



The Resu-Mess

Streamline the hiring process crushed beneath tons of résumés

By Ira Wolfe

For individuals in search of a new job career, it is as easy as Copy, Paste, and Submit. The economy is improving and more and more candidates are applying for jobs on the Internet.

But just like the neighbor attending an open house to get a peak how the people on the other side of the street live, an increasing number of job candidates are just "shopping." The result is creating a massive influx of résumés—an administrative nightmare named the "resu-mess."

No longer do managers just receive a dozen or so résumés mailed or faxed from a single ad in the Sunday classifieds, but hundreds of e-mails clogging in-boxes from Internet job postings. After years of cutting

back on the size of human resource departments or just adding more and more responsibilities on the shoulder of the HR assistant, it is fair to say reviewing and processing these résumés is like having six lanes of traffic merging into a two-lane tunnel. This translates into a bottleneck at the hiring tollgate.

But more isn't necessarily better. Sifting through the résumés takes time. Few managers, human resource professionals and assistants have the time to screen the applications, call the candidates, fight the voice mail tag, complete phone interviews, schedule face-to-face interviews, check references, complete background checks and so on.

Successful recruiting strategies to select more of the right candidates are being derailed by a voluminous response of applicants. While managers and HR staff are attempting to disqualify the unqualified or disinterested applicants, high-demand qualified candidates are being overlooked and turned off by slow response times, cumbersome hiring hurdles and inexperienced, sometimes inept, interviewers.

To further complicate matters, what you see is not necessarily what you get when it comes to résumés. In a survey conducted by Avert Inc., 44 percent of 2.6 million résumés they checked for background accuracy reportedly contained at least some lies: 44 percent of applicants lied about their work histories, 41 percent lied about their education and 23 percent falsified credentials or licenses.

The Internet, with its many advantages, also creates more work for hiring managers who need to verify the truth behind the resume. If the job requires a four-year college degree or even a PhD, a candidate doesn't need to go back to school. He can just submit his credit card information and Volia!—he now has a degree with an official looking embossed, certified "diploma."

Phony degrees are easy to track. Other fabrications, particularly those that just stretch the truth, are harder to detect such as the addition of fictional degrees, bogus job titles, vastly inflated responsibilities and changing dates of employment to bridge periods of unemployment. When the hiring employer calls to verify information, all they get is the name, dates of employment, last salary and little else. In fact, with downsizings, attrition and job hopping, the managers of many of these candidates are long gone.

Faced with a long list of allegedly qualified candidates, managers resort to old faithful to find the right employee. But according to Paul Ekman, a psychology professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of California Medical School in San Francisco and author of 13 books, including *Telling Lies*, "most people cannot tell whether someone is lying or telling the truth—but most people think they can."

Over the years, Ekman has tested about 6,000 people—among them college students, police officers, judges, lawyers, psychiatrists and agents of the FBI, the CIA and the Drug Enforcement Administration—to determine if they can tell if someone is lying. He has found that "95 percent of these decisions come down to chance—they'd do just as well flipping a coin."

A survey from the Society of Human Resource Management confirms the challenges of verifying the credentials of a candidate. Human resource professionals are uncovering lies in these categories:

- Length of employment, 53 percent.
- Past salaries, 51 percent.
- Criminal records, 45 percent.
- Former job tales, 44 percent.
- Former employers, 35 percent.
- Driving records, 33 percent.
- College degrees, 30 percent.
- Credit, 24 percent.
- Schools attended, 22 percent.
- Social Security number, 14 percent.

Lying isn't just a problem at the hourly level either. At least 23 percent of 7,000 résumés submitted for president, vice president and board of director positions have been a little cooked (source: Christian & Timbers).

The problem doesn't stop there. Forty million drug tests are conducted each year on job candidates and employees. But employees have learned "the ropes."

The prevalence of these drug screenings and the reach of the Internet has fostered a thriving cottage industry of entrepreneurs who promise to help workers beat the tests. Products to counteract urine tests, shampoos intended to counteract hair tests and tablets for saliva tests are readily available.

Managers are at a crossroads. Business just wasn't always as complex as it is today. But many organizations still insist on using the techniques of yester-year to solve today's problems. Candidates hire professional resume writers. They search the Internet for information about your company. They download dozens and dozens of answers to the most common interview questions, just like fraternities and sororities "prepped" their brothers and sisters for term papers and final exams. Yet managers are still doing interviews on the fly, relying on gut instinct and a suspect resume to make the final hiring decisions.

