

# MAKING GRADUATES WORK FOR YOUR BUSINESS

FIFTEEN years ago, media titles such as The Times, The Guardian and Prospects Today represented the main advertising vehicles for graduate recruiters. The rise (and rise) of the internet as a core advertising medium swiftly changed all this.

Online recruitment sites gave employers the opportunity to communicate with masses of graduate jobseekers in a fast and cost-effective way. Although online recruitment still has a huge part to play these days – and is extremely popular with graduates – it doesn't represent such good value any more. In fact, for companies wishing to attract the very top talent, online tools only form part of the puzzle. Recruiters *must* supplement this activity and look beyond the internet when implementing their attraction strategies.

Most of today's high-calibre graduates will know the organisation they want to work for long before applying. They don't reach this conclusion through chance, or even through an exhaustive search of all companies in their chosen field. Students are already aware of the 'best' companies around. Their opinions are formed through interactions with these companies, on several levels. So, by taking the initiative and engaging with students at an early stage, employers can improve their chances of securing the best graduates.

The process must begin with creating a powerful profile, long before job-hunting has even entered the minds of top future candidates. The key is to focus activity, rather than use a 'scattergun' approach. This goes for all areas of the recruitment strategy. Online, the smartest organisations use fewer job boards, and on-campus they are *more* active, with *fewer* universities. Companies must engage with students in a focused way, through targeted fairs and presentations,



Recruitment expert **SIMON REICHWALD**, of Graduate Success, examines ways for companies to attract and retain the best talent in the graduate marketplace

as well as forming relationships with key academics. This will bring companies closer to their ideal recruits, and increase the chance of being on the graduate 'shortlist', come application time.

The key to real success with any on-campus activity is not to view it as 'nice to do', but to leverage its full value. Do it right and companies can consistently appear on the radar of the best graduate talent. It's important not just to 'play at' achieving this presence and penetration, but to re-engage with universities, headhunting and talent spotting all the while. At first glance, these methods may not appear particularly time efficient. However, by maintaining a fairly narrow

focus and investing some time during the early stages, employers can actually increase speed to hire in the long run. Companies must ensure they are attracting the right quality applicants rather than simply large volumes, otherwise they will place an unnecessary strain on resources.

It's important that communication doesn't cease once contact has been established and this applies right through the recruitment process. Even during filtering, interview and assessment stages it's key to provide speedy responses and maintain communication with all applicants throughout. Candidates may have multiple job offers, so it's important not to leave weeks

before a response is given. Also, telling applicants to assume they've been unsuccessful if they don't hear anything is completely unacceptable!

Once a 'successful' recruitment drive has attracted promising talent – and resulted in an appointment – all parties generally give a huge sigh of relief and think the job is done. Adopting this attitude means at best, delaying new recruits' integration and development, and at worst losing them altogether. Today's generation of talent need to feel valued throughout their recruitment experience not just once they start at work, or they'll begin to look for something more rewarding.

The whole rationale for graduate recruitment is to nurture and develop future talent, right through the ranks. Investing in graduates is often far more cost-effective than hiring at very senior level. So, companies should make that investment work for them, by providing effective support mechanisms. Technology can often combat cost issues, through tele-coaching and online programmes to aid integration and development.

It's important to remember also, that today's generation of graduates is extremely tech-savvy and most are prolific web communicators. So, inevitably, any good or bad experiences they have with organisations will quickly end up online, to potentially be seen by thousands of their peers. A sobering thought for recruiters who think the process stops once a job offer is made.



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