Moving your Talent Acquisition strategy to the 21st century

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Abstract

When I began my role as Talent Acquisition Manager at UCO, I was given the broad objective of reviewing and upgrading the recruitment strategy to match the world around it. I had applied for my position on an applicant tracking system a few weeks earlier, so I knew the university was keeping pace with others in that regard – it was the lack of presence on social media, and with advertising sources that was lacking.

The primary advertising source when I arrived was to place an ad in the local city newspaper for around $700 (per posting) for a small section in the classifieds. This was done for a few positions based on how specialized/hard to fill they were. There was also the occasional dabbling with Craigslist and Monster.com if a position was really hard to fill. The return on investment from these sources was not a good use of our budget, and thus I set about examining how to get better bang for our buck.

Knowing that the majority of applicants today are looking for jobs online rather than in the local press (and having some analytics to back this up), I immediately set about giving UCO jobs an online presence. This proposal will detail the thinking behind this process and the steps taken to bring the Talent Acquisition Strategy at UCO into the world of social media and online advertising.

Introduction of the Organization

The University of Central Oklahoma prepares future leaders in an opportunity-rich environment. Located in Edmond, Central is one of the top public universities in Oklahoma City's thriving metropolitan area.

As Oklahoma's metropolitan university, Central offers its more than 17,000 students an innovative learning community where teaching comes first, a commitment seeded in the university's roots as a teachers' college. Students develop personal relationships with more than 450 full-time and 500 adjunct faculty and staff who, guided by the mission of helping students learn, are committed to transforming lives.

With 114 undergraduate majors and 63 graduate majors, Central is a smart investment for students dedicated to their success. Notable academic programs include Forensic Science, Music Theatre, Graphic Design, Mass Communications, Teacher Education, Accounting, the region's only accredited Professional Golf Management program, Jazz Studies and the Academy of Contemporary Music at UCO, located in downtown Oklahoma City's Bricktown district. The university just added to its downtown presence with the opening of the CHK|Central Boathouse on the Oklahoma River in 2015. Central also is one of two universities in the country named an official U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Training Site.

Statement of the Problem/Initiative

When I began my role as Talent Acquisition Manager at UCO, I was given the broad objective of reviewing and upgrading the recruitment strategy to match the world around it. I had applied for my position on an applicant tracking system a few weeks earlier, so I knew the university was keeping pace with others in that regard – it was the lack of presence on social media, and with advertising sources that was lacking.

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Promoting UCO as a great place to work

Employer Branding

Presence on Social Media

Advertising Sources

Improving Turnover

<u>Design</u>

The first step was to research & contact multiple recruitment sources, and get a demo/quote

for their solutions. As the majority of these solutions required annual contracts at $10k - $50k

ranges, I specifically asked for 3-6 month trial periods to compare the value of each. The result

was a busy 6 month period reviewing the following solutions:

- LinkedIN recruiter "head-hunting" tool & job posts.

- TweetMyJobs – profile and auto-scrape of all positions tweeted to all followers

- Glassdoor.com – enhanced company profile & job scraping

- Indeed.com – "sponsored" postings monthly based on set budget

- CareerBuilder – 10 postings package

- Berke Pre-Employment Testing – an online assessment that matches applicants "fit" to

  the position they are applying for

Part of the solution was also to improve our employer brand online. We already had a popular

UCO website, and our applicant tracking system, but we had nothing that specifically detailed

"what's great about UCO", or "why would I want to work for UCO". The plan for this took many

forms:

- Promoting UCO as a great place to work: Create a new section on our UCO website

  simply called "Reasons to work at UCO" – this was created by simply asking a sample of

  the campus the question "what do you love about working at UCO?" – it was not hard to

  collect 20 reasons and simply list them on this page. We then linked this page on our

applicant tracking site to send new applicants directly to this page to help persuade them to keep coming back, and to tell their friends. To take the "Reasons to work at UCO" theme even further, we wanted to make it even easier for prospective employees to hear these reasons, while at the same time, giving them a view of the beautiful campus we inhabit. To do this, we called on members from various employment areas (staff, faculty, and student employees) to take part in a short video where they get the chance to tell applicants what they love about working at UCO. This video we then embedded both on our website and on the applicant tracking site as the first thing anyone will see. It is also easy to post on social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

