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Staffing Technology Trends: Transformational Talent Experiences

Erecruit Best Practices

January 2018

With the help of technology, innovative staffing firms will deliver transformational talent experiences in 2018.

All economic signs indicate that our candidate-tight market will continue.

Many know what ought to be done to capture the attention, hearts and loyalty of working people: we must shift our focus from filling jobs and cultivating careers.

Powered by unprecedented financial investment in the staffing and recruiting space, more and more talent-centric tools are available to help recruiting organizations win the war for talent.

New tools and innovative approaches provide staffing firms with an opportunity to dramatically improve their interactions with candidates. Transformational talent experiences focus on the person behind the resume and aim to understand, support, guide and, yes, employ them.

Staffing firms that excel at attracting, retaining and even creating talent will grow. Those that can master the talent experience at scale, yet maintain a personal touch, will top the industry leaderboard. We've had time to strategize and think about the ultimate end-to-end talent experience; 2018 is the year to make it happen.

The Recruiting Landscape in 2018

2018 is an exciting time for our industry, staffing and recruiting, and the technology solutions supporting us.

Unemployment continues to be [very low](#), and in a tight labor market it's simply more difficult to recruit candidates. To avoid a drop in recruiter productivity, staffing firms are focusing on honing their recruiting strategy, increasing their recruitment marketing efforts, streamlining business processes, making training more accessible, automating recruiter functions, and may even be adding recruiting headcount.

In a tight labor market it's simply more difficult to recruit candidates: it takes more time, more resources, more strategy and more tools.

At the same time, corporate staffing organizations are starting to hire contingent labor directly, without any help from staffing firms (a.k.a. direct sourcing). Corporate staffing is simply posting temporary jobs on their own websites and inviting candidates to apply... [and it's working](#).

Hiring organizations know how to create strong employment brands, how to recruit talent, and have access to all of the tools, innovations, and resources of staffing firms. To remain relevant, staffing firms must be able to clearly express how they do a better job providing contingent labor than the hiring organization can do themselves.

The gig economy is changing the very nature of work by breaking down the “job” into smaller non-core tasks that can be outsourced, redefining a “career” as a series of gigs.

Workers like the flexibility and control that the [freelancing offers](#) them. What gigsters don't like about online staffing models is all the effort it takes them to stand out from the online masses. Candidates have to compete in a hyper-competitive global market where it can feel like there is always someone else willing to work at a fraction of the rate, with more skills, more experience, and a better track record; they are perpetually online and available 24/7.

Staffing firms also provide flexibility and control, but they can offer candidates a great deal more than freelancer platforms: a personal touch. Herein lies great opportunity for staffing firms. By becoming more talent-centric and engaging with talent at a deeper level, staffing firms can make candidates feel unique, understood and appreciated during the hiring process, while on assignment and in between. In order to develop stronger relationships with job seekers and maintain productivity levels, recruiters need tools and technologies that enhance interactions, enabling the staffing firm to deliver great experiences.

The greatest opportunity for staffing firms in 2018 is transforming the talent experience.

Improving recruiting practices is one way to abate these strong market forces. However, greater competitive advantage and a stronger value proposition can be realized by transforming the talent experience by reorienting recruiters to personalize the job seeker's experience. New tools and technologies can maintain recruiter productivity levels by working behind the scenes to enhance the recruiter's role or even take over low level tasks.

By redesigning, rebuilding and transforming the end-to-end talent experience, talent will engage with staffing firms in a new and meaningful way that will result in more placements, higher redeployment rates, increased recruiter productivity and greater profits.

What is a Transformational Talent Experience and How Do We Create Them?

It turns out that pounding the pavement for work, virtual or otherwise, is not very fun and people tend to avoid it. For job seekers, it's difficult to have a transformational, or even meaningful, job hunting experience if you feel part of a short-term, money-making transaction. A transformational talent experience must include interactions that feel very personal, positive, and authentic.

Even in high-touch recruiting models require more and more supporting technology to enable meaningful candidate experiences.

Since landing a job isn't a one-time life event, the job seeker will want to repeat a great recruiter interaction, again and again. Having a recruiting organization that helps you lock-in one job after the next, and guides you throughout your career, is the ultimate experience.

In fact, recruiters at staffing firms are positioned to be the best coaches because they hire for more than just one company. They can truly focus on the job seeker's wishes and present the best-fit opportunities across hundreds or thousands of companies. Hiring organizations represent only themselves and are, by definition, biased toward the limited opportunities they alone offer the candidate. Job seekers want to be hired again and again over their career; and deploying candidates, one assignment after the other, maximizes the staffing firm's profit. When the job seeker and staffing firm's ultimate experiences are aligned - ka-ching!

