasses the need for site visits or large data exchanges in a sector where compliance and safeguarding are of the utmost importance.

“As the solution holds invoicing data for all suppliers, the client can process timesheets for all agencies delivering into the contract in one place, only requiring one login for all time and attendance processes,” says Alex. “Once timesheets have been ratified by the relevant stakeholders, the client can quickly download invoices, viewing an itemised list of what has been billed per site. Any user can access this with the appropriate permissions, meaning invoices don’t go missing, and historical records can be accessed at any time. As the booking and payment data is driven via the VMS software for all temporary workers supplied, it allows the buyer to track agency spending in real-time, ensuring complete control over staffing and budgets.”

While delivering on all these functional area, Champion also notes that management information can be generated at agreed frequencies, which in turn give breakdowns of clients’ spending across different sites and departments. “This allows our clients to make data-driven decisions, which has been difficult to achieve in such a transactional environment until now,” Champion concludes.



As the solution holds invoicing data for all suppliers, the client can process timesheets for all agencies delivering into the contract in one place, only requiring one login for all time and attendance processes

TAKING IT BACK

Jamie Hart, Director of Technology Solutions at Page Outsourcing describes how PageGroup put the customer at the heart of its new technology platform.

The recruitment industry has undergone a seismic shift over the past decade when it comes to its use of technology. The pandemic, for many businesses in our space, will certainly have accelerated transformation programmes, with leadership teams looking to streamline and bolster capabilities across the board. At PageGroup, our journey to creating industry leading customer focused innovation started a little earlier, with the roll out of one single global website and finance system for the first time in our 40+ year history. After the success of unifying our platforms, the next challenge was to implement a single, global technology platform across all markets for our recruiters. That's how Customer Connect was created, born out of a desire to drive change, increase our customer focus and respond to market demand effectively and efficiently.

What is Customer Connect?

Customer Connect is our new, single global platform for managing client and customer relationships to meet the needs of all our brands and disciplines across our 38 global markets. Our integrated suite of tools uses AI, data and a great user experience to do more of the heavy lifting on behalf of our consultants, making us an attractive employer and leaving them to focus on what they do best – building human relationships. We know how access to data drives better decisions, whether through automation, or as a source of differentiation in the hands of our people. Data integration on Customer Connect enables a single source of truth, which means our clients can be kept informed and updated on live opportunities by consultants across our network, helping us to further widen and deepen our relationships. Our Pagelnsights tool builds a picture of the latest market pressures, allowing our teams to have the right conversations with clients at the right time, adding enhanced value to talent planning with meaningful insights and content. Today's recruiters look for intuitive technology that they can use anytime, anywhere, which was never more important than during the pandemic. Operating on the Salesforce platform, we were able to give mobile access to our users, and a significantly more robust 'work from home' experience to our consultants. Underpinned with artificial intelligence and a search tool which is

not limited by manual coding, the real excitement has been about the frictionless collaboration, be it passing leads and candidate "shouts" across teams and borders, or interacting with middle and back-office operators without having to leave the customer record the consultant is sitting in.

Customer Connect is part of our commitment to taking our business on a journey toward new thinking around the customer. It helps us focus on building our customer fluency and digital adoption along with deploying our intelligence and insight tools. We have put in place core measures to widen and deepen existing client relationships, as well as our insights into customer satisfaction. Over time we are looking to further grow the reach of this framework to assess our service proposition in line with customer demand, and further build out the technology platform to deliver it.

We have also implemented an in-tool learning guide which is the foundation for users to learn at the point of need. This is crucial considering how important it is to give new starters a taste of success as quickly as possible, and the feedback we have had from experienced consultants joining us from competitors has been hugely positive.

The challenges

The challenge of standardising processes across 38 markets, harmonising reporting, enhancing the user experience, implementing the right approach to data and creating seamless experiences for our customers was substantial and not without risks. However, as we near the end of the roll-out phase, it is useful to reflect on what has been achieved and the potential for the future.

