

Social media for hiring

Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are a constant feature in our lives – we spend (often too much) time refreshing our feeds or updating our statuses, satisfying our curiosity about what’s happening in others’ lives. The average internet user now spends a staggering six hours and 43 minutes online each day, with more than a third of that spent on social media¹. The dopamine hit users get every time they receive a notification makes social media tantalisingly addictive. Not surprisingly, it makes sense for employers to build a brand and reach out to potential candidates via these platforms. Consequently ‘social hiring’, as it is sometimes known, has evolved as the platforms themselves have grown. According to employee review and job site Glassdoor, 79% of candidates are likely to use social media in their job search².

The ways organisations can use social media channels to reach out to both active and passive candidates are as varied as the ways we might use them as consumers. Music streaming service Spotify has been known to use playlists to engage candidates (one recruiter at the company even used a playlist to make a job offer)³, while retailers might ask shopfloor workers to make a short video of them in their role and post it to Instagram. It can build brand awareness, and link back directly to a recruitment hub or application page on a company website, or even incorporate games or assessments that will filter the best candidates. The real-time data recording views, shares, click-throughs and swipe-ups can provide valuable insights to recruiters so they can adapt campaigns quickly.

Before embarking on a social hiring campaign, it’s essential to consider your audience, advises Alex Fourlis, managing director of Broadbean Technology. “For every geography and type of job there is a different media mix that each recruiter should consider,” he advises. “Having a balanced mix of job opportunities, employer brand stories and useful info for jobseekers is critical when incorporating a social recruitment strategy.” Peter Linas, EVP of corporate development and international at staffing software company Bullhorn, agrees: “Nowadays, job ads on social media allow companies to do more than just hire people. It enables them to increase branding, reach and engagement with talent who have already shown an interest in their company. It allows you to build a persona and is also powerful for referrals.”

THE BIG FOUR

The platform(s) you choose should be guided by where you expect your candidates to be, which will be influenced by factors such as age, industry-sector and type of role. Most of us access social media via smartphones, so content needs to be mobile-friendly both in terms of presentation and brevity. New social media platforms emerge all the time and it can be a challenge to keep up, but these are arguably the ‘big four’:

LinkedIn

The main advantage of LinkedIn is that it is purpose-built to connect professionals, so your job post or career message won’t be bogged down by other social posts and stories. The platform offers a number of paid-for services, including LinkedIn Premium (which allows you to see profiles of those who are not connections and send messages) and LinkedIn Talent – a suite of services such as data analytics and recruitment marketing. But there are also a host of things hiring teams can do using the basic membership.

Joining relevant LinkedIn groups (industry- or location-specific, for example) will provide insight on the types of skills in demand and some will allow you to post links to job adverts for free. It costs nothing to look at similar job postings and benchmark them in terms of salary and what they're looking for, or even professionals that are in those roles already. You could create a company LinkedIn page dedicated to careers, using videos and stories from employees to bring the brand to life; job posting on this page will also be free. Asking existing employees to share posts amplifies your reach far and wide and makes the most of their networks.

Paid-for job advertising on LinkedIn can be cost-effective, however. It runs on a pay-per-click model so you only pay when a potential candidate views your listing, and you can set daily budget limits or the maximum you'll pay for every 1,000 impressions. Marja Verbon, chief executive of careers site Jump, says that while it is often the first port of call among job-seekers, LinkedIn has its limitations. "LinkedIn allows access to thousands of professionals and as such can be a great tool for headhunting. But its outreach is very manual and conversion rates are very low, so it is not very scalable as a recruitment tool."

Facebook

The core attraction of recruiting over Facebook is its sheer size. At the end of September 2020, there were 2.74 billion monthly active users⁴, so arguably more people will come across your recruitment on this platform than on any other. Facebook has its own powerful built-in search engine, Graph Search, which allows you to search against publicly-listed profiles, meaning you can pinpoint people in certain locations and even roles or companies (if they've made that information available).

