TALENT ACQUISITION TRENDS, 2016: CANDIDATES TAKE COMMAND

In 2016 — when 73% of companies indicate that talent acquisition is absolutely critical to executing their businesses’ strategies — it is imperative to have robust, effective, and easy-to-use technologies and tactics in place. It’s not just about supporting HR and hiring managers, though. Successful talent acquisition today puts candidates front and center. This report explores these talent acquisition trends in 2016 and how to respond to those trends in order to effectively source, recruit, hire, and onboard candidates.
Setting the Stage for Talent Acquisition Today

Talent acquisition has matured over the past few years. The process has been traditional, predictable, and administrative by nature, and entirely owned by HR. As recently as 2014, per Aberdeen’s *Talent Acquisition 2014: Reverse the Regressive Curse* (June 2014), 60% of companies recruited reactively; i.e., they only sought new talent when there were open job requisitions, instead of actively recruiting and building a candidate pipeline. Presently, more and more companies plan ahead and don’t wait for candidates to come to them. Case in point, per Aberdeen’s research *Best Practice: Use Modern Recruiting to Stay Cutting Edge* (January 2016) Best-in-Class companies (sidebar, page 3) are 55% more likely than All Others (68% vs. 44%) to proactively build and expand the candidate pipeline, regardless of current hiring needs. This tactic, though, represents only one of many ways talent acquisition is transforming into a strategic, candidate-oriented function that extends beyond HR.

Nowadays, smart departments work cohesively with a variety of internal and external parties to grow their organizations, from the traditional roles of recruiters and hiring managers, to individual contributors, marketing, IT, executives, and customers, as well as active and passive candidates. Notably, Best-in-Class companies are 45% more likely than All Others (61% vs. 42%) to involve various business stakeholders in talent acquisition strategy-setting and execution. Successful talent acquisition today means using a variety of technologies and strategies, including: social media for sourcing, employer branding, talent communities, mobile access, video interviewing, pre-boarding, and more. While not every technology / strategy is a necessity to successful sourcing, recruiting, hiring, and onboarding, Best-in-Class organizations
are more inclined to use an assortment of tools that are accessible to them to best find, interact, engage with, and hire top candidates.

Candidates Reign Supreme: It’s Time to Respond Accordingly

Diversifying resources and taking decisive actions is quite timely as companies across the board are struggling to overcome the shortages of critical skills available in the labor pool. Fifty-eight percent of organizations indicate that the dearth of quality, applicable candidates for the most needed roles is the biggest challenge facing talent acquisition today. The jobs and responsibilities are becoming increasingly complex, but the workforce, on average, doesn’t have the necessary abilities, skills, and knowledge to satisfy these needs.

Not everyone is sitting on their laurels, though. As previously mentioned, top performing companies are more likely to build candidate pipelines regardless of current hiring needs. They’re also intent on creating an employer brand that targets desired candidates. For instance, per Aberdeen’s Employer Branding: What a Known Identity Can Do for Recruitment (February 2016), Best-in-Class organizations are 42% more likely (37% vs. 26%) than All Others to create and promote an employer brand that targets desired talent. In addition, such companies take whatever steps necessary to improve the candidate experience. Accordingly, Best-in-Class companies are 35% more likely (42% vs. 31%) than All Others to invest in new technology to make talent acquisition more engaging for candidates.

Such actions are increasingly appropriate to sway potential employees to apply. After all, 75% of the fully employed

In Aberdeen’s November 2015 talent acquisition survey, the following key performance indicators (KPIs) were used to distinguish the Best-in-Class (top 20% of aggregate performers) from the Industry Average (middle 50%), and Laggard (bottom 30%) organizations, with mean performance among the Best-in-Class as follows:

- 79% of employees received rating of “exceeds expectations” on last performance review.
- 79% year-over-year improvement in length of strategic talent search (time to hire).
- 15% year-over-year improvement in revenue per full-time equivalent (FTE).
workforce consider themselves passive candidates; thus, it's more of a challenge than ever before. Today, the candidate reigns supreme. That's why businesses who want to truly grow through hiring (as opposed to promotions and/or strategic workforce decisions) need to be conscientious about how they approach candidates. Accordingly, the biggest efforts to improve candidate experiences focus on technologies and processes (Table 1).

