

Have You Mastered the Art of Job Posting?

By Randy Howard

My friend, Jay, is an avid fisherman. He spends the majority of his weekends out on Tampa Bay, gaming for snook, redfish and trout in his Sea Lion flats boat. Last weekend, I watched him throw a 10-foot bait net. He carefully draped the net over his arm, reared back and "cast the net" from the boat, spreading it far and wide. When he pulled it in, hundreds of greenbacks were wriggling inside. It reminded me of the "Art of Job Posting."

I believe "casting the net" is a useful analogy to remember when posting jobs. The basic premise is the more opportunity you give yourself to bring in qualified candidates, the more you will be able to choose from. The concept seems basic, yet, in practice, this approach is rarely taken.

Understand the Position

Back in the second grade, my teacher organized a lesson in our class one day. All of the children were assembled in a circle. The teacher whispered a statement in the ear of the child sitting next to her, and asked him to pass it on. By the time the statement reached me, I had no idea what the kid next to me was trying to say. When the teacher asked me what he said, I felt foolish and fabricated a response ("The turkey had one leg?"). The purpose of this exercise was to illustrate how information can be lost or taken completely out of context when passed along. This is a valuable lesson to remember when posting a job. Be sure that you understand fully and completely what the client is looking for in a candidate. The better you understand the position you are posting, the better your response will be.

Include the Kitchen Sink

When posting a professional position to a job board, you can significantly increase your response rate by being as thorough as possible with your job descriptions and key words. Too many people buy into the misconception that a job posting is kin to a traditional advertisement, the only difference being that it's on an electronic medium. Wrong! Unlike a newspaper ad, which may charge you money based on dimensions or column inches, job posting fields often provide you an endless field in which to list your descriptions and key words. There is no limit to how much information you can write - take advantage of this!

A DBA By Any Other Name...

If you have been limiting your job postings to a specific "set" of criteria or skill sets, you are probably missing hundreds of potential candidates. As a rule of thumb, you should strive to cover the broadest spectrum of qualifications with your key words, even though you may be looking for an individual to perform a specific job. This is especially true in today's marketplace where so many of the positions are highly technical. For

example, in posting a job for a "program manager," it would be wise to include "project manager," "project engineer," and "program engineer" in your key words. Similarly, for a sales position, the following functionalities could all apply: "account manager," "account executive," "inside sales," "outside sales," "regional sales," "territory sales," among others. Too many job postings rely on the candidate's ability to match the key words listed for the job. Consequently, a "dba" could miss a potential opportunity because he/she failed to spell out "database administrator." (Hint: In addition to writing the acronyms for titles, make sure you spell them out!)

Toot Your Client's Horn

Before we proceed any further, let's conduct a hypothetical experiment. Imagine you are a professional job-seeker perusing the boards for your next career move. The first posting you see reads:

"C++, SQL, Cold Fusion, COBOL and Visual." (...yawn)

You scroll down to the next posting and find:

"Big 5 company, global leader in avionics, top-notch benefits and incentive package, seeks world-class programmer to lead us into 2001." (Eureka!)

Which of these postings say more about their prospective clients? Which would you be more likely to respond to? The obvious answer is the second posting. Unfortunately, too many jobs are posted in a manner that poorly reflects the client's positive attributes. This is your chance to "sell" your client. Remember, write your brief description with marketing flair; bells, whistles and all the accoutrements. Include such information as company position, advancement potential, stock options, pre-IPO, market share, and any other information that would entice a candidate.

Knock Out the Knockouts

Another commonly made mistake is listing the candidates you specifically *do not want*. For example, "no e-commerce development" or "no sponsorship." Many of these postings are placed as a result of the source not getting the correct information in the first place. In the past, they may have posted a similar set of descriptions and keywords which attracted candidates they were not seeking. In an attempt to address an earlier problem, they post "knockouts." Posting knockouts does not provide a potential candidate any more information about the position, in fact, it gives them less.

Learn By Example

In my professional experience, I have found learning by example a practical approach to acquiring new skills. You can use learning by example to improve your job postings. Before you actually log onto a job board with the intentions of writing an order, look at some of the other positions which are posted. What kinds of things are you seeing consistently? How would you improve some of the postings? It should only take you a moment to realize which postings will get the responses.