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Get More Marketing Value From Recruitment Software

By Charles Trumpess

Offering high levels of process automation, recruitment software plays an indispensable part in reducing a staffing agency's administrative burden. However, today's recruitment applications are designed to do a whole lot more than just reduce paperwork. They can make a significant contribution to a company's marketing and sales activity.

Effective client contact management and timely, personalised business communications are essential to the success of any recruitment company. The first step in getting more from your marketing and sales activity is to better understand your existing and prospective client base.

In today's frenetic business environment it's simply not enough to send generic email shots to everyone on your database and hope they generate some interest. With numerous demands on their time and attention, your existing clients and prospects surely won't appreciate another bland missive to an already bulging Inbox. Worse still, they might simply block all future email communications from you.

An audience of one

The days of "load and send" email campaigns are long over. Today email marketers are focused on increasing response, conversion and retention rates using a combination of personalisation, segmentation and triggers. Increasingly segmented and triggered emails are driven by behavioural data, such as which links a recipient clicked, whether someone did or did not open an email, what pages they visited on the sender's website or whether they did or did not take a specific action.

Design matters

Something like 95 percent of all commercial email campaigns are sent in HTML today. As a result, design has become critical for a number of reasons. Recipients might have their email setup to block images. Many people now use their Outlook "preview panel" as a handy filtering tool to weed out unwanted emails. Designers also need to consider inconsistent rendering by different email clients. The way an email looks on Gmail differs from Yahoo, for example. Some designers have adopted a

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purely graphical approach to email campaigns in an attempt to bypass content filters, but this brings us back to where we started.

Bombarded by evermore junk mail, most people will only read about 15–20 commercial emails per day, and in many cases much less. As a result, layout, readability and usability are critical to differentiating your emails from everyone else's. In reality your email will have just seconds to provoke interest, convey value and trust, and prompt action.

Democracy at work

Email has been described as the ultimate democratic form of marketing communication. After all, it's the recipient who decides whether they want to opt-in or opt-out of your mailing list; if and when they open, read and act on your email; how much information they wish to share with you; and when they want to unsubscribe.

Recruiters who do not wish to fall foul of increasingly stringent anti-spam legislation and want to build genuinely lasting client relationships will learn to deploy various tactics to increase trust and build brand loyalty, such as ensuring only permission-based emails are sent from your company, switch to a double-opt in subscription process, and publicise your privacy policies. Those recruiters recognised and trusted by clients and prospects will be able to mine for more information. In turn, this will enable them to deliver higher value emails through ever-greater personalisation and segmentation.

Recruitment software mail centres

Today's sophisticated, made for purpose recruitment applications, such as Bond Adapt, RDB Pro and Eclipse integrate with third party email clients and offer a range of contact management or Customer Relationship Management (CRM) features.

Chris Pawsey, Business Development Team Leader at Bond International Software (UK) Ltd, explains: "Bond Adapt integrates email via Microsoft Outlook. Since Outlook is by far and away the market leading product we (Bond) make use of many of the functions therein. It is also possible to integrate Bond Adapt with other email clients."

It is this contact management or CRM functionality that allows recruitment agencies and staffing professionals to create and retain email, letter and fax templates; conduct email marketing campaigns; and record response data. However, what these applications cannot do is prepare marketing materials, or ensure promotional activity is properly monitored and measured to ensure continuous improvement.

Matter of design

If you want your emails to succeed in generating interest in your services then they must always look professional. Don't make the same mistake many applicants do when sending CVs/resumes in response to job advertisements i.e. fail to spell check and proofread them properly. If you send an email full of spelling mistakes, it will cost you sales and could permanently damage your credibility.

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Next, send test versions of your emails to yourself. You can sign up to any number of free email account providers such as Yahoo, MSN Hotmail and Google's Gmail. Include these email accounts in your test mailings. The point here is to catch any formatting errors that might show up in the different email programs. It's quite common to find a HTML email that looks great in Outlook and is missing all of its images in Yahoo or Gmail.

Before you send your email you should also ask yourself one fundamental question: "How relevant is this email to the recipient?" Don't assume that the recipients will automatically see why your email is relevant to them. Often it needs to be spelt out. Succinctly explain how your recruitment company can help them and why now is such a good time to spend money on your services. You might want to consider using a professional copywriter to help you.

Two of the most effective ways to highlight the relevance of your offer are to put a strong emphasis on the benefits and make your offer exclusive. Tailor any promotions you run so that they are exclusive to your recipients, giving them a strong reason to act immediately.

As well as facing an avalanche of commercial emails every time we visit our In-boxes these days there's also the ubiquitous spam, much of which comes with the added threat of viruses. In fact, a

recent article in London's Metro daily newspaper suggested that as many as one in every 43 emails received world-wide is infected with some harmful entity. So, not only does your email have to compete for the recipient's limited time and attention, it also has to overcome their fears and apprehensions.

Even with a good understanding of your target audience, establishing which email design elements work will be a matter of trial and error. To help you identify weaknesses and build on strengths, it's a good idea to take one email design and then produce two or three variations (split test). For example, you might use the same headline and supporting image, but change the subject line. Response levels and email tracking will enable you to identify strengths and weaknesses of your promotion.

Email Design Tips

Effective subject lines

Subject lines should be clear, direct, attention grabbing and benefits related, such as "Reduce your recruitment spend by 60%."

Get your hooks into `em

Just like other forms of advertising, emails have to capture the reader's attention within the first couple of sentences. Otherwise, it's all over. The hook should be a distillation of your email's overall message and strongly appeal to the reader's self-interest e.g. what do they get, how do they benefit.

