

Chapter 42

The Use of Social Media in College Recruiting and the Student Job Search

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses the gap in the literature regarding employer recruitment of college students, and more specifically, the use of social media in the recruitment and hiring processes by both students and employers. Background information on traditional recruiting strategies is briefly discussed as well as how employers are using social media. Additionally, how millennial college students typically communicate and how they should be using social media in the job search process are addressed. This chapter also includes data from a survey, administered by the authors, of U.S.-based employers who recruit college students with anecdotal information about how they utilize, or do not utilize, social media in their recruiting and hiring practices.

INTRODUCTION

For over a decade, the popularity of connecting with others through social media has been steadily increasing. Friends following friends - or even following others not connected through friendship - to see what they are doing, where they are, who they know, or just to explore one's personal interests is a normal daily activity supported through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and similar outlets. Also becoming more common place is the use of social media in the job search and hiring process. Candidates and employers are using social media as a new way of interacting and finding out about each other.

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The Use of Social Media in College Recruiting

Candidates are creating profiles, following organizations, researching opportunities, and finding job leads through various social media outlets. In the Class of 2012 Student Survey Report conducted by the National Association of College and Employers (NACE) about 41 percent of graduating students used social media in their job search (NACE 2012). In the coming years, this number should be on the rise. So what are some of the best social media sources presently used for this purpose and how should they be used?

For those candidates who are using or planning to use social media in their employment searches, it is necessary to be aware of their online presence and how that may affect their ability to be hired. Creating a “brand” that speaks to who they are as candidates, highlights their positive attributes, enables them to interact with others in a professional manner, and does not shed any negative light on their candidacy is essential. Candidates should be mindful that with the prevalence of employers’ access to such platforms, something they did not wish a potential employer to know about them could be discovered.

As for the other side of the employment perspective, ever-changing technology has altered methods employers use for recruiting new talent. While traditional avenues for recruiting may still exist, the cliché that it is not what you know, but who you know is even more present through social media. In the *2012-2013 Recruiting Trends* study created and published by the Collegiate Employment Research Institute at Michigan State University, 29 percent of employers surveyed indicated that “social media is becoming well established as an important strategy for engaging students” (p. 23). This report lists travel costs, time away from the office, and efficiency in recruitment as top reasons for leaning on social media and other technologies within hiring practices. Employers are utilizing social media for a variety of purposes. Some recruiters effectively utilize these online outlets to connect with candidates and advertise opportunities. Others utilize such networks to conduct informal screenings or unofficial background checks on candidates.

Further, social media is a rapidly changing environment, and which outlets hiring managers are choosing to utilize continues to evolve at warp speed. Is Facebook the 2013 version of MySpace from 2005? Will recruiters be able to continue the same methods used today in one, two, or five years? As candidates are online earlier and earlier, will employers expect candidates to be where they are online or will employers continue to adapt and change to keep up with the younger workplace generation? Should we expect to find images of job postings on Instagram in the near future? For candidates, are there other social media sources that will yield more opportunities for them in the coming years? Will Foursquare, and Pinterest help in the job search?

This chapter will address the use of social media in the employment realm from the hiring agents’ point of view and from the perspective of candidates, specifically the students. The chapter will highlight how hiring agents are utilizing social media through use of anecdotal evidence and survey data collected from U.S. based college recruiting staff by the authors. Questions of how and why candidates’ employment searches should include using social media as one of the tools in their job search kit will be explored. How candidates should create a brand worth showcasing to potential employers will be discussed. Additionally, this chapter will address how to protect the personal brand to minimize unintended access of information that would contribute negatively to that image. Current trends in what social media outlets are most used by candidates and recruiting professionals will be addressed in this chapter. Finally, the chapter will provide recommendations on how to move forward in the 21st century with recruiting millennial students through the use of social media and questions for further research will be posed.

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