- Employer Branding: To further enhance our brand, and to emphasize to our applicants that our staff are not exaggerating their "reasons to work at UCO", we wanted to make sure we had something to back up these claims. For that, we emphasized top workplace awards we already had, and entered to take part in some additional ones (you can never have too many companies recognizing you as a top place to work!). We had already made the honor roll for "The Chronicle of Higher Education Great Colleges to Work For" list for the 2nd consecutive year, so promptly added this badge of honor to our applicant tracking and HR websites…. In Addition, we were recognized nationally as "Best for Vets" in Oklahoma 2015 in the Military Times. Not satisfied with just these 2, we entered "The Oklahoman Top Workplaces 2014" competition and had the campus surveyed – we were awarded the distinction with flying colors! Also, part of the Glassdoor.com solution is about employees being able to "review" the company they

work for - this allows job seekers the opportunity to hear anonymous feedback from many different roles and departments. For companies that achieve a set number of reviews, and also respond to these reviews (whether positive or negative), the distinction of "Glassdoor Open Company" can be achieved – we attained this in January 2015 – and again added this badge of honor for all our applicants to see. This badge shows our applicants that we are a transparent employer in all we do – and welcome feedback from our staff.

- Presence on Social Media: UCO already had a good presence on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIN – but this presence was primarily aimed at attracting students, not staff. To combat this, we created our own Jobs Twitter page (Jobs at UCO (@JobsatUCO) which auto-posts every job listed on our applicant tracking site (part of the TweetMyJobs solution). This account is managed by myself – I post interesting facts about UCO, as well as the "20 reasons to work at UCO", and the "Reasons to Work at UCO" video – we attract followers by running "retweet" and "follow us" giveaway drawings every couple weeks. Part of the TweetMyJobs package also adds a module to your Facebook account - this allowed us to link our twitter jobs as a unique widget on our UCO Facebook page which already had 33k + likes (no need to start a new page from scratch) = these 33k individuals now have instant access to all our jobs anytime they are on Facebook.

- Advertising Sources: Of the demos/trials we ran, we used our applicant tracking system to ask applicants where they saw our posting, and recorded the number of applicant's vs number of hires for each source. Although this was a tough comparison (as not all solutions were like-for-like), it did provide a good return on investment gauge to determine which solutions we wanted to roll with long term. My overall assessment of each solution compared to the needs of our organization are as follows:

  o LinkedIN recruiter "head-hunting" tool & job posts: The head hunting tool is a unique option that can't be compared to any other provider. This tool allows you to create a "Boolean" search to find candidates that match the exact key words you are looking for – whether these are software skills, job titles, location etc. You can match someone in your area and send them a direct message to tell them based on their background that you think they would be a great match. The result of our trial was that this is definitely a great tool, but we just didn't have the manpower required to run the manual searches and send the personal messages. We have a department of 2, and with around 30 postings per month, this was just too labor-intensive. Although we did run the tool for 3 months, and did have some applicants and hires, the cost of this tool was far more than other solutions that had either matched or bettered these results

  o TweetMyJobs: This source was vital in posting all of our positions on Twitter and Facebook – the results of this were slightly lower than the other trials, but the presence that these options' create take time to build followers, and my

research suggested Twitter and Facebook is the biggest growing area for job applicants – with this in mind we kept this solution.

- o Glassdoor.com: This source was one that I utilized as an applicant before I joined UCO; to read the employee reviews about working life here – this is also a growing trend – and a high rating on Glassdoor.com can positively influence an applicant in accepting a job offer. With this in mind we trialed the Enhanced Employer profile so we could scrape all job postings to our profile that included our "reasons to work at UCO" video etc. We currently have this solution ongoing because the unique "employer review" tool combined with the job postings gives us an increased online presence.

- o Indeed.com: If you are not currently using Indeed.com, then you are probably losing out on applicants and hires. Indeed's site doesn't look flashy or spectacular; it is plain, and to-the-point. At first, as an applicant, this put me off Indeed.com. That is, until I signed up to the job alerts, and found that Indeed effectively covered all other job alerts with other sites I was using all in one place. Indeed.com is effectively the one-stop shop for applicants at the moment – their solution, (which scrapes (seemingly) all job postings from every applicant tracking system) will probably be finding most of your positions already. The tool that they provide is "sponsored postings" – this allows you to promote certain positions each month, and you are then charged based on how much traffic you get in that posting. You can set a specific budget each month, and when that limit is hit, chose to either extend, or remove your posting accordingly. When we

rolled out this trial, it didn't take long for the applicants (and the hires) to start

indicating Indeed.com was where they had found the position. From around

0.5% in 2012, Indeed.com now makes up almost 30% of all applicants to UCO.

- o CareerBuilder: CareerBuilder is one of the more old-fashioned job boards – you

  buy credits, and post your position on their website where applicants can search

  and apply. We used this for 10 postings we had and unfortunately nobody was

  hired, and just a handful of applicants said they came through this route. The

  model that Career Builder has doesn't offer anything unique to add to our

  Employer Brand to justify using this long term.

