

Recruitment reforms put talent on stream at River Island

Technology transforms the hiring process

Retailer River Island knew it had a problem with its recruiting system when it was left with unfilled vacancies because it could not process the volume of applications it received.

Since the company was not able to track candidates once they had made an application, it was frequently unable to offer news or feedback to anyone who contacted the recruitment team to check on the progress of their application.

“As a team and an organization we recognized the need to give candidates a better experience and relieve the recruitment burden from store managers so they would have more time to drive sales,” said recruitment manager Janine Jenkinson.

The business – with almost 300 stores in the UK, Ireland, Europe and the Middle East – used a paper-based system for sales-adviser recruitment that failed to offer the organization or candidates any consistency when it came to screening applications. The labor-intensive system also put a lot of pressure on the central recruitment team.

“We needed a recruitment system that would lead and support candidates through a slicker recruitment process,” said Kirsty Jerome, the retailer’s HR controller. “By emphasising and focusing on the candidate experience we realized we could increase the quality of applications, as well as realizing positive benefits for our employer and consumer brand.”

Following a competitive pitch, River Island appointed online recruitment and resourcing expert Changeworknow to develop and deliver a new recruitment system.

Using technology to manage talent

Changeworknow recommended capitalizing on the expertise of the central recruitment team to post vacancies on the corporate website and manage candidates once applications had been submitted. By employing technology to manage the volume and quality of candidates through screening and filtering suitable applications, it was possible to use store managers more efficiently.

“We were keen to involve store managers in the recruitment process only where they could add the greatest value,” explained Lisa Astbury, director of Changeworknow. “Because we recognized how important it was to take the burden of recruitment administration from store managers, the solution we proposed and implemented ensured that they continued to be involved in the recruitment process, but limited their involvement to decision making.”

Candidates’ online applications are scored and classified as A, B or C. When the number of applications for each vacancy has reached its quota – for example, ten A-class applications

have been received – the technology automatically closes the vacancy and takes it off the corporate web site.

Once a vacancy's quota has been reached, the central recruitment team invites all applicants to a local recruitment event. Store managers receive details of the shortlisted applicants and they host and manage the recruitment event to ensure they have the opportunity to review and select the best talent for their store. Following the recruitment events, store managers advise the central recruitment team of the outcomes so the central recruitment database can be updated.

Exceeding recruitment expectations

River Island had initially been concerned that too few people would apply to fill the 5,950 vacancies it expected for the Christmas season. In fact, 96,000 people started the River Island online recruitment process between September and December. Some 53 percent of them submitted their application, with the remainder de-selecting themselves from the process based on feedback received on their suitability.

The River Island team worked closely with Changeworknow to tighten the scoring of applications and use the vacancy-quota function to ensure that only the highest quality candidates were invited to attend their local recruitment events.

Delivering positive business impact

"Time to hire is approximately 32 days which, when recruiting for the Christmas trading period, is key to getting the right people in the right stores as quickly as possible," reflected Janine Jenkinson.

The new approach to recruitment also helped to create a more positive working relationship between the central recruitment team and store managers. "Not only have we been able to help store managers to save time, but we have also been able to add value to the recruitment process, ensuring their expertise is focused on selecting from the very best candidates," she explained.

"All team members were trained on the system, knew the processes and were confident in how best to manage candidates. Because the system effectively managed the applications, the team was free to manage candidates and ensure every candidate was contacted quickly and was aware of the outcome of his or her application," commented Lisa Astbury.

A flexible future recruitment solution

The head-office team now uses the online recruitment system to staff new stores in the group. "Already one store has filled all its vacancies within nine days and another within 11 days. When you consider that a store can require up to 400 members of staff, it's an achievement that should not be underestimated," said Kirsty Jerome.

The system is also used to recruit for all management roles and head-office posts.

The system is continually being updated to reflect technological developments and changing business needs. A new interactive candidate portal has been introduced. Applicants can log on to see how their application is progressing and receive updated communications from the recruiting team.

Plans are in place to include text messaging in candidate communications to further manage the high volume of applications received and to ensure that the business can turn them around as quickly as possible.

The system now also incorporates interactive graphical dashboards, tag-cloud capability and a user interface designed to increase the productivity of the central recruitment team.



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Comment

This review is based on “Technology transforms retailer’s recruitment”, by Lisa Proctor, sales and marketing director of Changeworknow. The article demonstrates how technology can improve the recruitment process in a large organization. It discusses how the replacement of a paper-based system with online technology greatly improved recruitment efficiency and the candidate experience at high-street retailer River Island. The author reveals that, because of the high volume of applications received, the organization acknowledged it needed to revise and refresh its approach to recruitment. The company teamed up with online recruitment and resourcing expert Changeworknow to design a system to meet the needs of the brand. The combined impact of moving from a manual to a technology-led process, and transferring recruitment from front-line managers to HR, improved the recruitment process to the extent that the system is now being extended across the organization. The article shows in particular how technology can help to overcome the challenges associated with seasonal recruitment.

Reference

Proctor, L. (2010), “Technology transforms retailer’s recruitment”, *Strategic HR Review*, Vol. 9 No. 6, pp. 22-6, ISSN: 1475-4398.

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