One of the most significant challenges has been managing data privacy laws across countries and regions whilst operating as a global organisation on a single platform. This became even more important against the backdrop of the pandemic, as the ability to access global talent (which was previously restricted by commute times or even international borders) emerged as a huge opportunity for organisations. But by leaning into data, technical and operational expertise, we have been able to implement a best-in-class GDPR framework without losing operational excellence,

while also creating the ability to tap into broader talent pools for our clients.

Encouraging adoption and seeing the benefits

The adoption challenge was always going to be huge, however we invested heavily in engaging our users through sponsorship and change networks, so that people really understood what was in it for them and why we were undertaking such a huge upheaval. The younger generation were the fastest to respond and start experimenting and, naturally, there were many challenges as people tried to make the new system work effectively. What did help, though, was bringing in experienced recruiters right at the start to help with the design, implementation and roll out – a true collaboration between our technology and our operational business.

Without a doubt, the biggest opportunity has been integrating our sales and marketing platforms. This gives our sales teams and recruiters full visibility on how our clients and candidates have interacted with marketing initiatives. Even more crucially, it allows marketing to really focus on personalised touchpoints and increasing lead conversion, giving full transparency on the impact of specific campaigns.

Coupled with this, we have started the self-service journey, whereby candidates can enrich their CVs with additional information which immediately lands in the platform with their application, giving consultants a clearer picture of their relevancy for roles. The next stage is making the capture and validation of compliance even easier (which is always a challenge for the fast-paced temporary markets), as well as enabling candidates to enrich their profiles themselves as their circumstances change. All of this will be followed by new offerings for clients, including extended collaboration tools for more digital interaction over shortlist presentations, interview bookings, and status updates on large-scale projects.

From a reporting and analytical perspective, being able to access a single standardised source of truth has been a step change for our leadership team, whether that's by enabling management of operational effectiveness for real time performance measurement

of their teams, or client and sector trend analysis to understand where to focus future effort.

Looking to the future

By implementing an agile technology platform, we have been able to introduce a level of dynamism into our operational capability at so many levels which is truly exciting. We're now releasing monthly upgrades which deliver enhancements, automations and further seamless touchpoints to our candidates and clients and scaling up global recruitment teams to accelerate the rapid growth of our Page Outsourcing RPO and MSP offering.

Having a single global platform is critical in allowing us to scale opportunity faster, driving effective and efficient deployment of new functionality as standard for all markets. It serves as an incubator for innovation – whether that is deploying data labs to examine how data can drive activity and relationships, or the use of automation to remove manual input from routine tasks throughout the recruitment process. It puts the customer at the heart of what we do and addresses ever-evolving client and candidate demand.

This is not just lip service, but a true culture shift that enables us to get the most out of our technology platforms and increase growth via means other than just headcount. Ultimately, to drive return, this shift is not just about technology – that is only an enabler. It is about a focus on the customer experience we deliver, for our candidates, clients, and our consultants. ■

About the author:

Jamie has worked in recruitment for 25 years both in the UK and Sweden. Moving across from operations into leading the technology and business team delivering Customer Connect has given him both a unique insight into the challenges of technology in the recruitment industry, and also first-hand experience of the opportunities it can and will create. He is currently focused on developing the technology capabilities that PageOutsourcing can bring to Talent Acquisition teams to help them create the right talent experience for their organisations.

AUTOMATION FOR THE PEOPLE

Kalina Buradzhieva, Data & Campaigns manager for Harnham on how automation works for recruiters behind the scenes.

Recruitment is a people-driven industry. Its success relies on strong foundations of trust, communication, and empathy. However, there's no denying that there's a lot more to recruitment than having pleasant conversations all day.

