

Using Social Media in Nonprofit Talent Acquisition

Attracting talented people to your organization is one of the most important and, likely, the most competitive tasks facing managers at a time conspicuous for its tight labor pool. This is especially true at the senior and leadership levels where nonprofits increasingly vie for talent not only with other nonprofits but also with the corporate sector.



Social media offers recruiters a set of powerful and, in many cases, free or moderately priced tools that can foster exponential productivity. “As an industry, we’re long past the point where nonprofits can simply post a job and wait for candidates to come,” says Kathleen Yazbak, the founder of [Viewcrest Advisors](#), an executive search firm, and a former Bridgespan partner. “Social media platforms allow recruiters to proactively seek out qualified candidates, shorten time-to-hire, and help raise an organization’s profile.”

A recent [Society for Human Resources Management](#) survey shows that nonprofits trail the corporate sector in using social media. But that gap is closing. Here are a few steps you can take right now to build social media into your talent acquisition mix.

1. Promote your talent brand

According to LinkedIn, 45 million profile views take place on LinkedIn every day—it is the number one activity on the network. The more you can show about who you are, what your company does, and what kind of people thrive there, the easier it will be for candidates to engage with you.

Take a look at your company profiles on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. Do they make you feel proud to work there? If not, take the critical first step of developing a well curated and compelling social media presence that highlights your company’s distinct culture. You can also use these pages to link to your organization’s human resources or employment pages.

[Year Up](#), which offers educational and career support for low-income young adults, includes employee testimonials and client success stories as well as links to the organization's [careers web page](#). As Year-Up expands into new markets, Talent Acquisition Manager Alison Kaneko is ramping up her acquisition strategy by partnering with her colleagues in marketing. "In the future, we plan to work with our National Marketing team to build and showcase our talent brand through videos and articles on the rewards that come from being part of what we do."

Kathleen Fujawa is vice president, talent, at [Education Pioneers](#), which used to outsource its recruitment function. Fujawa brought it in house and in doing so revved up the organization's social media presence. In addition to what Fujawa lauds as a "small but mighty" marcom team that produces the company's [Impacts and Insights Blog](#) and other social media, Education Pioneers has piloted an internal blog called Open Air to provide a "safe, internal training ground" where staffers can exercise their authorial voices on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. "This is the core of our culture and our hope is that some of these bloggers will add to conversations that include external audiences as well," notes Fujawa.

"I'm excited about expanding our blog and other 'culture' features," she says. "That can be a wonderful long-term recruiting tool."

2. Build your talent pipeline

LinkedIn has six million nonprofit members and 22 million members who "follow" nonprofits, according to [LinkedIn for Nonprofits](#). A robust and up-to-date talent pipeline is the holy grail of talent acquisition professionals. As a supplement to maintaining records manually, you can, for a fee, use Talent Pipeline in LinkedIn Recruiter to aggregate, track, contact, and nurture leads. LinkedIn's Advanced People Search function lets you find and filter the best applicants by skillset and/or geography, allowing you to target job openings to the most qualified candidates. Twitter lets you choose the location and current job titles of people you want to reach with your job posting. You can customize key word search to include whole job titles or parts of titles to widen the possibilities. You can also post to professional or other special interest groups—even those you don't follow or who don't follow you.

Kaneko uses Recruiter to post jobs and send "InMail" to source passive candidates. "There are many other options that LinkedIn Recruiter offers, including options to post targeted ads and advertise specific jobs on employee profile pages. We're looking into those options for this year."

Employ your current staff to build a network by asking them to cascade job postings to their personal social networks like LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. "This extends the reach far beyond just the company's social networks," says Yazbak. "Use incentives to reward employees for spreading the word."

Fujawa likes to relate the anecdote of a staffer who was chatting on the website of her old African American sorority and noticed that somebody was moving to New

York City—and looking for job. She connected with the sorority member and ended up hiring her. “It was a great fit and it demonstrated our commitment to fostering a diverse workforce,” says Fujawa.

3. Monitor your results

Documenting and measuring your social media productivity and outcomes isn’t glamorous but will help you build credibility in the long run. The good news is that most social media platforms include useful analytics. Your Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn pages should enable you and your staff to track which of their friends, followers, or contacts are applying for jobs, which social network they came from, and what stage they are in during the recruiting process.

In addition to talent branding, offer content that appeals to a wide range of professionals at various stages of their careers. Job search tips, career advice, industry news, and thought leadership articles can make your organization a valuable resource.

4. Dos and Don’ts

Every schoolgirl and boy know about the reputational risks of exposing one’s personal life on social media sites. Less well understood are the state and federal laws that limit prospective employer use of social media content in “screening” or conducting background checks.

Suzanne King, a partner at the law firm [Pierce Atwood](#) who advises nonprofits on [employment law](#), says firms should be aware that the [Fair Credit Reporting Act \(FCRA\)](#) may apply if they outsource social media screening. She recommends either conducting social media screening in-house or asking your vendor what they are doing to comply with the FCRA requirements.

To remove even the possible perception of discrimination against protected characteristics, such race, gender, religion, and disability, etc., shield those making hiring decisions from the social media screening process. Have human resources do it and share only job-related information. Check only public sites for social media and refrain from asking candidates to provide passwords to view private content.

Also, know your [state laws](#). “A number of states have off-duty conduct laws that prohibit employers from taking adverse employment action based on conduct outside of work,” says King. “This may include personal information discovered on social media.”

In addition, focus on what candidates say about themselves more than what others say. It’s hard to verify accuracy and credibility of third-party testimonials. “Besides, positive feedback taken out of context may not be that helpful,” explains King. A testimonial that says, “Billy knows what he wants and goes for it!” does

not necessarily mean that Billy can't succeed in an environment that values selfless teamwork.

Most important, if you decide not to hire someone based on something you saw on social media, document the information used. "If you're asked to defend a decision, you want to be able to access the post that made the difference," says King. So, take a screen shot of anything you rely on in making your hiring decisions.

"My bottom line," avers Yazbak, "is nothing replaces clear job descriptions, good interview questions, and due diligence to get at a candidate's qualification in terms of skill and fit. They are the core pieces of your comprehensive recruitment strategy. Social media offers a set of tools to support this strategy."

We'd like to thank freelance writer David Moore for his help in writing this article. David specializes in writing about business, nonprofits, and higher education and can be reached at daveryanmoore12@gmail.com.

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