Table 1: Talent Acquisition’s Candidate Experience Priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tactics to improve the candidate experience</th>
<th>All Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Streamlining processes to shorten the time to hiring decision</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping candidates up-to-date about their application status throughout the process</td>
<td>39%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leveraging social media to interact with candidates</td>
<td>38%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing a talent community to reach candidates</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leveraging mobile solutions for candidates to find and apply for jobs</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing in new technology to make recruitment more engaging</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
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55% of businesses across the board indicate that streamlining processes to shorten the time to hiring decision is the most effective way to improve the candidate experience.

Applicants in the current job market now expect a seamless process that resonates with them, much like any other ideal consumer experience. This is known as consumerization. The encounters should cover the entire application process, from being found / finding a job, to applying and interviewing, to placement, onboarding, and even rejection. Whether companies realize it or not, a bad candidate experience can have an impact on any organization's ability to acquire strong talent in the
future. All it takes is a few reviews on company review websites, some social media posts, or comments elsewhere to leave a lasting impact on any employer brand.

That’s where a little due diligence around impressions and experience can pay off dividends for present and future talent acquisition. Accordingly, Best-in-Class companies are 23% more likely than All Others (38% vs. 31%) to gather feedback from past and current candidates. With such information, organizations can help make more informed decisions and make any necessary improvements / updates. In that way, a great candidate experience doesn’t require an identifiable brand, but it demands that businesses are aware of the potential impact that applications and interviews can have on the business. All it takes is one voice to make everything come tumbling down — from talent acquisition, to customer and employee retention, to the organization’s overall success.

Differentiating Exceptional Talent Acquisition Tactics and Technologies

This is where employing talent acquisition tactics used by Best-in-Class companies can be a major difference-maker between hiring success or failure. This section will address tactics from sourcing, to recruitment, and on through onboarding. To help with such strategies, discerning HR departments have an ongoing dialogue with other parts of the business. Each team — from marketing, IT, and beyond — has a different perspective that should be taken into account when trying to effectively recruit and hire candidates.
As previously mentioned, top-tier companies don’t leave HR to handle talent acquisition on their own; instead, they instill a culture of collaboration. That has a trickle-down effect on specific activities. For instance, per Aberdeen’s *Talent Acquisition Takes a Village and It All Starts with Collaboration* (November 2015), Best-in-Class companies are 57% more likely than All Others (33% vs. 21%) to empower internal teams — recruiters, HR team members, hiring managers, and others — to collaborate on candidates. With such an approach in place, every relevant party can feel as though their input is heard and they’re a part of the process.

Such a collaborative culture also extends beyond the traditional cohesiveness HR has with other departments, including IT, marketing, and others. For instance, implementing top technology requires insight from IT. Best-in-Class companies understand the importance of IT’s feedback and are 22% more likely than All Others (56% vs. 46%) to collaborate with IT to select talent acquisition technology providers. They have a lot of power to help roll out top-of-the-line technologies and resources. IT can be a very strong ally to HR and talent acquisition, so it’s important to be considerate and careful with how they’re approached.

Similarly, appealing to candidates successfully is a team effort. Accordingly, per Aberdeen’s *Recruitment Marketing: Converting Candidates, Winning Talent* (February 2016) report, Best-in-Class companies are 68% more likely than All Others (67% vs. 40%) to involve the marketing department in employment branding and advertising tactics for candidates. Successful marketers know what is and isn’t quality content, and they understand which channels are best to tap into and when. But marketing is one piece of the puzzle. Savvy departments have their own experts...
who are recruitment marketers and are trained in their own way. Another piece is around utilizing contemporary technologies and tactics to better attract and interact with candidates. Such resources include: talent communities, video, employer branding, mobile, social networks, career sites, recruitment marketing, candidate relationship management (CRM), and beyond. Best-in-Class companies understand the value of variety and invest accordingly (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Top Companies Are Committed to Using Technologies to Attract the Right Candidates**

Best-in-Class organizations are 63% more likely than All Others to use talent communities to help attract the right candidates.