From procedures which enable client and candidate data to be cleansed, to reminder emails being sent to candidates about upcoming interviews; the processes that allow companies to perform optimally are numerous, multi-faceted and time-consuming. Thankfully, with the advancements in technology that the world has seen over the last decade, automation now plays a crucial role for recruitment agencies. While most of it is hidden, only dealt with daily by back-end and, in some cases, marketing teams, if its capabilities were suddenly removed from an agency, chaos would surely ensue. Whether you're interested in the technology that is currently running your recruitment agency, or exploring how automation would benefit your company, here are a few examples of what roles automation plays in successful agencies.

Data health and accurate audience segmentation

Data health and the accuracy of a candidate and client database is the lifeblood of any agency. A cleansed database enables you to stay in contact with warm leads, target candidates with relevant and effective communication and remove duplicated contacts, all of which will power and strengthen your customer relationship management (CRM) system.

We are a global agency with clients and candidates across the world. From the insights gathered via automated processes (such as candidate data capture) which is then fed into our CRM system, we know, for example, where our candidates are located. This then enables us to send relevant email communications which are timely and include the correct information. Without this data, we run the risk of misunderstanding our audience and targeting them poorly. This will lead to a very quick 'unsubscribe', and we've lost a lead before we've even started.

Investing in an automated data cleanser will save you precious hours. As you can imagine, especially in large agencies, the number of clients and candidates on a database can rack up into the thousands. With just the click of a few buttons, you can easily run a data health check, ensuring that key datasets aren't missing or out of date.

Of course, the investment in data cleansing must be ongoing to be effective. We can't ever fool ourselves that data will ever be perfectly cleansed; the information agencies have on file will constantly evolve. The minute your data health begins to decline is the moment you see other automated processes start to fail.

The frequency of your automated data cleansing however is down to how well you train your team on back-end knowledge. We can't emphasise enough the importance of ensuring that there continues to be human-powered understanding behind your technology by everyone within the team – no matter whether they're using automation technology once in their career, or most days. Here at Harnham, all new joiners undergo in-depth training sessions on our CRM system and are trained to understand how their actions as recruiters can affect the quality of our automation.

For example, even something as simple as writing a candidate's name in capital letters when inputting them into the database will then mean that any email communication sent to them via our automated system will look very clearly automated – a risk factor for positive candidate engagement.

Only after the data cleansing process has taken place can you benefit from making accurate data-led decisions about investing in further automation technology. With this, your agency is then better equipped to refine candidate and client targeting, have more success within business development efforts and improve upon client and candidate engagement.

Improving candidate engagement

Job searching can be an overwhelming task, hence why frequent support from a recruiter is greatly appreciated. Of course, there are

certain elements of this support that can be automated behind the scenes to ensure that recruiters are consistent in their communication and processes with a candidate.

With the candidate information you have on your CRM system, such as upcoming interviews, you can schedule reminder emails to go into recruiters' inboxes, ensuring that timely candidate contact is not missed. This personal touch makes candidates feel valued and will also give them the sense of support during a stressful time. One of the biggest positives of automation in the candidate engagement process is post-placement communication – internal reminders sent to your recruiters to catch up with candidates within a month of placement, for example. This prolongs the feeling of being valued for the candidate and strengthens relationships.

Compliance and time-saving

The benefits of automation in the back-end of recruitment agencies also affects the day-to-day optimisation of recruiters' work. There are hours of administrative work in recruitment and these hours won't be the ones that earn money.

For example, sending out official documents to candidates after speaking to them is an imperative part of the process that cannot be skipped. And while it will only take about two minutes per candidate, recruiters can talk to anywhere between 20 and 30 candidates per day. That's nearly an hour of their day taken up not on the phones, not wrapping up deals or meeting KPIs.

Happily, this is an incredibly easy process to automate and, if you're yet to truly integrate automation into your back-end processes, this is a great place to start. Another easy win is feedback forms sent to candidates at the end of a recruitment process.

Automation is not only brilliant for gleaning insights about your candidates and clients, but also about your own agency. By gathering insights through automated feedback forms, you can see where you have potential downfalls in your processes, what you are lacking or where more investment may need to be made.

