Recruiting Technology Meets the Mobile Communication Revolution

AKKEN

Recruitment and staffing have always been fast-paced, dog-eat-dog occupations. Every day, the know-how and capabilities of the individual and the firm prove the old adage that time is money. When you miss a beat or stumble trying to get the necessary information to the right person, you lose a deal.

So it shouldn't be surprising that mobile technology, which has altered the way people communicate in nearly every aspect of their lives, from making dinner plans to executing stock deals, would eventually change the way recruiting works. The only questions are: Why has it taken so long and who's doing it right?

Those questions are answered in this article from Akken, provider of the first all-in-one business software suite to automate the core functions of staffing and recruiting firms.

The Situation: Mobile Technology Raced Ahead of the Recruiting Technology

Mobile communication is no longer the wave of the future. It is the state of communications today. The number of mobile subscribers overall will continue to grow rapidly and, more to the point of how the trend will affect recruiting, smartphone sales will similarly continue to skyrocket.

Last year, there were an estimated 4.3 billion mobile subscribers worldwide, and the number is expected to reach 5.8 billion this year, according to Portio Research[1]. Sales of smartphones are expected to reach 406.7 million by 2015 and account for 29 percent of the total global market of phone handsets, according to Ovum, a research and analytic firm.[2]

As a result of these tectonic shifts in the world of communication, the work of recruitment has become faster-paced, more dispersed and less anchored to an office than ever.

"We've learned from listening to our clients that in every level of recruitment, people are using smartphones for their day-to-day jobs, to improve and speed up what they do, from dealing with temporary hires and candidates, to providing client service, to staying in touch with their staff and team members," says Giridhar Akkineni, founder, president and CEO of Akken.

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[1] Portio Research, Mobile Factbook 2009,
http://www.portiodirect.com/productDetail.aspx?pid=49$55$51$431.
[2] "Smartphones: The Silver Lining of the Declining Handset Market,"
http://www.mediabuzz.com.sg/asian-channels/june-2009/483-smartphones-the-silver-lining-of-the-declining-handset-market.

As summed up neatly by CareerMag.com, an online recruitment and career community:

- More and more hiring managers and candidates are on the go as part of their routine business lives and are no longer waiting at their desk for a phone call or email from a recruiter.

- Job seekers are increasingly turning to their mobile devices to search for jobs, hoping for a competitive edge by staying informed, reacting quickly to new job opportunities and getting in front of prospective employers faster.

- Employers are increasingly finding it necessary to incorporate mobile strategies into their overall recruitment programs to ensure they can effectively connect with their target audience from anywhere, at any time.

- Mobile recruitment options, such as texting and mobile job-search applications, provide employers with extended reach into active and passive job seeker communities, connecting with people who search for jobs directly from their mobile devices.[3]

An example is the daily life of Matt Smith, vice president of personnel services for Houston-based The Liberty Group, a staffing and recruitment firm.

> **"It takes time, it's inconvenient and it costs us money because it ties up another person."**

"I travel quite extensively, among our offices in Houston, Austin, San Antonio and Dallas, so I'm in the airport or the car a lot, and I constantly have to wait to open a laptop, or call the office for someone to get the information for me," Smith says. "It takes time, it's inconvenient and it costs us money because it ties up another person."[4]

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[3] CareerMag.com, "Mobile: The Next Revolution in Recruiting,"
   http://www.careermag.com/career-resources/mobile-applications/mobile-the-next-revolution-in-recruiting.html.
[4] Matt Smith, telephone interview, April 28, 2010.

Despite the increasing use of mobile devices by recruiters and staffers in general, mobile recruitment and staffing solutions have been unavailable. According to Akkineni, two factors explain why, until now, high-powered, richly featured mobile solutions for recruiting and staffing have not been available:

1. Broadband capacity was either insufficient to handle fully featured recruitment solutions, or broadband was not yet a commonplace business office technology, or both.

2. Software applications created for desktop and laptop operating systems could not be readily redesigned for use on mobile device servers, and new applications are created uniquely for one smartphone platform (e.g., an application designed for the iPhone will not necessarily function on a Blackberry).

The Solution: Broadband Everywhere Meets SaaS and Cross-Platform Design for Total Recruiting Flexibility

The challenge of dealing with insufficient bandwidth for mobile devices was simply a matter of waiting for the mobile device technology to catch up with the recruitment software that Akken and possibly other recruitment and staffing solution firms were developing for mobile devices.

For example, Akken originally considered launching its Mobile Software as a Service (Mobile SaaS) solution 18 months ago. But at the time, before G3 technology, the limitations of cellular bandwidth and of smartphone design conspired to prevent the company from offering an optimal graphical presentation on a smartphone screen or for the program to run fast enough.

Instead, the company waited and launched its beta version of Akken Staffing Mobile in March, to a very positive response.

