



## managing a work force

**Recruiting & Hiring**

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### **What Your Job Ads Say**

**Paula Santonocito**

*Your job ad describes the position and the qualifications required. It also tells a little bit about the company. But what else does it reveal?*

#### **Seeking qualified candidates**

More than you might realize. Depending on word choices, position title, and the information you choose to share about the job, its benefits, and the company, a job ad has the potential to speak volumes about the opportunity, while speaking directly to the right candidates.

Thoughtfully crafted postings are important, according to Shaker Recruitment Advertising & Communications, because they enhance your ability to attract better-quality candidates.

When the nature of the position is clear, job seekers are less likely to apply blindly because it "seems close" to what they want.

In order to be clear, Shaker recommends that a job posting focus on the purpose of the job and why it exists, while providing relevant information about its requirements, rather than turning the ad into a sales pitch for the company. A tangible, results-oriented description will also attract candidates likely to accomplish the job results needed.

In addition, the ad should focus on the big picture and state critical requirements, as opposed to small duties. This too will help screen out unqualified candidates.

#### **Communicating with candidates**

But these are only the basics. A job ad must serve as a vehicle for effectively communicating with the candidates you seek to attract. This requires knowing the audience you are targeting and sharing information in a way that resonates with them.

According to Mary Stanton, creative brand manager for Shaker Recruitment Advertising & Communications, the biggest mistake employers make when writing job ads is "they don't talk directly to the candidate."

Stanton likens the problem to a restaurant review that would talk about the square footage of the restaurant as opposed to what people are really interested in, which is the food.

In order to talk about the food, a job ad should explain what's in it for the candidate, which means more about what the position will do for the candidate rather than what the candidate will do for the employer.

A candidate wants to know how joining the company and taking the job will benefit him or her, and the ad needs to allow the candidate to make that connection, on both an emotional and intellectual level.

How do you facilitate that connection? Shaker advises employers to answer the questions candidates have: what will I do; with whom will I work; what will I learn; what will I accomplish; and what will I earn.

In addition, because benefits matter, and matter a lot to candidates, those benefits most likely to attract candidate attention, such as flexibility and work/balance, should be stressed.

### **Compelling copy**

Meanwhile, information should be presented in a way that captures candidates' attention—and holds it.

Here the process can also break down. Stanton finds that because descriptions are pulled from job requisitions they tend to fall flat. While she says this may be excusable for old-time help-wanted ads, in today's online world, more attention is required to make postings stand out.

The problem of dull, ineffective job ads can also be attributed to the fact that human resource functions are often considered separate from a company's branding and marketing efforts, Stanton says, which she believes shouldn't be the case.

A job posting, like other company communication, should contain compelling copy.

With this in mind, word choices, content, and how the material is organized are critical. The ad should start with the most interesting and important points, while at the same time communicating in a way that is authentic.

Stanton gives the example of a Smith Barney ad vs. a Southwest ad. A conservative brokerage firm will not sound like an airline that has a reputation for fun, and most likely will not draw the same candidates.

"It's a matter of knowing who you are and what you want to sound like and the type of people you want to attract," Stanton says.

At the same time, it's important to be honest, she tells *HRWire*.

She gives the example of a client that said, "Our corporate structure is that we don't have one." If this message were included in a job posting, it would immediately screen out candidates who prefer more structure and definitive roles.

Similarly, a company with an ad that reads, "Every Friday afternoon our entire staff plays softball" conveys important information about its culture.

How do you know what to include? "Really try to focus on the things that make you different, what sets you apart from those in your industry," Stanton says.

To get clients thinking, she often asks, "What is one thing that you wish people knew that they don't know about you?"

It also helps to remember that the internal view of the company and the position may be very different from what people on the outside see. "You're often dealing with perceptions and misperceptions," Stanton says.

Once you have a draft of a job ad, Bob Goesling, copywriting supervisor for Shaker Recruitment Advertising, has a simple but effective way to see how it resonates: Read it aloud.

While listening to your words, you should first ask if people really talk like that, and then if the ad has your company's voice. Reading the ad aloud will also allow you to determine if you have created a compelling story.

### **Advancing the conversation**

And speaking of story, a job ad doesn't have to be all inclusive.

Shaker generally recommends that any recruitment communication, including job postings, drive people to a corporate careers site. "That's where you have your online real estate to tell your story," Stanton says.

But what if, because of budget constraints, the message at the careers site isn't engaging enough?

For a company facing this challenge, Stanton recommends updating a landing page or creating a microsite that can expand upon the story the job ad introduces.

Similarly, Facebook can be used to provide more insight into the company.

With regard to Facebook, however, Stanton cautions that the point of Facebook is to interact. If no one is available to monitor a company Facebook page, it may not be appropriate to mention the page in a job ad.

### **The bottom line**

Every component of a job ad matters, including the position title because even it can convey something about the company and/or the job.

Consider the difference between chief people officer and executive vice president of personnel, for example, or senior accountant compared to accountant level 4.

By taking the time to write an effective job ad, with attention to audience, you increase the likelihood of finding quality candidates who are a fit for your organization.

Granted, it requires additional time and attention. However, the effort can significantly impact the bottom line. Consider research Shaker shares from the Advertising Research Foundation: Companies waste \$1 out of every \$5 they spend on advertising.

In an economic climate where every dollar counts, now certainly seems like an ideal time to focus on creating more compelling, more authentic, and better targeted job ads.

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