Understand the goal

Knowing what platforms to use when it comes to automation can be a pain point for many businesses – simply because there are so many in the market to choose from. To help make the decision – work backwards. By understanding what your end goal is from automation you can then ensure the product you choose fits the bill. It doesn't matter if you choose to use an all-encompassing platform for your automations, or if you integrate your chosen automation tools into each other – the most important thing is to make sure they work together and feed back to your CRM system effectively.

Next steps

Automated technology has undoubtedly enabled the recruitment industry to evolve; agencies have found that they are more effective, more efficient and have been able to build even better relationships with candidates.

Of course, those who really excel with automation are those who understand that it must work hand in hand with the human touch. While a recruiter can send an automated interview calendar invite to a candidate, saving them five minutes, it doesn't mean that actual communication, such as a pick-me-up email for a stressed candidate or a quick phone-call post-interview to see how it went, should be avoided. Whether you're looking to start with the basics of automation or want to employ a few tools, such as chat bots and automated Business Intelligence reports, there's no time like the present. It will undoubtedly improve the functionality of your business as well as the effectiveness of your processes, making for a more profitable, more successful agency in the long-term. ■

THE COMPLIANCE CHALLENGE

Crawford Temple, CEO and founder of Professional Passport looks at where technology sits in the recruitment compliance landscape.

Just recently we learned that the Prime Minister has asked Matt Warman MP to lead a review into how the government can best support a thriving future UK labour market. The announcement came in the same week that the government chose to omit the employment bill from the Queen's speech and, all the while, we wait to hear the findings of the Call for Evidence into the umbrella sector and we also know that the Director of Labour Market Enforcement Strategy has appealed for information to help give her a steer on her labour market enforcement strategy for next year focusing on compliance and enforcement.

Let's cast our minds back to 2017 when Matthew Taylor, in his role as Chief Executive of the Royal Society of Arts, was tasked with carrying out the Taylor Review into modern working practices and the government published its response in the Good Work Plan in 2018 addressing some of the recommendations. Underlying the review and the plan was an ambition that "all work should be fair and decent" and that "the government will act to ensure that the interests of employees on traditional contractors, the self-employed and those people working in the 'gig' economy are all properly protected."

It was in the same review that the Single Enforcement Body (SEB) was first proposed, mooting the prioritisation of enforcement resources and using collegiate working to tackle non-compliance in the labour market. Still we wait as the can gets firmly kicked down the road five years on.

If the government wants to make a real difference, then now is the time to implement some of the changes that are needed and have already been identified over the last five years and technology can have a part to play. But, we need changes rather than more lip service and whilst it might be hard to stay positive as we face another review there are reasons to be cheerful from an umbrella perspective.

Technology and Compliance

Ensuring providers are operating compliantly and their procedures are aligned to the law serves to protect the providers and agencies from significant potential liabilities. Agencies must conduct their due diligence processes to ensure they are working with compliant providers and whilst there are technological solutions being developed to assist recruiters, the best way for agencies to operate safely is to work with accredited bodies. Accredited bodies work hard for agencies free of charge to ensure that robust and rigorous processes are in place to weed out non-compliant operators.

Last year, Professional Passport took steps to develop an API tool to enable agency members to check company credentials against its approved provider's list. The process for checking for non-members has also been enhanced and provides a manual company number check to verify the accredited status. The enhancement came when Professional Passport saw a proliferation of companies masquerading as Professional Passport accredited payment intermediaries causing confusion and harm to the market. The automated tool that has since been launched now provides the highest level of transparency for agency members so that they can quickly identify and check on those providers approved by Professional Passport. Non-compliance is now more sophisticated than ever and with many companies operating with very similar names to accredited ones, it can be difficult to spot the difference. The new Off-Payroll legislation has served to fuel malpractice in the umbrella sector and opened the floodgates to non-compliant providers. Recruiters can now spot the rotten eggs. However, whilst tools and technology can serve to help stamp out non-compliance, it is vital that the government works closely with experts and stakeholders to create a level playing field. Hopefully, the Single Enforcement Body will hold the key.