One of the most popular recruitment tactics on Facebook is to set up a company page to share photos and videos of employees to reflect a more three-dimensional view of your organisation's culture. Barclays, for example, has a dedicated Facebook page for early careers and graduate recruitment, showcasing stories from people who have been through its internships, apprenticeships and graduate schemes alongside links where candidates can apply. As with LinkedIn, Facebook groups can be another cost-effective option to get your employer brand out there: student or alumni groups are a good option, or specific-interest groups related to the role or your industry.

You can of course post a job ad on Facebook on your personal timeline, but this will be limited to your friends or friends of employees. Paid-for posts offer the option to boost and target your reach depending on the criteria you're looking for – using a general "we are hiring" ad is a more cost-effective option if there are multiple roles, but for hard-to-source skills a specialised post could attract more attention.

Twitter

With limited word counts in each post, early social recruiters used Twitter as a way to simply post links to jobs, but it has evolved since as an effective way to entice potential candidates in to see more of your brand. For one, it's easier to start a conversation with your audience as there is no barrier of being 'connected' to someone, you can simply follow relevant talent and reach out to them. However, getting to know potential candidates is a good idea rather than sending direct messages or tagging them in tweets about jobs: what content do they publish or retweet? Who do they follow and does this reflect their professional interests? Are there people they interact with that could also be worth targeting?

A subtler strategy is to use Twitter to amplify your employer brand and recruitment marketing efforts and show off the company's personality. The character count allows you to embed links to videos or longer blog articles that showcase your culture. Social media scheduling company Hootsuite does this well: its Hootsuite Careers (@hootsuitelife) includes a range of stories from how the company has responded to the Black Lives Matter movement to how it supported an employee to relocate. For cost-conscious recruiters, perhaps the main advantage of using Twitter for recruitment is that it is completely free.

Instagram

The picture and video-led platform is often favoured by younger audiences so is good for showcasing workplace culture, or using imagery to spark a conversation with potential candidates. There are around 1 billion monthly active users on Instagram, and 71% of them are under 35⁵.

Claire Stapley, a recruitment marketer who has worked on a number of hiring campaigns, says that content has to add value to the target audience if it is to be effective. "This shows you're credible and know your demographic. Generation Z, for example, are thinking about inclusion and an organisation's impact on the environment and are less concerned about salary," she says. "It's not about sharing how great your company is, but outlining initiatives you may have, content you've written or something relevant from another platform. As long as it's in line with your brand values, that's great."

The type of content you could share on Instagram can be broken into three key areas: people, events and environment. People stories might include celebrating an employee's achievement, events could showcase the social side of the business, while environment can give candidates a feel for what the workplace itself will be like. Choosing the right hashtags is critical on this platform – you could create a dedicated hashtag for your brand as well as use popular ones such as #nowhiring, #jobs and #jobsearch. Cisco's dedicated @wearecisco account is a good example of life at the technology company; there are few direct references to open roles but a huge mix of stories and videos about its employees and ethos.

THE NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

Don't limit your candidate search to the four key platforms. Potential applicants don't need to be actively conducting a job search for you to get your brand in front of them – think about other channels where they could be socialising online. Here are a few to consider:

TikTok: In 2019 this video sharing app surpassed 1.5 billion downloads and is hugely popular among Generation Z audiences. The app revolves around sharing 15-second video clips so the brand message needs to be concise.

Snapchat: Another popular platform among younger people, Snapchat allows users to share photos and videos for a finite amount of time. McDonald's ran a 'Snaplications' recruitment drive, with 10-second videos of employees discussing what it's like to work there, with a swipe up to its recruitment page.

Pinterest: Not just for checking out bathroom tiles and recipes, picture-led platform Pinterest allows users to 'pin' posts they like and recruiters can access paid options to promote pins that are performing well.

GitHub: If you're looking for a software developer, you'll probably find them here. Developers use the platform to discuss projects they're working on. Profiles and locations are visible and you can search for specific programming languages.

