



The Coming War for Talent

April 17, 2020 – Earlier this week, the federal government reported that over 5 million people filed for unemployment benefits, bringing the four-week total to more than 22 million. These are shocking numbers, the likes of that we have not seen since the recession back in 2008-2009. The expectation is that similar numbers of unemployed individuals will be reported over the next several weeks. Hospitality, food service, manufacturing and retail are just a few of the many industries that have been hit hard with job reductions, furloughs and reductions in work hours.

Staffing firms have struggled over the past three years to find workers for their client demand. With unemployment at record lows and at or below full employment, there have not been enough available candidates looking for work. With the coronavirus pandemic and the shutdown of the US economy, that is all changing – and at breakneck speed. Some of the job reductions may be at risk of becoming permanent due to downsizing and restructuring when the economy recovers, but for the most part, companies will find themselves quickly trying to bring back their workforce when the recovery begins. Most economists project that the first half of 2020 will report negative GDP growth and a short recession, with the second half rebounding dra-

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matically—possibly as much as 30%—in the fourth quarter. With a high level of pent-up consumer and commercial demand, once the flood gates open, everyone will be fighting over the available workers who are actively looking to return to the workforce.

So how should staffing companies position themselves to prepare for this coming war for talent? The ones who will win the war will develop strategic plans now for reaching those available workers, and they will deploy all the relevant communication tools and channels that they can to see and be seen.

UNIQUE MESSAGING

Staffing firms must create a unique message that speaks directly to the talent they are seeking. That message must clearly define the value the firm brings to the worker. There are questions on the candidate's mind that must be answered, such as:

Who are you and why should I listen to you?

Why should I consider your staffing firm to help me find work?

Do you really care about my wellbeing and my return to the workforce?

Do you provide competitive pay and benefits?

Just posting openings to job boards won't be enough to distinguish your staffing firm from the other hundreds of others that will be doing the same thing.

TIMING

In order to be fully prepared to take advantage of the coming crunch for talent, the winning firms will get out ahead of the pack. Assuming that the recovery will begin in the June-July time frame, the time is now to begin making your presence known. Like most successful marketing endeavors, capturing top-of-mind awareness requires repetition and consistency. A multi-week campaign with a consistent message and/or theme and call to action is necessary in order to stand out in a crowded field.

little effort and investment has been made by the staffing community to make it easier for candidates to interact with their firms. Those that do will capture the lion's share of available contingent talent.

ASK FOR THE ORDER

As with branding, staffing companies are great at getting in front of prospective clients and making convincing arguments as to why they are the best choice for contingent staffing, and then closing the deal. When it comes to recruiting, however, those same firms have an (unrealistic) expectation that potential workers will see their job postings on a job site or their internal website and just automatically choose them. Nothing could be further from the truth. With the coming onslaught

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BRANDING

Staffing companies spend considerable time, money, and effort to cultivate their client-facing brands. Why, then, do they ignore branding as it relates to the employment market? The message and brand used to speak to clients and prospects is completely meaningless to the contingent marketplace. The most successful staffing organizations have given considerable thought to their "employment brand" and have made it a priority to interact with that market as aggressively as they do their client markets.

TECHNOLOGY

Many online applications and candidate platforms are unfriendly for users, require too much input, and do not have adequate methods for taking the candidate all the way through the hiring process. With all of the available tools for interacting online, it is shocking how

of potential workers that will be available, it will be a "seller's market" and candidates will have many options. The best staffing firms will make a strong appeal to those candidates to come to work for them and will present a clear call to action. They will also have realistic expectations that in order to attract and hire the best talent, they need to stand out as the best choice possible.

Now is the perfect time to begin laying the foundation for a strong and effective recruitment marketing program. Whether you do it yourself or work closely with an outside recruitment marketing firm to create a strategic plan, you will not only bring back the workforce that was lost during the downturn but you will most likely gain some of your competitor's contingent workers. Who would say no to that?

Villing + Company is a marketing communications firm providing recruitment marketing, branding, web development, advertising, design, social media planning and support to the staffing industry and other business sectors. Villing + Company is led by Jay Mattern, co-founder and former CEO of a large staffing firm, a three-time Staffing 100 recipient and a Certified Staffing Professional. He can be reached at jay@villing.com.