Creating the Single Enforcement Body

The absence of the Employment Bill from the Queen's speech gives policymakers pause to get the creation of the Single Enforcement Body right. It is going to be a big and complex undertaking that shouldn't be rushed and has the potential to be extremely disruptive and distracting just at a time when the constituent parts of the new body are perhaps needed most by the UK's workforce.

Any merger can be disruptive and ensuring that HMRC, the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) and Employment Agencies Standard Inspectorate (EASI), each with their own ingrained cultures, behaviours and specific areas of focus and responsibility can blend together is a delicate process. The government must get it right and with Margaret Beels as the new Director of Labour Market Enforcement, we must glean some confidence.

Labour market enforcement

Margaret Beels brings with her a GLAA background. The GLAA is widely respected for being robust and effective in helping to stamp out bad practices and with umbrella companies already operating in GLAA licensed sectors, the GLAA has had some success in flushing out non-compliant umbrellas. Margaret Beels should therefore have a good understanding of how umbrella companies work and be aware of the issues and scale of the issues that the sector is facing and her expertise should help the three enforcement bodies to focus tightly on what they can do within the current framework. She could also use her considerable influence to encourage HMRC to use its powers of enforcement to act more effectively. HMRC has the power to tackle at least 50% of the compliance issues in the umbrella sector and those issues would not fall

HMRC has the power to tackle at least 50% of the compliance issues in the umbrella sector and those issues would not fall under the remit of the SEB

Know every link in your supply chain

The risks around using non-compliant providers puts even more emphasis on the need for a compliant supply chain to ensure that tax liability doesn't pass up the chain to you or your clients. How confident are you that you're working with a provider you can trust?

As a leading provider of umbrella and accountancy services, we've always encouraged compliant practices by advising agencies to work with a list of trusted providers.

We have robust processes and controls, audited by our own strong internal compliance team and we also invite external companies in to audit our audits.

When it comes to assessing your providers' compliance, there are a number of things you can do:

1. Send out compliance questionnaires
2. Check actual payslip calculations and PSC management accounts
3. Ensure the provider has third party accreditations
4. Review the financial strength from the latest statutory accounts
5. Carry out your own site visit

For the best assessment of your key providers, we recommend that you use all of the above.



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under the remit of the SEB anyway. If you strip away the problems that are agency-led, which EASI could take more concerted action to resolve, and strip out all the tax and NIC issues, which HMRC has the tools to deal with, the only glaring problem left is the one that has most recently hit the headlines – holiday pay. For far too long, some umbrella companies have been consciously withholding holiday pay from umbrella workers but the latest Pimlico Plumbers ruling means that this can now no longer happen and workers can claim what is rightfully owed to them.

Tackling non-compliance

What can and should be done to put an end to non-compliance that is still prominent throughout the supply chain? HMRC could stop non-compliant operators from getting a foothold in the marketplace by scrutinising new employer applications before registering them or making more use of their ability to require a PAYE security deposit in the form of cash or a guarantee in the form of a performance bond issued by a financial institution.

To the extent that bad apples get through, there could be a refocus on PAYE compliance and enforcement at employer level. Umbrella companies are employers and under tax law, they have an obligation to operate PAYE properly. If they are paying workers through disguised remuneration schemes, they will not be doing this for the benefit of their workers and simply have their own interests in mind.

HMRC has access to huge volumes of data through the employer's payroll and agencies' monthly intermediary reporting. This provides significant intelligence to help identify potential disguised remuneration schemes quickly. Yet, HMRC is still slow to act and still pursues the worker who has been unwittingly duped into a scheme rather than the perpetrator of the scheme. HMRC's resources may have been constrained in recent years but this should be no excuse for not putting effective enforcement at the heart of its operations as part of its core remit to manage the tax system efficiently. Let's hope that the latest drive by government to introduce a Single Enforcement Body will give HMRC even more tools to get its job done properly.