"People are poor intuitive judges of truth and deception," according to Eckman, which seems only to confirm the previous research on the effectiveness of interviews for selecting the right people.

In these comparative studies of various selection techniques, the success of the traditional interview is only slightly better than flipping a coin. The addition of reference and background checks, personality

testing and a behavioral event interview to a selection process, however, improves the success of hiring to nearly 8 out of 10.

Simplify the application process

Everything has changed. Streamlining recruitment, hiring quickly and selecting the right people are no longer options but key growth strategies.

An effective recruiting solution has many pieces, including applicant tracking, screening, testing, interviewing and background checks. All of these components must mesh with business processes and create an end-to-end solution.

To first attract and then actually hire the best talent, making the entire recruitment process as convenient as possible is critical. Prospective employees should be able to fill out an application at a Web site, and any tests or profiling tools should be available through the Web or by phone.

Success Performance Solutions recently introduced Prevue APS (Applicant Processing System), an online applicant processing system, comparable to those used by the Fortune 1000s but now within reach and affordability for even the small business owner.

"With the introduction of the Prevue APS, I re-evaluated my old hiring process to see how much time and money I could have been saved with a system like Prevue APS," says Marilyn Walker, former director of Success Performance Solutions Employee Assessment Center.

Walker reports that during her three-year tenure as director of a social service agency, she hired fourteen employees. One of the most remarkable was the last hire. In a job market overflowing with qualified individuals, Walker received over 60 résumés during just the first week. They arrived by fax, e-mail, snailmail and several candidates personally delivered them.

Not unlike most businesses, her hiring process started with reviewing each resume and sorting them into three piles: "Definitely Not," "Maybe," and "Definitely Call." From the definitely-call pile she identified about twenty people that she considered worthy of an interview. With additional review, she narrowed down the list to ten candidates. These ten were scheduled for face-to-face interviews.

From the interviews, the field was narrowed down to five people. All ten of her staff interviewed each candidate for an average of one hour and rated each candidate on pre-established criteria. They then discussed any responses and observations regarding his/her suitability for the position, the team and the culture.

Prior to leaving the agency, Walker completed a time-cost analysis of her hiring process. A conservative estimate of the time and assessment-related costs to hire an employee was as follows:

- Classified Ad - \$ 350.00
- Review résumés - \$ 630.00 (average 20 minutes each)
- Phone interviews - \$ 180.00 (average 20 minutes each)
- Initial interviews - \$ 260.00 (average 60 minutes each)
- Administration / review of DISC - \$ 200.00 (average 45 minutes each)
- Group interview / de-briefing - \$1300.00 (average 1.5 hours each)

Walker determined it was costing the agency \$2920.00 just to interview each new hire. This, of course, did not include the highest cost—the cost of lost opportunity. While interviewing these candidates, Walker admitted she was deferring other responsibilities, including training and coaching the staff and working on fund development. Likewise, her staff was taken away from working with their clients.

With the introduction of the Prevue APS, Marilyn took a look back at her old hiring process. “Had I had a system like Prevue APS,” Walker says, “it would have enabled me to screen candidates electronically via a job board. Prevue APS would have allowed me to create job specific filter questions (such as “are you available to work weekends including Saturdays and Sundays and have you completed a 2-year or four year degree), allowing candidates to self-qualify or disqualify themselves, avoiding many needless phone calls to unqualified, unmotivated and uninterested candidates.

Prevue APS also automates follow-up responses to candidates who are disqualified and reminders to qualified candidates who need to complete personality assessments or provide additional information. My secretary would have loved this function too, says Walker.

Walker realizes now that by simply using Prevue APS, she could have saved the agency over \$1000 per hire on management wages alone and well over \$6000 during a first year on the job when she hired five new employees.

A well-designed applicant processing system is like the EZ-Pass of human resources. It can help organizations filter and process résumés quickly and provide a central repository for potential candidates. When the system aligns with business processes, it’s possible to identify talent more quickly and reduce hiring time. The net result is that you can snatch talented individuals before your competitors do.

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For more information about selecting people with the “right” values or to order his new books, visit www.successperformancesolutions.com. 