To boost the candidate experience, you can offer integrated application routes in the posts (both LinkedIn and Facebook offer 'apply now' options) and deploy chatbots so candidates can ask questions at any time. Combining data from social channels, other sources such as your careers site and jobs boards can be challenging but insightful, says Linas. "Analytics is tough to do on your own, so you need the right technology stack that enables you to pull relevant data. Doing this will enable you to see where candidates are coming from, and linking this data with other sources further on in the employment lifecycle (such as engagement, retention and performance data in your HR system) could provide insight into which sources produce the most productive and successful applicants.

It's worth remembering, however, that social media can show off your brand reputation in a less flattering light, too. Glassdoor, where employees can leave reviews about current and former employers, has become a go-to research point for candidates. Because the reviews are generated by employees, potential recruits trust them as a 'warts and all' reflection of an organisation. "Employee-generated content such as reviews can be excellent recruitment marketing content and be used across multiple channels, including social media," says Joe Wiggins, Glassdoor's director of corporate communications. The power of employee reviews is in their transparency, so building and showing off an authentic and fair company culture is key to creating an audience of engaged candidates. In 2020, the site introduced specific diversity and inclusion ratings, offering potential recruits another benchmark on which to base their job search.

Anyone that has watched the documentary *The Social Dilemma* will know that the public are becoming more cautious of social media, with users beginning to reconsider the addictive nature of social media and re-evaluating their relationship with them. Whether this trend will last and will impact how hiring teams engage with candidates via these channels remains to be seen. But for now, they cannot ignore the potential of reaching out to a global network of talent at comparatively little cost.

CASE STUDY: PENSION PROTECTION FUND (PPF)

The PPF's social media strategy focuses heavily on recruitment, helping it to attract, recruit and retain a diverse employee population. The organisation, which protects members of defined benefit schemes if the schemes they've paid into fail, uses LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram and Glassdoor along with job adverts.

One of the reasons PPF uses social media is to reflect its diverse workforce and culture, and to support this it uses searchable hashtags such as #inclusive, #DiverseEmployer and #DisabilityLeader. "A key feature of our strategy is the use of video to give candidates a flavour of what working for the PPF is really like. For instance, when advertising a new role we ask the hiring manager to record a short video talking about the team, opportunities and life at the PPF. This adds a human element and brings the role to life, giving the candidate another dimension they couldn't get from reading an ad," explains Glenda Kladitis, PPF Senior HR Business Partner.

Each of the social channels serves a specific purpose, and LinkedIn and Glassdoor are the core routes to candidates. "We are fortunate enough to receive enough applications organically that we don't currently need to use LinkedIn's paid features," she says. Instagram is aimed at current and prospective employees, giving a

'behind the scenes' view of life at PPF, for example candidates discussing how reasonable adjustments were made for their disability during the interview or onboarding process.

The majority of applications to PPF come through social media, and this has largely eliminated the need to use agencies and headhunters. "We're also proud to hear anecdotal feedback who have been attracted by the diversity they see on our channels, which is a true representation of our workforce. We aim to be an employer of choice for people of all backgrounds and are pleased to see our efforts in this area being effective," Kladitis adds.

Integrating your social media data

Integrating these campaigns with your recruitment and applicant tracking systems can make them even more effective. Find a plug-in tool that will feed social media data into your ATS and this can maximise your efforts. Tools such as Broadbean can do the following:

- Automate posting on chosen social media platforms, reducing time spent doing this manually;
- Post on multiple platforms at a time and manage advertising spend;
- Track referrals and reward employees for sharing posts;
- Upload candidate information into your applicant tracking system to create reports on conversion rates so you can tweak campaigns;
- Create a searchable database of candidates so you can filter against selected criteria;
- Establish a record of candidate information, making onboarding quicker if they are a successful hire.

Five takeaways

1. Almost four-fifths of candidates use social media in their job search so – having some form of social media presence is essential
2. Social hiring can complement or even replace paid-for job advertisements, making it a cost-effective route to candidates
3. Visual channels such as Instagram and Facebook can provide a realistic view of what it's like to work at your company
4. The potential reach of social media means it can project your employer message far and wide, so make sure that's a positive one
5. Social hiring campaigns produce rich data and insights on where candidates come from, which can be used to tailor future recruitment efforts

References

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