Enforcement and education

Enforcement will always be key to protecting workers and educating and arming workers with the knowledge to protect themselves against poor treatment or exploitation is vital. Working with experts and stakeholders throughout the supply chain, the government is getting better at informing workers about umbrella working so that people are becoming more aware and better equipped to make informed choices about umbrella working. But there is still a long way to go to prevent workers from falling foul of dodgy schemes.

However, today there is far greater transparency around umbrellas, how they work, how they should work and their place in the labour market and we are seeing an increasing number of manoeuvres, initiatives and solutions mooted that should work to fill the gaps that exist in enforcement and education.

These include:

- Industry-led think tanks, experts and associations are taking a collegiate approach to sharing information and ideas that will help to raise the standards in the sector
- Appropriate technology to assist in spotting non-compliance
- Awareness by the whole supply chain to use a compliant umbrella and the risks that come with not doing so
- Reforms at Companies House that seek to clamp down on the misuse of corporate entities

Ensuring that "all work should be fair and decent" was never going to be an easy task and was always going to present many challenges to policymakers but maybe, just maybe, things are starting to align which means that there are better days ahead for the umbrella sector and by default, umbrella workers. Workers should not be exploited and compliant providers deserve to have a level playing field. I would like to send out a strong message to non-compliant providers that their days are numbered – SEB or no SEB. ■



PROTECTED BY LAW

Holiday pay must
reach the right
destination

Many reports on holiday pay retention suggested providers are relying on contractual terms that are not often not read or understood by the workers. As such, many workers were completely unaware that they had lost holiday pay entitlement.

To combat these practices by providers, Professional Passport has worked with the main software providers to the sector, and developed standards with the developers for payslips and pay reports.

Every time a worker receives their pay they can see:

- **Their holiday pay position**
- **Any amount accrued in that period**
- **What has been paid in that period**
- **Any carried forward balances**

Professional Passport requires all of its providers to communicate with all workers prior to their 'holiday year' end to provide them with:

- **Updates on amounts available**
- **Advice on claiming the amounts**
- **Advice on requesting a concession to roll over into the next holiday year**

The Right to Audit and Verify

As part of our terms operated with our **Approved Providers**, we have a right to request reports to confirm and verify the standards are being applied correctly.

Why Professional Passport?

We are Independent ✓

We act independently of providers, recruitment companies, and end clients to set the highest standards of transparency and compliance.

We are trusted ✓

Operating with knowledge and expertise, Professional Passport liaises with all the enforcement bodies including HMRC, BEIS and EAS.

We are insured ✓

Professional Passport is the only insurance-backed accreditation available in the UK.

Find out more at www.professionalpassport.com, or contact us at info@professionalpassport.com.

FUTURE TECH

Chris Abbass, CEO and Co-founder at the global leader in talent acquisition services, Talentful looks to the future.

Recruitment has and continues to face challenges as employee priorities change. The turbulence of the last few years – a Covid-19 pandemic, supply chain collapse, a cost of living crisis – has thrown stable industries across the global economy into disarray, pushing inflation to 30 year highs and compounding health fears with existential questions around job security and wage viability.

The increased demand for labour as post-pandemic businesses reopen, find investment and merge will create new opportunities for talent to leave and find new roles where security, career development and an enjoyable working experience can be guaranteed. Companies that survive must adapt, evolve and embrace new recruitment technologies to manage the pace of change.

The role of data

Increasingly, better information will be needed to close the wound and prevent companies from haemorrhaging staff. Especially in larger companies, less agile and less prepared to offer bespoke working arrangements to staff, recruitment technology must be used to manage the new dynamic between employers and employees in 2022 and beyond. Established medium to large-sized ventures, prone to becoming diseconomies of scale, are struggling most to identify and stop the trends underlying high employee turnover: while 59 per cent of employees at small firms are thinking of leaving their jobs, 65 per cent of those at mid-sized businesses are considering their way out. Large companies, at 61 per cent, are at greater risk than small companies, but for now have the draw of clearer career progression and development opportunity than those in the dangerous middle.