The ideal career coach understands your career vision, what you want in life, your values, and how you prefer to work. The perfect recruiter understands the market, up-and-coming opportunities, trending skills, the value of good talent, and how to negotiate fair and competitive compensation packages. They are able to analyze the skills and experience you have, can articulate your strengths, identify what you need to achieve your professional and career desires, and help you find ways to close those gaps. They know and understand the person behind the resume and they keep track of you, letting you know when it's time to ask for a raise, get additional training, or move on to your next job.

When the job seeker and staffing firm's ultimate experiences are aligned - ka-ching!

Undoubtedly, there are many approaches to creating transformational talent experiences including high-touch, low-touch or fully-automated methods. For example, the candidate profile can be captured in a variety of ways: via a candidate conversation with a chatbot, by proactively capturing and interpreting a person's online profile and actions, through video interviews, or in a live interview with a recruiter. What's important is that the conversation is smart, the experience is easy and relatively quick, and the information is stored and reused.

Even high-touch recruiting models require more and more supporting technology to enable meaningful candidate interactions. Recruiting automation technology helps maintain recruiter productivity in a candidate-tight market where so much effort is needed to attract, recruit, and retain talent. Recruiters appreciate when good technology enhances their interactions, helps them be better coaches, or takes over low-level tasks.

Transformational talent experiences are personal, meaningful and have the potential of being life-changing. Staffing firms create them by engaging deeply with talent over a long period of time. Filling an order is transactional. Placing a candidate has the potential to be transformational; but, enabling a career definitely is. In order to create transformational talent experiences at scale and in a cost effective manner, staffing firms must rely heavily on technology.

Transforming Technology

With outside pressures like direct sourcing and online staffing gaining steam, along with low unemployment, it's very important that staffing firms make use of all of the tools at their disposal. And there's good news, there is a record number of point solutions aimed at solving business problems in our space. In fact, we saw over [400 tools and technologies](#) on the exhibit room floor at the 2017 HR Technology Conference & Expo. These technologies include both innovative tools that automate business processes in totally new ways, like chatbots, as well as more practical and focused solutions, to long time wish list items like talent communities.

Below we have highlighted technology-related topics that we think will be central to this year's business goals for many of you:

Building a kick-ass candidate database to increase the number of jobs filled by candidates you already know

Direct sourcing is a viable threat, and staffing firms must have a better candidate database than their customers. Candidate data quality, completeness, and freshness is paramount so that recruiters can fill positions directly from the database. A great database is needed so that it can be easily segmented and accurately marketed to. With a robust candidate database, staffing firms can confidently engage niche talent with niche content. Automatically updating data elements, such as contact info and work history, via external data sources, will be increasingly important in 2018.

Utilizing talent relationship management (TRM) tools to automate low touch relationship building

These tools offer more visibility into candidates, including information earlier in the application process, like whether they viewed a job posting, or started – but didn't finish – an online application. TRM tools give you visibility into a new part of the candidate pipeline. With this information, recruiters and recruiting technology can better convert interested job seekers into candidates.

Quantifying the strength of the relationship with an engagement score

Defining the engagement score and incorporating the score into recruiting activities is an important theme for 2018. Staffing firms are getting serious about building longer-term relationships with candidates using a wide variety of communication approaches such as phone calls, bulk and one-off emails or texts, social media direct messaging, and networking events. At the same time candidates are interacting with the staffing firm's online content (company website, job posting pages, direct emails, etc.). Highly-engaged

candidates are easier to place, so busy recruiters want to be able to quickly identify which candidates are interacting with their staffing firm and showing the most interest. Recruiters will then be able to focus on the closest-to the-dollar candidates, and marketers can identify and repeat communication activities that net the best results.

Right-skilling talent to meet client demand and to generate candidate goodwill

With unemployment so low, talent creation is an extremely hot topic, and there are a number of opportunities for technology to play a role. For one, open or unfilled positions can be compared to your candidate database to identify gaps in supply. A deeper supply-side analysis can identify candidates that have the potential to add the needed skills through training. Several staffing firms have [integrated learning platforms](#) into their offering in an effort help candidates gain high demand skills, upskill so they are more placeable, or can garner a higher wage. The ability to understand skill gaps from all perspectives – candidate, the client, geographic, total market, etc. – will enable staffing firms to create new talent and fill more orders.

Inclusive sourcing and hiring to widen the sourcing net

The practicalities of a tight talent market and data, such as [McKinsey's landmark 2015 study](#) that showed diverse firms financially outperform non-diverse firms, are among the factors driving more support for diversity initiatives than at any other time in history. Staffing firms must use whatever tools and techniques necessary to ensure the broadest possible talent pool is sourced and hired.