Sign posts

Generally it's considered best practice to keep your emails text length to about 250 words. The body

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copy must support your "hook" with a clear focus on benefits, and then close with a clear, direct call to action. It's extremely important that there is no ambiguity about what you want the recipient to do e.g. "click here," "register now," "reply."

Mind your language

A well-written email message uses the active voice and short, concise sentences. This is critical as the stark reality is that most readers won't progress beyond the first couple of lines. You have to be clear, direct and focus on how your offer benefits the reader.

Readability Almost as important as what you say is how you present your text to the reader. Try to keep your paragraphs short - no longer than five lines. Use 1.5 or double line spacing, and a font that's easy on the eye and big enough to read. Use bullets to emphasize key points, but avoid text in all caps or multiple exclamation marks. Set text width at 68 characters or less per line so it displays correctly in e-mail applications. Also, avoid breaking or wrapping URLs into two lines – it may cause technical problems. The more barriers you eliminate the better your chances of a positive response.

Keeping track

Having segmented your audience, prepared your marketing message and sent your email out, you'll want to know it has been received and acted upon. Tracking email responses is essential if you are to identify and eliminate weaknesses and build on the strengths of your campaigns. Here are some suggestions that will enable you to monitor and analyze the effectiveness of your email marketing for

free. For accuracy, be sure to use a unique tracking code for each of your different email test variables and keep accurate records.

MS Outlook provides you with a simple tracking facility which informs you when a message was sent, when it arrived and when it was opened. The downside here is if the recipient just glanced at your email in the panel view of their Inbox and then deleted the item you'll only know because you will never receive a corresponding "read" message from your Outlook tracker.

To switch on MS Outlook 2003 email tracking:

1. Launch MS Outlook
2. Click on the Tools menu at the top of the page, scroll down and click on Options.
3. Click E-mail Options, which is top-right of the Preferences page.
4. Next, click Tracking Options.
5. Select the Read receipt and/or the Delivery receipt check boxes
6. Click OK.

One idea is to simply ask respondents to place something unique in the subject line that acts as a tracking code for your email campaigns. However that puts the burden of responsibility on your respondents, which is something you might to avoid. Instead us the following little trick to automatically place what you want in the subject line of a response email message:

Click on this example:

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mailto:user@domain.com?subject=Send-Info.aboutyourcompany Replace

user@domain.com

in the

above example with the email address you want to use and a unique campaign code.

When the above link is clicked on in your email promotional message, the text immediately following ?subject= automatically appears in the subject line of a new email message. This should work in most email packages.

Vital statistics

If you have access to even the most basic website statistics you can track hits to your web pages by placing a question mark (?) after your web address (URL) when used in each email promotion, followed by your unique tracking code.

For instance, you send 3 email promotions. Each carries a corresponding URL tracking code:

Email Ad 1.

<http://www.yourdomainhere.com/homepage/htm?EM1>

Email Ad 2.

<http://www.yourdomainhere.com/clients/htm?EM2>

Email Ad3.

<http://www.yourdomainhere.com/applicants/htm?EM3>

Hyperlinks with your own unique tracking codes added to the end of a URL don't adversely affect the ability of recipients to access your web pages in any way, but will show up in the server log files. To determine the exact number of hits that a particular email generates, look at your log files within hours or days of sending your mail shot. You can check with your ISP or web host for access to your log files.

If you don't mind having other peoples advertising on your website then there is a range of free website tracking services available. Take a look at AddFreeStats.com and FreeStats.com.

By using some of the simple, free tracking and analysis methods explained here you can continually refine your email marketing, measure its effectiveness and get more from your recruitment software. For more information and professional help preparing your next email campaign, sales promotion or advertising visit

www.charlie-the-copywriter.co.uk

Charlie Trumess is a marketing communications copywriter with over a decade's corporate experience. Today he offers copywriting services to small and medium size businesses. Visit:

<http://www.charlie-the-copywriter.co.uk>

Executive Search Agents Get Results

By Burns Carlton

Recruiting a senior manager or director for your business can be expensive. Placing adverts in the right papers and journals is a huge expense in itself. If you're recruiting at the top level in your business, it may be more cost-effective for you to use an executive search agency.

Did you know that, in some cases, the fee charged by a recruitment agency may actually be less than handling the recruitment in-house? People often turn to an executive search firm when they have had trouble recruiting for a certain position. They may have had a low response to adverts, or discovered that all the CVs that have been sent in are from people who are under qualified or inappropriate for the role. This can be very frustrating, particularly as it is very expensive to place recruitment adverts in the local and national press.

Businesses who don't have a full-time Human Resources function, or who are too busy to handle top recruitment themselves often outsource to an agency. Whilst it has a cost attached, it removes the majority of the recruitment burden from the company's internal resources and makes sure that the best candidates are put forward for the job. This use of external expertise is really no different from using a design agency to run a website, or a sanitary company to do the cleaning, and leaves the company's management free to approach the interview stage fresh and enthusiastic.

Executive recruitment is normally for specialised roles and candidates therefore need to have a very well-defined set of skills and experience. For this reason, businesses are often less concerned with the time taken to employ someone than they are with the quality of the person they eventually hire. This can turn the search and selection process into a long one and managers can go through several sets of candidates before offering the position.

Specialist recruitment agencies come into their own here. Their databases help to search out possible candidates who have the right combination of qualifications, experience and skills, and can even undertake the first round of interviews on the company's behalf, so that the final list includes only the best candidates available. This outsourcing of basic recruitment functions allows the company to concentrate on running the business and leaves them feeling confident that the candidates that come for interview are all suitable for the job.

Burns Carlton provides a professional executive search and selection service for a range of business sectors. Check out their website by clicking

<http://www.burnscarlton.com>



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