Such top-performing organizations recognize that there’s no cut and dry method for attracting candidates. Hence, per the chart above, the Best-in-Class diversify their investments and don’t rely on one method over the other.

However, when investing in any one particular resource, savvy organizations incorporate other best practices to enhance any
new recruitment strategy. Case in point, Best-in-Class businesses don’t just rely on a pre-selected set of employees for supporting their talent communities. Instead, they incorporate various employees and their perspectives into building talent communities for candidates. More specifically, such organizations are 2.3 times more likely than All Others (42% vs. 18%) to include such varied angles into talent communities.

Another area where top performing companies differentiate themselves from everyone else is onboarding strategy. After businesses have spent so much time, energy, and money on sourcing, recruiting, and hiring, it’s a shame when businesses miss out on a great opportunity to get new hires excited and engaged early on. Best-in-Class onboarding starts right after an employee receives the signed offer letter. Oftentimes, though, employers don’t start the process until much later. Best-in-Class companies grasp the value of beginning the onboarding process before day one. This is also known as pre-boarding. Notably, they are 53% more likely than All Others (69% vs. 45%) to pre-board their new hires. Doing so enables new hires to feel that much more connected with the business from the onset of their tenures.

Set Expectations for All Relevant Parties

While strong teamwork and excellent technology is important to the ongoing success of talent acquisition today and for the future, it’s increasingly necessary to plan out who should be hired, what skills and characteristics are most desired, and who should be held accountable. For starters, it’s a necessity to set precedents for recruiting to ease the process for everyone. For instance, Best-in-Class companies are 2.1 times more likely than All Others (72% vs. 34%) to create success profiles of top
performing current employees, high performers, and high potentials to make recruitment easier.

In doing so, each member of the hiring team will have a better understanding of what success looks like internally and can source, recruit, screen, and interview candidates depending on their roles in the talent acquisition process. In addition, such companies can more clearly explain, both externally and internally, exactly what they’re looking for and how such individuals can fit within the organization overall. Setting standards for candidates based on current employees’ performance is great; but other expectations should be set as well.

For instance, hold recruiters accountable for whom they end up placing in their open requisitions, instead of simply letting them disassociate themselves from the process once offer letters are signed. Fittingly, Best-in-Class firms are 55% more likely than All Others (90% vs. 58%) to set performance expectations for recruiters. This is a great way to ensure that recruiters understand that their responsibilities are inherent to the ongoing success of the organization. With that said, it’s important that the expectations set are obtainable and relevant.

**Best-in-Class firms are 55% more likely than All Others to set performance expectations for recruiters.**

### Mobile, Social, Video, and Beyond; Top Modalities for Success

Fortunately, there are a slew of resources presently available to assist with the talent acquisition process. Some of them, as recently discussed, are used by Best-in-Class companies. Others are still finding their place in the twenty-first century talent acquisition technology landscape. However, there are still a few modalities that continue to be favored and fruitful for all users.
Such strategies include the usage of mobile, social, and video in conjunction with attracting, interviewing, recruiting, and hiring candidates. Per Figure 2 below, top performing companies perceive these resources to be strong allies for all aspects of the talent acquisition process.

**Figure 2: Mobile, Social, and Video Are Still Successful for Talent Acquisition**

Best-in-Class companies are 37% more likely than All Others to use mobile tools to support their talent acquisition strategies.

The adoption of such technologies is on the rise, too. Notably, per Aberdeen’s research *Getting Social About Today’s Sourcing* (November 2014), 56% of Best-in-Class companies and 44% of All Others used social media and tools for talent acquisition. What’s more, top companies perceive such resources to be more valuable than the strategies of previous years. For instance, Best-in-Class businesses are 1.9 times more likely (62% vs. 33%) to consider using social media and tools to be more effective for connecting with candidates, as compared with job boards.

