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Poor communication thwarts hiring

Uninformed recruiters can miss viable job candidates

By Paul Davidson
USA TODAY

Is it a skills gap — or a communications gap — that's contributing to sluggish job growth?

Despite the 8.2% unemployment rate, many businesses have struggled to find qualified candidates for an abundance of high-skill jobs in technology, engineering, health care and other fields. That, along with a hesitancy by firms to add jobs amid global economic uncertainty, keeps unemployment high.

Yet a Beyond.com survey backs the view that poor communication often prevents human resource officials from identifying viable candidates.

Job descriptions are often too vague or too specific, and HR staffers may rule out qualified

applicants because they don't understand what hiring managers want, says Rich Milgram, CEO of Beyond.com, a job search Web site. "There's a gap in posting and relaying the information," he says, citing his conversations with employers.

For example, he says, recruiters miss nuances, seeking for example an accountant who's proficient at bookkeeping instead of deeper analysis. Others mistakenly assume a candidate must have all the numerous skills listed by a hiring manager.

The recruiter often "has a piece of paper with skills on it and that's what they try to get out of you," instead of a more rounded picture, says Laura Crafton, 23, of Indianapolis, who's seeking a public relations job.

Another problem: employers who do overly specific keyword searches that screen out good candidates. Companies who are seeking truck drivers on Beyond.com and recently typed in "commercial drivers license" would have seen 1,200 résumés but missed out on the 12,800 that

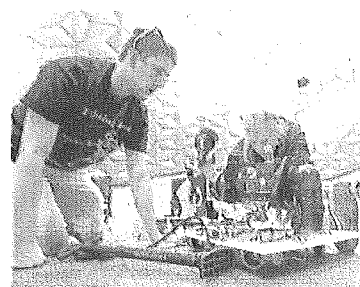
use the shorthand "CDL."

According to the job network's recent online survey, more than a quarter of 1,700 job seekers said their biggest frustrations were that job descriptions had limited detail and that they knew more about job requirements than recruiters.

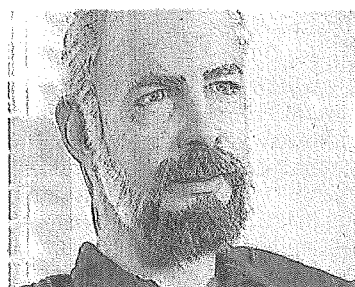
Milgram blames heavy layoffs in HR departments and staffing agencies in the recession. As a result, he says, many new recruiters are overworked and less familiar with the employer.

Kathy Kane, senior vice president for top staffing firm Adecco, agrees. "Fewer HR people have the time to ask questions of hiring managers to get all the intricate details," she says. But she says the bigger issues are a genuine skills gap and employers that have become overly selective.

Abigail Murray, HR chief for obstetrics at University of Chicago Medicine, says she's involved in business strategy, payroll and benefits, leaving her little time to aggressively recruit. "My plate is full," she says.

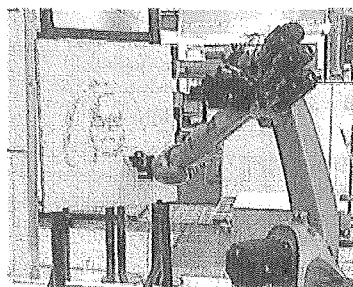


Hoping to score: A robot gets checked for play in the Mechatronic Football Game in South Bend, Ind.



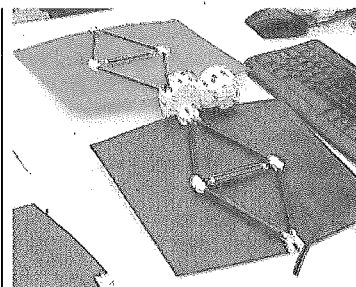
Hanson Robotics

Author, author: A mechanical replica of science-fiction writer Philip K. Dick, who often wrote about robots.



By Jon Swartz, USA TODAY

Art is life: A robot at the March 2012 CeBit computer trade show in Hannover, Germany, sketches a drawing.



By Jon Swartz, USA TODAY

An eye in the sky: This winged device is a "vampire bat" bot for above-the-fray surveillance.

Robots: The tools for our time?

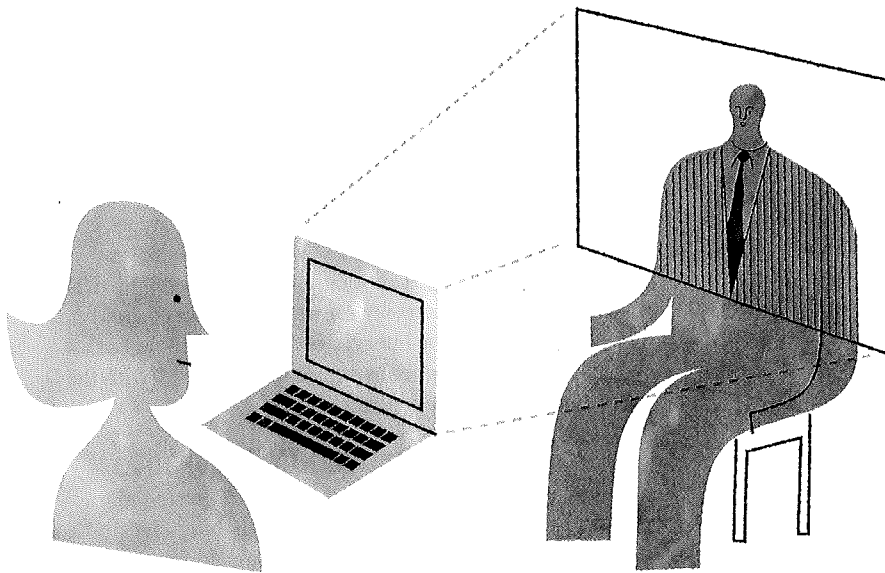
Pace quickens for march of mechanicals into the chores of our everyday lives