Trading in the in-person interview for video-based interviews and online pre-employment assessments

Remote work and telecommuting have become more commonplace, and staffing firm candidates don't necessarily want to come into the branch for an in-person interview. Video chat, video conferencing, and video interviewing are tools frequently used by recruiters in lieu of the in-person interview.

Surprisingly, some firms are moving away from interviewing all together. Believing that the interview is not particularly useful in accurately capturing the candidate's abilities and traits, staffing firms are relying more heavily on [assessments and predictive hiring tools](#) to confirm candidate skills and fit. It's possible that these online assessment tools end-up being less expensive, more accurate and, with gamification, more fun than the traditional face-to-face interview.

Whether you are using interviewing automation tools, assessment tools, or both – they must be integrated with your ATS in order to provide a seamless candidate experience.

Communicate with candidates based on the context and the candidate's preferred communication method

The number and variety of recruiter/candidate communication methods is mind-bending: phone, voicemail, email, text, instant messaging, LinkedIn direct message, Facebook Messenger, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram and I'm sure there are others. VoIP systems, texting tools, and social recruiting platforms must be integrated with the recruiter's staffing software so that recruiters can manage all communications without having to

leave their core application; and all communication notes and activities need to be visible from the candidate's record.

Candidates may have a personal preference for one method over another; and that preference may vary depending on the content and urgency of the message. [According to Forbes](#) magazine, millennials make up the largest portion of the modern workforce and they have an aversion to phone calls, preferring texting, which directly contradicts what most staffing firms teach their recruiters.

The more staffing firms coach recruiters on the appropriate communication method for the situation, and the more systems can help recruiters track candidate communication preferences, the better the talent experience.

Driving up candidate redeployment rates with two-way performance rating systems

Over the past several years, staffing organizations have been making a greater effort to redeploy workers on one assignment after the other. Redeploying workers dramatically reduces costs while giving clients access to known high performers. With [Uber](#) and [Upwork](#) leading the way, we have all become accustomed to the 2-way 5-star performance rating system. With staffing's push for redeployment and 2-way feedback the norm, staffing firms must get serious about collecting talent and client feedback and use this information to market the talent to the next opportunity, as well as spot opportunities for improvement for each player – recruiter, client, and talent.

Quickly integrating strategic, point solutions to transform the talent experience

In September 2005, I wrote a Staffing Industry Review article about the staffing front-office (FO) ecosystem, explaining how important it is for FO solutions to integrate with third party solutions (there's no hyperlink because the article is too old!). While integration has remained important to staffing over the last decade, I believe it's even more important now.

Staffing platforms, like [Erecruit](#), offer more functionality than ever as part of the core system. At the same time, there has been a great deal of [venture investment](#) in the recruiting space over the past few years and innovative point solutions are finally ready for prime time.

Staffing firms will be identifying new point solutions that offer a unique and specific value-add. These point solutions will need to be quickly interfaced with the core staffing solution in order to add value so they don't negatively impact recruiter productivity by creating manual steps, like duplicate data entry.

Sanely applying AI, machine learning, and chatbot technology to help

No 2018 trends conversation would be complete without addressing the role of artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning and chatbots. In all six of the 2017 fall conferences, these buzzwords were mentioned uncountable times; so much so, that they nearly became a joke.

Staffing firms will continue to experiment with these new technologies this year, making every effort to leverage them to improve the talent experience and increase recruiter

efficiency. These types of technologies are being applied to improve search and match accuracy, and to offload work from recruiting resources such as conducting the initial screening and establishing an interview time.

We predict that many of the vendors providing these new technologies will come and go, be acquired, or shift their focus in 2018, but this area of emerging technology will certainly continue to be a hot segment to follow throughout the year.

In Summary

In 2018, staffing organizations are shifting the focus of recruiters from filling jobs to placing candidates. Perhaps your firm is going to take it one step further through cultivating and enabling long-term careers.

In the past, recruiters have been asked to assess the candidate's fit for a specific job as quickly as possible to reduce time-to-fill and maximize spread. This approach doesn't work very well in our candidate-tight market where job seekers can represent themselves in freelancer marketplaces or apply directly to the hiring organization to lock in their own temporary job.

Huge investments in HR-related technology have been made over the last few years. New talent-oriented point solutions are cropping up in droves. By using staffing software solutions that support positive talent experiences and integrating new tools into your architecture, you can create transformational experiences that will set your staffing firm apart.

Market forces demand that staffing firms strengthen their value propositions. Staffing firms are in a unique position in that they can offer job seekers guidance and support across their careers since they work with hundreds or even thousands of hiring organizations. By delivering transformational talent experiences your staffing firm will attract, retain, redeploy and gain the loyalty of top talent and be well positioned for years to come.



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