

The Medium Is Not the Message

There's been no lack of discussion lately about the use of this sourcing medium or that. Is Twitter better than Facebook? Are niche job boards more effective than general ones? And so on. These are all important questions, to be sure, but the media we select represent just one-half of a successful sourcing strategy. The other half is the message we deploy on those media, and with apologies to Marshall McLuhan, that message has its own distinct purpose and value.

Historically, we recruiters have devoted the content of our messaging to information. We typically provide details on the requirements and responsibilities of the positions we are filling and, often but not always, an introduction to the products or services of our employer. Basically, we are announcing our openings. And for much of the 20th Century, that was good enough.

Today, however, recruitment-by-announcement doesn't work, at least if you want to hire top level talent. Those kinds of candidates – the people who have hard-to-find skills and those who are “A” level performers – have choices. They have recruiters chasing after them all of the time. And, that means they not only have to be informed about a position, they have to be sold on it.

So, how do you transform a message about an opening – whether it appears on a job board or a social media site – into a persuasive sales communication? There are a number of practices that are critical to success. The three below will get you started.

1. Speak in the second person. Craft your content as if you are speaking to the candidate. Don't use bureaucratese or the corporate third person: “The successful candidate will be able to perform this kind of work according to such and such a standard.” Instead, say, “You will be challenged to excel at this kind of work.” That approach personalizes your message and makes the reader feel as if you're making the effort to sell them. And, showing someone you care enough to try and sell them is a huge ego boost which, in turn, makes them more likely to pay attention to your message.

2. Don't talk about the job. The best talent never, ever look for a job. They look for a career advancement opportunity. They want to know about the responsibilities and requirements of an opening, but they want that information conveyed in their terms. In other words, don't tell them what you want them to know, but instead, tell them what they want to know. For example, rather than itemizing the specific tasks a job entails, answer these questions for the candidate: What will they get to do? What will they get to learn? What will they get to accomplish? And, with whom will they get to work?

3. Use the language of passive prospects. Four fifths of the American workforce are still employed. While surveys indicate that as many as two-thirds of that population want to leave their current employer, the vast majority do not have a resume or even think of themselves as a “job seeker.” To communicate effectively with them, therefore, you must use a different vocabulary..For example, instead of saying “To submit your resume for this opening, click here,” say “To apply for this extraordinary career advancement opportunity, click here.”

Every organization will make its own idiosyncratic selection of sourcing media. While Facebook and LinkedIn might work best for one employer, a job board and a career site blog might perform better for another. Regardless of which media are used, however, the best practices of messaging are constant. The format of those messages may have to be tailored to each specific medium, but their content must always be powerfully persuasive. Indeed, only a message with more than medium appeal can influence the best talent.

Thanks for reading,
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