- Improving Turnover: Once we get applicants applying into our Applicant Tracking

  System, we want to ensure our hiring departments have the best information at their

  fingertips to allow them to make the best hire. With this in mind, we explored the

  market for Pre-Employment Testing solutions. After many webinars, phone calls, and

  demos, the model that best suited what we were looking for was Berke.com. This is not

  an IQ test, but a personality and skills assessment. What makes this assessment so

  useful is that it compared the assessment to the unique traits/skills/requirements for

  the individual job they are applying to. The assessment is the same every time (testing

  personality, vocabulary, spatial awareness, logical reasoning etc.), but each of these

  areas are only important if they are part of the job in question. For example, spatial

  awareness would be a very relevant section for a graphic designer, but not so for an

  admin assistant. The end result is a high, medium, or low job fit match for each

applicant, and a report is sent to the hiring committee to read detailed info on how each applicant compares to the key areas for that position. Traditionally, screening Committee's only have a resume and an interview in order to determine who they want to hire – with this tool, the extra info and insights gained allow them to either back up their decision or make them think twice and ask that extra question before they fully commit. The feedback from committees that use the assessment are that this tool gives them an advantage towards select someone that is going to be the right fit for them for the long haul, and not just someone that is going to plug a hole for the short term. Ultimately, we will be running analytics on all hires that have used the Berke tool to determine how many high, medium, and low fit hires were selected by departments, and compare this info to their performance, promotions, and resignations.

Implementation

After our trials had been completed, we reviewed costs versus;

1. Number of applicants per source (quantifiable)

2. Number of hires per source (quantifiable)

3. Branding (subjective – based on what each solution can add in terms of online presence/employer reviews etc.)

4. Improving Turnover (this was specific to the Berke pre-employment assessment – at this stage, the decision was made based on feedback from trial departments, as metrics will take some years to really measure turnover and performance significantly)

The timeline for our trials was over a 6 month period – this allowed us to review prior to the start of a new fiscal year and decide what solutions to implement long term to match our strategy. We have since been running with the strategy from July 2014 to present.

The only pitfall we found was getting accurate analytics on applicants and hire sources. To begin with, we were basing this on how each applicant answered a question on their application form – "where did you hear about this position?" and selecting from a set answer set e.g. "Indeed.com, Directly from our ATS website jobs.uco.edu, Twitter etc." – We found that individuals would say they found the position directly on our ATS for a lot of cases even when they had come there from another source initially…. The reasons for this based on research is simply that applicants think it will impress a hiring department more if they make it sound like they had been searching our ATS over finding it on a job website (I assume as this makes it

seem like they are committed/dedicated to finding a job at UCO rather than searching by job title on a search website). The reason we uncovered this was we started using Google Analytics to compare the website that an applicant was using prior to coming to our ATS page – the results showed many more were coming from other Job Websites than were letting on.

<u>Benefits</u>

The Benefits from introducing this modernized Talent Acquisition Strategy are that our applicants now have a great first impression of UCO as a great place to work. Ultimately this is going to increase the number of applicants we have for our postings through word of mouth, and this increases the chances of our hiring committees finding the right candidate for their position. In the long run, this is going to help with our costs attributed to retention/turnover – although the analytics to back this up are the next stage of the strategy. The building of an online social media presence was essential to bringing UCO up to the expectations of the current millennial generation – by creating the networking sites on Twitter and Facebook we are both boosting the branding of UCO, and making it as easy as 1 click for a "passive" applicant to view our available jobs. The chances of this happening previously were slim as an applicant would have to either know to search our website, or happen to be reading in the local newspaper. Because of the way we built up the website with the awards, benefits, and reasons to work at UCO sections, anytime I am speaking with an interested party, I simply send them to the relevant page and let UCO sell itself – it's hard to argue with the staff, employer reviews, and the top workplace awards all at once.

Retrospect

In retrospect, we would've ensured that the analytics we were using to test the demos for advertising sources were not open to the bias that we found in asking only the applicants. When we introduced Google Analytics to compare, we found the discrepancy that suggested a large percentage of applicants were stating our ATS (jobs.uco.edu) was where they had first seen the posting advertised. Although this was true for the majority of cases, there was a large section of those applicants that had in fact been directed to our ATS via another website first (usually one of the Job Websites we were running in the demo). The reason this was not a bigger concern at the time was that all demos were still facing the same issue equally – so they all had the same disadvantage.