Other tactics have entered the conversations more recently, but have been around for a while, such as employer branding.
Branding, as discussed earlier, has a strong kinship with marketing. That’s why top companies use the expertise and knowledge of said departments in conjunction with their own strategies. Some companies even have their own employer brand or recruitment marketing expert on their talent acquisition team. But top branding nowadays intersects with social as well. For instance, Best-in-Class companies are 40% more likely than All Others (66% vs. 47%) to use social media and social tools to strengthen the employer brand. In doing so, talent acquisition processes have a stronger social presence and help build a better employer brand, too.

Empower Your Employees to Enhance Talent Acquisition

In a time when candidates have more options than ever before about where they can work, it’s a necessity to utilize the best technologies, processes, and tactics available to ensure the greatest likelihood of successful, quality hiring. However, sometimes, the most effective approaches are right out in the open and don’t require additional investments. Case in point, employees can play a major role in helping to find, recruit, and hire top talent. After all, they have their own professional and personal networks through which they can share job openings, and those networks can build upon themselves to share the word about requisitions and careers.

Employers, whether Best-in-Class or All Others, perceive employee referrals and networks to be the most effective way to recruit employees, as demonstrated in Table 2 below. This strategy is far and away more effective than the next closest approach of social networking, followed by job boards. In
essence, employees hold the key to the future of hiring worldwide. It’s just a question of whether you’re ready to enable them to do so.

Figure 3: Trust Your Employees to Lead You into the Future

Best-in-Class businesses are 2.5 times more likely than All Others to integrate employee referral programs with social media.

While it's important not to expect too much of employees, as they have all of their other responsibilities to handle already, they also want to feel connected with the business and feel like their efforts make a difference. Notably, 57% of companies believe that the biggest reason employees commit to their jobs and employers is that they are drawn to what they do and believe their efforts make a difference.

Best practices can include informing employees about open requisitions and asking them to share said openings with their networks, whether via social, email, in-person, or otherwise. To that point, Best-in-Class businesses are 2.5 times more likely than All Others (45% vs. 18%) to integrate employee referral programs with social media. These individually effective strategies, when intertwined, can have a that much greater
impact on talent acquisition and the growth of the business as a whole.

Conclusion and Next Steps

There are many technologies and tactics available today that can aid talent acquisition, and make the process even more active and effective than it is already. To get there, it’s important to weigh which available modalities will work best with your current talent acquisition efforts. Every company is different. But with candidates more expectant than ever about the effectiveness of the process, it’s imperative to weigh all options and hear multiple voices. To get started, take the following steps:

1. Assess the popular technologies of mobile, social, and video first and foremost. They’re well received and effective for a reason.
2. Consider updated strategies to take talent acquisition into the future, such as pre-boarding and employee referrals.
3. Determine which newer technologies will be implemented based on specific needs. Look at recruitment marketing, CRMs, and talent communities specifically.
4. Ask for assistance from other departments on effective strategies and technology implementations. IT, marketing, and finance are available to collaborate on which resources will work best and when.

With candidates more expectant than ever about the effectiveness of the talent acquisition process, it’s imperative to weigh all options and hear multiple voices to determine how to proceed.
5. Seek out candidates’ feedback on the talent acquisition process, and use their perspectives to shape the future. Best-in-Class companies are 61% more likely than All Others (58% vs 36%) to use assessments and surveys to measure candidates’ satisfaction with the talent acquisition process.

Not every technology and tactic will be a good fit. But HR doesn’t have to be alone anymore to figure that out. After all, every one (including current and past candidates) has a voice and can help support and grow the company. Teamwork is just valued as ever for talent acquisition in 2016 and beyond.

For more information on this or other research topics, please visit www.aberdeen.com.

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**Related Research**

- **Employer Branding: What a Known Identity Can Do for Recruitment**; February 2016
- **Best Practice: Use Modern Recruiting to Stay Cutting Edge**; January 2016
- **Talent Acquisition Takes a Village and It All Starts with Collaboration**; November 2015
- **Getting Social About Today’s Sourcing**; November 2014
- **Talent Acquisition 2014: Reverse the Regressive Curse**; June 2014

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