from microbots, which are tiny black dots to the naked eye, to bots that resemble bees and bats, to gigantic models.

The Virtual Interview

Cost and time savings are prompting more employers to turn to video interviewing tools.



form provided by HireVue in Draper, Utah. The practice has freed up time for a "lean" recruiting team. "Previously, if we did phone screens with eight candidates, that meant eight hours for our recruiters and another four hours to type up and polish notes," Mitchell says. "The new system is a big time savings for them, and we can get a lot more candidates through the screening."

New Platforms

It wasn't long ago that video interviewing was restricted to Skype calls or asking candidates to interview from the videoconference suite of a FedEx Office store. Today, more recruiters in more companies rely on their own or vendor-supplied online platforms for one-way recorded interviews or live, two-way interviews. Many are drawn by improved broadband connections, a desire to offer promising prospects technical support, and the travel cost or productivity-related savings.

In an August 2011 survey, the Boston-based Aberdeen Group found that 42 percent of respondents were using web-based video for at least some job interviews, up from only 10 percent in 2010. Respondents in the *Talent Acquisition Lifecycle* study included managers from 500 companies of diverse sizes across various industries.

"Video-enabled interviewing is no longer just something HR leaders are curious about. More are actually adopting it," says Mollie Lombardi, an Aberdeen human capital research analyst.

Standardizing the interview process represents one justification for using

By Dave Zielinski

The venerable telephone screen is becoming just a memory in the hiring process at Ocean Spray, the juice company in Lakeville, Mass. To separate pretenders from contenders in initial rounds of interviews, recruiters now send candidates an e-mail link. The candidates then click to respond to preset interview questions while being recorded on a webcam.

Hiring managers review and rate the video profiles, share them with co-workers for comments, and move contenders to the next round.

This virtual screening tool has multiple benefits, says Martin Mitchell, senior manager of talent and diversity at Ocean Spray. It guarantees that the same questions are asked in the same way of each candidate, offers more insight into candidates' personalities than a phone screen and is schedule-friendly.

"Our hiring managers love being able to see candidates respond on screen to questions, rather than reading notes recruiters type up," Mitchell says. "They can watch the video profiles at their convenience during the workday or at night, and share them with other managers if they think [a candidate] might be a better fit for another position."

Recruiters create the one-way recorded interviews via an online technology plat-

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are frequently mobile, Linthicum says it's easier for them to view candidate videos on the road than to schedule or conduct phone screens. "You can log in at night and catch up on evaluating video profiles without having to worry about anyone else's schedule," she says.

Some recruiters use recorded or live video interviews to foster collaboration around hiring decisions. With more stakeholders participating—by logging on to live interviews from multiple locations or leaving comments for colleagues to read on recorded interviews—more input leads to better candidate selection. "You tend to get a more multifaceted view of candidates, and when others can easily see comments already left about applicants, it can lead to better, faster decision-making," Lombardi says.

Recorded video interviews can be a timesaver for candidates as well, Lombardi adds. Instead of reiterating answers to typical early-round questions

with every person, they record their responses once.

Overhauling Interviews

Not everyone is enamored with one-way recorded interviews, however. For some, predetermined questions have limits, primarily in reducing the ability to ask probing follow-up queries that can yield valuable insight into candidates' past decision-making or behavior.

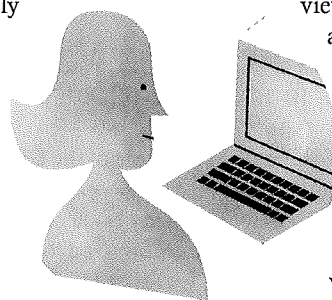
In other cases, recruiters voice concern that "passive" candidates, or those recruited but not actively seeking jobs, won't want to risk a video interview circulating or falling into the wrong hands.


PepsiCo Inc. uses live video for early-round interviews for entry-through executive-level positions, says

Sheila Stygar, PepsiCo's senior director of talent acquisition. But company leaders say asking candidates to record interviews, rather than conducting them live, strays from their recruiting philosophy.

"Our candidates are interviewing us, just like we are interviewing them," Stygar says. "We also know many candidates are consumers of our products. So it's important they have a positive experience with us throughout the interviewing process, regardless of whether they end up being hired."

Video is transforming traditional hiring at many organizations. Yet the technology can still be a tough sell for human resource leaders trying to convince others wedded to in-person interviewing or wary of vendor costs. ■





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