Essentially, the difference is that there is less complex and competing data to manage in smaller companies. This allows leaders to more easily hold regular one-to-ones with members of their team, to understand the changing priorities that will make or break a job commitment and to offer and monitor flexible working where possible. As companies get larger, they have a harder time staying on top of the variables that are driving staff to and from employers.

By contrast, larger scale companies must rely much more on automated software, artificial intelligence and machine learning to do their bidding. The switch to remote and hybrid work has pushed companies to manage a much more varied working experience of staff – and without the proximity to gauge changing sentiment in real time. Recruitment tech will, in part, have to draw on digitally recorded data logs to identify gaps in teams and the skills of most value, giving recruiters the information needed to make hires who will have an immediate impact on their team.

The necessity of automation and AI

Data can ultimately inform predictive analytics, which will allow recruiters to anticipate the most appropriate skills for a given role, looking at similarities between the happiest and best performing staff and justify hires on the basis that, given all the evidence, candidate X has the best traits necessary to succeed in role Y.

Pre-pandemic – before resignation patterns were skewed by lockdowns – 33 per cent of new hires were resigning within the first month of taking on a new role. This is likely to be worsened as employee needs become more varied and less well communicated, and can be improved by giving recruiters access

to more information to match quality candidates with suitable jobs. To offset the trend of mass resignations, future recruitment technology will have to precisely assess the suitability of all new hires, understanding and mitigating any potential concerns as they arise.

Separately – but related – teams will need processes to help these candidates transition into their new roles to tackle the pattern of early resignations. These processes are time and labour intensive and automation will again be essential for streamlining and cheapening data gathering, analysis and application in mid-to-large sized companies. As the value of technology becomes more apparent, we can expect to see wider and more innovative applications of AI and machine learning to support these missions.

We will see recruitment companies leveraging AI to help them think more strategically and future proof. HRs and recruiters will – with the help of data – get more visibility of talent availability and what the skill gaps are in the present and future.

Rethinking the function of technology

Following the pandemic, it has been a job seekers market – but this might change in a couple of years. Companies will continue to be challenged to find the right talent quickly enough and retain top talent. Businesses need to understand how they should adapt and change in order to stay in the game – and technology will provide valuable data for the decision-making process. For example, should they buy, build or train? It is important that companies get transparency and some real understanding of how the market situation is and what the company might need in 10 years time.

The digital switch will also modernise how the recruitment process itself is managed; there are natural limits to what can be achieved in fully remote work, and we can expect software developers to prioritise ways to make interviews more enjoyable and immersive for teams and candidates. To support recruiters, technology must become more intuitive, focused on user experience and design to streamline processes and allow recruiters all the value derived from in-person interviews without the inconvenience. As sales teams find technological solutions to improve calls, expect recruitment to follow: the priorities in recruitment usually follow the priorities in sales.

Still, nobody understands recruitment like recruiters. Whatever the technology of tomorrow, it must be built with these stakeholders in mind. Some of the most inspiring and useful tools on the market today exist thanks to the recognition of challenges needing solutions by former recruiters. The fragmented market across sourcing, engagement, coordinating and tracking is understood best – and perhaps alone – by recruiters. The platform that can provide a single, accessible tool to manage these features will create the best recruitment teams, the highest staff retention rates, and the most successful companies long-term.

The future of recruitment tech will be decided by the present. Currently, solutions do not meet the needs of recruiters or candidates, encouraging or enabling high employee turnover as staff join jobs not built for them. Addressing these challenges best will be recruiters versed in today's challenges, committed to improving user experience for similar professionals and able to use all the available information to ensure the right candidates find the right jobs. ■

THE NEXT PLATFORM

John Healy, Vice President, World Employment Confederation on how digitisation is changing not only workflow, but work itself.

