

The Superconducting Super Collider of Social Media

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In recruiting, scale provides the leverage necessary to work productively, and productive work ensures that your reqs get filled on time and that, as a result, your contribution is appreciated.

Traditionally, scale in our field has been achieved through advertising. Ads worked because there were relatively few venues—either mass market publications or mass audience job boards—available to prospective hires. Hence, you could be certain that your single message would be seen by enough prospective candidates to generate a large enough pool of applicants to find at least one qualified person the hiring manager would accept.

That's no longer true today. The number of venues has grown so large and the audiences they reach so narrow that a single ad will no longer work. The only exception to that rule is social media sites. Their popularity has grown exponentially, and as a result, they do now provide the critical mass necessary to achieve scale.

Facebook, for example, has over 400 million users, while MySpace has signed up more than 250 million people. Twitter didn't even exist five years ago, and already, it has attracted an audience of over 90 million tweeters. And LinkedIn, the poster child of professional networking sites, has at least 75 million users forging connections on its site.

Each of these venues represent a pretty big bull's eye, and a growing number of employers are now targeting their advertising at it. Pushing job postings out to social media sites, however, is not social networking. It may achieve scale, but it misses out on the promise and power of the contacts and connections these sites offer.

How can you achieve the scale necessary to use social media sites to their best advantage? Use multiple messages and messengers.

Multiple Messages and Messengers

No single message or person can reach a large enough cohort of the talent using social media to provide an adequate source of candidates for even a single opening. Ironically, there are so many prospects on those sites, that it's harder than ever to find the right one for a specific vacancy. The key to success, therefore, is a new kind of outreach. I call it democratic scale.

Democratic scale is achieved by being ... well, democratic in the way you deliver your employment message to social media populations. Instead of doing all of the communicating yourself, you rely on your coworkers and tap into their connections and contacts. Think of it as way to transform your employee referral program into a superconducting super collider.

How do you get started?

My suggestion is that you start with a pilot project. Identify the five-to-ten coworkers who have been most engaged by your employee referral program. Meet with them and their supervisors to explain that you would like to try a new approach to sourcing talent for their unit. The commitment you're seeking is just two and a half hours per week—30 minutes a day—from each participant. The return will be a much larger flow of passive, high caliber prospects suitable for recruitment into their team.

Once you have buy-in, hold an orientation session for those who have agreed to participate. This session should cover both the employment brand of the organization—the key values and characteristics of your workplace—and the alternative ways to communicate and promote it on social media sites—from creating a page on Facebook for new professional friends to a LinkedIn group for contacts in their field, from building relationships through regular networking in the discussion forums of job boards to writing blog about their employment experience.

Their goal isn't to recruit new employees—that's still your job. Their role is to attract high caliber prospects to you by being the kind of colleague online those prospects would like to have as a coworker on-the-job. In addition, point out that while the program clearly benefits the organization, it also serves them, as well—by expanding their own stature and visibility in their field of work.

Then, turn them loose and watch their progress. I suggest that you set up an online venue for the participants so they can stay in touch with one another and trade lessons learned. It will bolster their sense of doing something special and important and help you identify and correct any issues that might arise during the project. Most importantly, it will provide the insights you need to determine just what are the best practices in social media for your organization.

Once you've got the kinks worked out of the process and you've fixed on the best practices, roll the program out across the organization. Enlist the pilot participants and their supervisors as your champions and don't stop until you've established active social media cells in every unit. That's democratic scale, and it's the single best way to leverage the promise and power of social media sites.

Thanks for reading,
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