"If we had launched earlier, it would have run slowly, and that would have defeated the purpose," Akkineni says. "What's the point of building a Web application that is going to take forever to open up? You don't want that on your desktop computer. And on a mobile device, the desire for speed is even more critical.

"Anything you need to do on a desktop needs to be done faster on a mobile device," Akkineni added. "That makes it more challenging to develop for mobile devices."

John Seyler, vice president and managing partner for the national staffing and recruitment firm IntelliChoice Medical Staffing, said the need for recruitment software for mobile devices has been huge.

"Like any service business, this industry is all about relationships, about the client feeling that the staffing firm is looking out for them, understands them and their business, and won't steer them wrong," Seyler says. "So, being constantly on the go but also having all of the necessary information at your fingertips has always been paramount."[5]

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On the other hand, Seyler feels that Akken's mindful, measured approach to developing and launching a mobile recruitment software solution made perfect sense and speaks volumes about the company itself.

"What really matters is Akken thinks the way the owner of a staffing firm thinks," Seyler says. "They didn't rush this app out there. They really listened to what their clients needed – what people like me and my team need – and asked how they could do something about that, asked what would help us work faster and with more flexibility. Then, they responded to that."

Akken Staffing Mobile performs all of the crucial functions of the company's traditional solution, which is an all-in-one, Software as a Service business software suite that automates core office functions of staffing and recruiting firms. That means Akken Staffing Mobile offers on-the-run mobile access to:

- Email, calendar and tasks.

- Client and candidate phone numbers, email addresses, notes, activities and other important information.

- Address information for travel directions to client offices (through a third-party application for maps or navigation).

- Tools to prepare for offsite meetings without being dependent on a laptop or printouts for information.

[5] John Seyler, telephone interview, April 30, 2010.

"**Without Akken Staffing Mobile, we would need to carry around paper, or we would need to go find a computer and log on.**"

After the challenge of bandwidth to allow the application to run quickly enough to be valuable to recruiters, there was the challenge of "converting" a software program that was created for desktop and laptop operating systems – including making it easy to use on a small screen and meeting the ever-present issue of data security. That hurdle was overcome with the further development of Software as a Service (SaaS) solutions and, as Akken was able to accomplish, development of an SaaS solution that works across all smartphone platforms.

With SaaS, all of a program's software is stored, maintained and updated by the vendor. The client accesses the program and their files and data from a Web browser. The client's data and documents are similarly stored on the host server, totally secure and safe.

"One of the biggest concerns with mobile device technology for recruitment, after bandwidth, has been security," Akkineni says.

"If the mobile device program was like a desktop program, where you need to download an app and then download documents and store them to the device, and you lose that smartphone, it's just like losing your PC with all of your data in it," he says. "With SaaS, your data stays on the server, not in your desktop or in your smartphone."

Also with SaaS, the client does not need to download any software, pay any licensing fees or buy any additional hardware. The software is provided as a service and the client usually pays on a monthly or other subscription basis. SaaS provides a huge cost savings over an on-site or self-hosted system.

"As a smaller firm (IntelliChoice Medical Staffing has about 120 employees nationwide), we rely on external systems and technology to make us efficient and allow us to compete with the larger companies," Seyler says. "That's what Akken does for us."

For mobile device technology, and particularly in the case of Akken's service, the use of SaaS makes it possible for the program to respond quickly, because the user only downloads the data or documents they need, when they need them.

"For us, this is huge," Seyler says. "We're in a 24-hour-a-day business."

He told the story of a hospital that called at 9 p.m. on a Saturday for a surgical position for a shift that was to start at 11 p.m.

"Without Akken Staffing Mobile, we would need to carry around paper, or we would need to go find a computer and log on," Seyler says. "Plus, at 9 o'clock on a Saturday night, let's face it, most of my recruiters aren't going to be thinking about work. But if they have their iPhone or Blackberry and they can access their files and information straight from their phone, that's a tremendous help. They can respond right then.

"These are often first-come, first-served deals," Seyler adds. "It's a competitive advantage to be able to move quickly. If we get back to our customer quickly, we can beat people out every time. Recently, we've been able to do that more and more."

Another challenge that Akken has overcome is cross-platform compatibility. Rather than try to develop one version of its recruitment solution for each type of phone, Akken waited and developed a single design that would work on any smartphone. The result was lower development costs for Akken, which in turn means it can pass the savings on to its clients.

Equally important to the user, Akken's approach means its clients can use the program across their entire staff, regardless of the type of smartphone they have.

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"Over time, in the next two years, these phones are going to be obsolete anyway," Akken's Akkineni says. "They've already started working on 4G networks, and there's some R&D on 5G. So it didn't make sense for us to design phone-by-phone. It's only going to get better and faster."

About Akken

Akken is an innovative Software as a Service company that is growing fast and causing a rapid shift in the staffing and recruiting market. Akken provides the first all-in-one business software suite to automate all core front- and back-office functions of staffing and recruiting firms. For more information please visit www.akken.com or call 1-866-590-6695