As digitisation advances we see that it is changing not only the way in which we organise work, but also work itself.

Historically, workflow has been designed for and around the enterprise. Now, in the new world of work, we see the emergence of Platforms that are designed for the worker. They increasingly take a consumer centric view that prioritises engagement of the person at each end of the workflow more so than the processes that the enterprise is focused on optimising.

The open talent ecosystem is complex. Some Platforms enable demand for talent, supporting enterprises who want access to talent, while others enable the supply of talent, supporting the workers who prefer to engage using digital means. Whether they are general business marketplaces or more specialist, focused on specific industries or skill sets, they are changing the nature of work and presenting labour markets with a new set of opportunities and challenges.

As the staffing industry, we are in touch with both workers and business clients every day so are uniquely placed to observe both sides of this workflow. It is abundantly clear to us that both organisations and individuals want to simplify the process, but that they prioritise different things, and that in far too many cases the current approach to workflow is simply not fit for purpose. Concepts around work-life balance and how to get work done have changed. The global pandemic served to reinforce this while also increasing our willingness to try different things. Necessity has always been the mother of invention and the restrictions imposed by Covid-19 increased people's drive to find purpose and personal passion in their work. With the barriers removed, the nature of work changed, and organisations now need new approaches to attract and engage a more diverse workforce.

The Mercer 2022 Global Talent Trends Study, which surveyed 11,000 people, representing 16 different geographies, provides some valuable insights into some of the issues surrounding the digitisation of work. It finds that while six in ten C-suite executive favoured gig working and planned to substantially replace full-time employees in the next three years, this view was not shared by the employees themselves, with only four in ten currently open to gig working. Moreover, the Mercer research suggested that while organisations were embracing new work models, less than 20 per cent were reviewing the terms and benefits that accompany gig working. The bottom line is that if we want more agile and flexible ways of organising work then we need to make sure that all work relationships are supported by the organisational culture and do more to make Platform work a viable, attractive and secure option.

Focus on the task

Organisations who are embracing the opportunities have brought focus to the taskification of work, choosing to democratise access to opportunity and see the market as one offering a world of abundance to available talent, not scarcity. A place where businesses can access talent from all over the world and source and engage people when they need them.

Furthermore, many of the customers of Platforms already come from large businesses, but they are contracting work outside of the standard corporate process: clear evidence, if it were needed, that that the way in which organisations currently manage workflow related to attracting and engaging workers is too complex, not user friendly, and over homogenised.

What these emerging Platforms offer is a more humancentric design with greater safety and security for the worker, as well as a dramatically improved user experience. Workers on both ends of the process – the line manager trying to get work done, and the worker with the skills needed to accomplish the task – want to do things differently because these environments are meeting their personal needs. The pandemic has proven that the more flexible approaches afforded by digitisation can work, but all too often, what I like to call the 'corporate immune system' rejects this type of work as it doesn't fit the standard mould.

We also need to make sure that we set in place appropriate parameters and checks and balances for Platform work. Policymakers and organisations are currently exploring how best to introduce regulation to support workers and we are all still learning about what works and what doesn't. Emerging Web 3.0 tools can assure greater transparency and trust, but we will need greater participation across ecosystems to define the data they hold and what will be shared. With human-led, tech-enabled approaches we can harness digital wallets along with existing infrastructure to provide effective functionality and portability that supports manager and employee interactions. In the end it will all come down to meeting consumer expectations. In the digital world, the customer experience is crucial to success and systems need to be adapted accordingly. We have accepted this for digital commerce and, in the wake of the pandemic, have also made giant strides with digital health records such as the Covid pass that allows us to travel, enter restaurants etc. The next logical area is in using digitisation to connect people with work. If we get it right, we have the opportunity to create a faster, smoother, simpler experience that will benefit everyone – governments, communities, businesses and of course, workers. ■



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- ✓ Talent engagement plays that cut time-to-fill by 55%
- ✓ 12-point checklist to evaluate automation partners

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