

Social Media as an Employee Recruitment Tool

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ABSTRACT

Social media can be used in the hospitality industry as a recruiting tool. Social networking sites are able to provide a method for recruiters to build two-way communication and engage job candidates. The appeal of lower costs for corporations also makes social media an attractive recruiting method. However, there is a lack of information about how job candidates perceive social media in the job search process and their ability to examine job openings. This proposed study will survey job applicants and examine their reaction to an organization's employment brand, the company website, and the applicant attraction to a company. In addition, it will study job applicants' expected commitment to the company after hire.

Keywords: *social media, recruiting, hospitality*

INTRODUCTION

The usage of social media sites in the hospitality industry is often primarily used to draw guests to properties and increase customer loyalty. With Generation Y being a prominent player in the job market, there is now a stronger emphasis on using social media to engage and recruit employees. This poses the question: how do job applicants see social media as a recruitment tool?

Social media plays a very important role in people's lives. It is identified as a "free participation that allows (communities) to get engaged and build genuine relationship[s]" (Narvey, 2009). Examples of social media include Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Twitter, and Second Life. While there are design differences between these sites, the basic components are the same (Smith, 2010). LinkedIn and Facebook, however, stand out as recruiting tools since they both include job-posting features for recruiters.

Facebook and LinkedIn are most popular among young professionals. In a study conducted on 430 employees, LinkedIn and Facebook use is highest among the employees who are aged 26 to 45. In addition, 52% of the people surveyed use LinkedIn, 49% use Facebook, 31% use MySpace, and 6% use Twitter (Skeels, 2009). Employers

who use LinkedIn and Facebook, as a result, have the highest potential of reaching young professionals in the workplace.

In July 2010, Facebook revealed that it had over 500 million active users (Schroeder, 2010). In August it was reported that U.S. web users spent 41.1 million minutes on the website. That is equivalent to 9.9% of their entire time web-surfing that month (Schroeder, 2010). LinkedIn, on the other hand, has 30 million users and is used purely for business and networking reasons (Bulik, 2008). LinkedIn is described by users as a virtual contact book. Both these sites, as a result, allow users to connect with others and tap into their internal network and contact business professionals.

Many hospitality companies have recently been experimenting with social media, and using it to help perform certain human resource functions. After surveying over 2,500 people, CareerBuilder found that 21% of employers use social networking sites to research and recruit potential employees (Leggatt, 2010). These new resources give employers the advantage of fast response. The employer who makes contact with the candidate right away “is the most likely to land them” (Berta, 2000). This gives employers the ability to find new candidates and move them through the interview process at a faster speed. It also helps employers filter out unqualified candidates. Alloro Restaurant uses primarily Facebook to recruit applicants. The general manager of the restaurant, Matteo Scaccabarozzi, messages friends and posts recruitment requirements to his Facebook page when he is looking for staff (Scaccabarozzi, 2007). Facebook and other social media sites are quickly proving themselves to be an efficient way to contact employment candidates. However, it is still too early to determine if these sites can be used as an efficient employment tool and help attract quality employees.

Social media may lend itself for targeting enthusiastic and interested job applicants. Yet, it is not clear if they help hospitality companies find employees who are interested in staying with the property for the long term. Managing and retaining human capital has been a challenge for hospitality companies. The turnover rates in this industry can reach 158% for front-line employees and 129% for managers (Poe, 2003). These numbers are incredibly high for an industry that emphasizes service consistency and brand loyalty. Such turnover rates can be costly for a company. A new hire of a college graduate could cost a company up to \$5000 (Evans, 2010). As a result, research on how effective social media, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, is used in attracting and engaging candidates could be important to hospitality companies.

Starbucks is an example of one hospitality company that has been experimenting with social media for job recruiting. At the ERE Media Webinar Expo, Starbucks revealed their plan to use social media for future recruiting. Starbucks plans to reach out to employment candidates by meeting them through popular media channels such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. In addition, they will include an area on these sites for employees to post videos, stories, tweets, and pictures. This new platform can help reduce costs and build two-way communication (Drum, 2010). Although Starbucks had faced some challenges with setting up their new recruiting platform, the overall response and results have been positive.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Allen, Van Scotter, and Otondo (2004) completed a study on recruitment communications. Through a study conducted on 989 undergraduate students, they found that media and media features have a direct effect on communication outcomes, attitudes, intentions, and behaviours related with potential employees for an organization. Conveying a constant recruiting message and utilizing media features such as two-way communication, personal focus, social presence, symbolism, and including a proper amount of organization, led to a positive opinion of the organization. In addition, these features were positively connected to the communication process. The findings show that media and media features have a significant effect on potential employees.

Moreover, with a sample of 175 undergraduates, Braddy, Foster, Wuensch, and Grossnickle (2003) completed a study on Internet recruiting. Their research found that maintaining a favourable recruitment image is related to being successful when attracting potential employees. The navigational ease of a website led to a favourable notion of the company versus websites that were difficult to navigate. The study addresses the potential of the Internet and the recruitment opportunities a company has through a user-friendly site.

Overall, the Internet can be used to increase communication outlets and influence potential employees. Using the Internet for communication purposes can lead to an increase in the number of job applicants a company can receive. In addition, an applicant can develop a lasting positive impression of the organization through the company's official web page. Although these studies address traditional Internet websites, the forms of communication mentioned are exercised on social networking sites.

METHODOLOGY

This study is designed to find out how job applicants perceive the attractiveness of social-media recruiting tools used by hospitality companies and their anticipated commitment to the company after hire. Methodologically, this study will build on instruments used by Allen, Mahto, and Otondo (2007). They examined the relationship among the effects of information, organizational brand, applicants' attitudes towards a company website, and applicant attraction to a company. Modifications will be made to Allen et al.'s (2007) instrument and measure the effects of information sent by social networking sites, organizational employment brands, applicants' attitudes towards a company's social networking site webpage, applicant attraction to a company, and their anticipated commitment to the company. The modified survey instrument will be pilot tested with the graduating seniors in a hospitality program in a national research institute located in the Northeast of the U.S. in the fall of 2010 before it is finalized for the actual study.

This study will adopt the criteria-based, mixed purpose sampling procedures to select informants for the survey (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Jia, 2006). The hospitality

programs that were listed as premium members in the International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education (I-CHRIE) organization will be included in this study. Many I-CHRIE premium members are highly recognized by both academia and industry. These programs play an important role in hospitality education. Students who are premium members in the I-CHRIE organization will be invited to participate in this study because these students come from major hospitality programs and many of them belong to Generation Y, which is very familiar with social media.

The survey will be monitored during the spring semester of 2011 through SurveyMonkey. An e-mail invitation with a link to the survey will be sent to the department head or the secretary of the selected hospitality programs, who will be asked to forward the e-mail to their undergraduate students. In addition to descriptive statistical analysis, Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis will be conducted with SPSS 18.0 to confirm the validity of the instrument and the relationships between constructs. The research findings are expected to provide some new useful information regarding how effective social media is as a recruiting tool in attracting Generation Y as potential employees.

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