

# Recruiting with social media

## Online tools open doors

These days,  
HR goes online  
to recruit and  
promote talent

By **Jacob Stoller**

### THE RECRUITMENT OF NEW EMPLOYEES

was one of the first applications of social media in business. And while practices are still evolving, organizations that have mastered these information tools are seeing numerous advantages such as keeping their employees up to date on internal events and maintaining a steady dialogue with clients.

In particular, many human resources (HR) departments now use social media to help them learn about prospective employees as well as promote their companies to attract top talent. When used properly, social media can enhance nearly all aspects of recruiting.

### New tools mean more power

The most obvious use of social media in recruiting is candidate searches. Sites such as LinkedIn provide not only thousands of searchable resumés, but also links to relevant discussion groups, blogs and Twitter posts that candidates may have written. Consequently, a searcher can learn not only about a candidate's "on-paper" qualifications and experience, but also other details such as how well the person writes and how he or she might fit into a company's work culture.

For those who hire regularly, automated tools such as ResuméGrabber and MaxHire, which are available through cloud-based subscription services, allow searchers to amass large numbers of resumés from multiple

sources — including job boards, social media and Google — and load them conveniently into a database.

Social media, however, can offer far more than a source of resumés. Their real power is their role in initiating and nurturing relationships with candidates.

One organization taking this approach is PricewaterhouseCooper (PwC), a global professional services firm. "We use social media to help us tell the story to our prospective recruits," says Toronto-based Colleen Bailey Moffitt, talent leader at PwC Canada. "Social media allow people to reach out directly and talk about what it's like to work here."

PwC is particularly active in social media with its campus recruitment program, Brilliant Futures. In addition to maintaining a team of 20 bloggers, the firm also posts YouTube videos that convey short overviews, advice on what to expect when you become an auditor and the personal perspectives of employees.

Moffitt reports that the YouTube channel is getting 100 to 200 visitors a week, and the Twitter site has more than 4,500 followers. "It's growing rapidly, exponentially," says Moffitt. "We see it playing an even greater role in years to come."

Toronto-based TD Bank Group finds that social media help the firm's HR people move beyond the reach of traditional job boards and lecture circuits.

# TOP THREE SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS



## FACEBOOK

WEBSITE  
**facebook.com**

REGISTERED USERS  
**800 million**

CHARACTERISTICS  
**Personal, informal, multimedia**



## LINKEDIN

WEBSITE  
**linkedin.com**

REGISTERED USERS  
**100 million**

CHARACTERISTICS  
**Businesslike, formal, text-based**



## TWITTER

WEBSITE  
**twitter.com**

REGISTERED USERS  
**175 million**

CHARACTERISTICS  
**Fast moving, direct, minimalist**

## The real power of social media is their role in initiating and nurturing relationships with candidates.

“What we found with our social-media recruitment piece is that our recruiters get to engage themselves in the communities that they support,” says Josephine Quercia, manager of Talent Systems and Programs, Corporate HR at TD. “They are able to connect with groups that they may not have connected with before.”

In addition to promotional videos on its Careers web page, TD puts its recruiters in the limelight by featuring them on a LinkedIn page which now boasts more than 36,000 followers. “It’s a great way of putting a face on who our recruiters are, and a face to the bank,” says Quercia, “so that potential candidates can really feel that connection and get a good sense of what TD stands for.”

### Keeping your tools in check

Companies need to use discretion, however, particularly when they gather information. If they don’t have solid policies in place, a simple candidate background check can quickly become an invasion of privacy. Reading somebody’s Twitter posts, for example, is reasonable. But paging through Facebook photos of a candidate’s family vacation is probably going too far.

The law offers few guidelines here. Since social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are all considered public domain, employers are free to search them for publicly displayed information, regardless of how embarrassing or misleading it may be.

“The courts have been pretty clear. When you put information onto the Internet, that’s not private, that’s public,” says Constantine Karbaliotis, privacy lead with Toronto-based HR consultancy Mercer Canada. “This is an area where the law and people’s expectations aren’t lining up.”

Accuracy is another concern. While social media can provide valuable information about potential employees that would be hard to find elsewhere, social media can also convey misleading, or even false, information.

Consider, for example, a potential hire who has a lot of Facebook photos that show him holding a glass of beer or wine. Does he have a problem with alcohol? Perhaps, but it’s also possible that all those photos were taken in a single night. Because social situations are more likely to be photographed, an album might not accurately reflect the totality of the candidate’s life.

Employers should keep in mind that recruitment is often the beginning of a long-term relationship and that the rules for candidates should be the same as the rules for employees.

“You can’t turn employment into a sort of constant surveillance state,” says Karbaliotis. “You’re not going to have positive relations with your employees if they feel like they’re constantly being watched.”

Transparency is also key, and Karbaliotis points out that candidates and employees have the legal right to review and challenge the information that companies collect on them. “The overall approach I would recommend is say what you do, and do what you say,” says Karbaliotis.

### The future is connected

Active Facebook profiles, frequent blogs and constant Twitter updates are quickly becoming the norm among tech-savvy youth. Indeed, statistics show that 42 per cent of teens and college students use Twitter, and spend an average of 11.4 hours per week on Facebook.

As numbers such as these grow, social media will play an increasingly bigger role in recruiting. If HR departments approach this new reality with a positive mindset, social media could become an ever more powerful way to connect people in the business world. ■

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