



Differentiate from the Competition and Win Candidates' Hearts and Minds

How can companies in less-than-glamorous industries successfully attract the attention of today's top candidates? The talent-acquisition manager of Lawson Products explains her organization's approach.

By Trista Jones, Monday, June 6, 2016

The strengthening economy poses a challenge for those of us in recruiting. Research reports talent shortages at 38 percent, the highest percentage since 2007. The qualified people recruiters want to hire have more options than before. The competition is trying to poach your top talent due to the limited amount of qualified candidates in the market. Sales representatives and skilled-trade positions are the most difficult to fill, with engineer and technician roles next in line.



Trista Jones

In addition, the way in which many employees find and choose an employer has changed. The evolution of social media and sites such as Glassdoor have created a more transparent world, resulting in a more candidate-driven market. Candidates want to know as much as possible, and not just about the job and training opportunities -- they want to know about the company, its values and its culture.

So what can recruiters do to differentiate their companies from the competition, and win and retain talent?

Validate Employer Brand and Candidate Experience

To compete effectively, companies must treat their employer brand with the same strategic focus and consistency that they apply to their corporate or consumer brands. They must also look for ways to improve their overall candidate experience; from early talent attraction to the preparedness of the interviewers, and from the way an offer is delivered to how they onboard new hires.

The term "employer brand" came about in the 1990s to describe an organization's reputation as an employer, versus its more general corporate brand reputation. This resulted in the creation of "employee value propositions" by many organizations.

As the talent acquisition manager for Lawson Products, a leader in the maintenance, repair and operations industry, I'm focused on finding sales representatives with the leadership skills and motivation to help us achieve our growth goals. In an effort to grow sales by developing under-served territories, we've been adding sales reps every year since 2013 and will continue this recruiting effort throughout 2016. It's not an easy task, especially when so many other companies are expanding their own sales organizations in the midst of a talent shortage. But the steps we've taken, and continue to take, to strengthen our employer brand and the candidate experience have proven to be key to the success we continue to have in attracting and retaining top sales-rep talent.

Evaluate Where You Are and Want To Be

During 2012, we implemented several major changes, including changes in management and major adjustments to our business model, such as consolidating facilities, adopting Lean Six Sigma practices, transitioning the sales force from an independent sales agent model to company employees, investing in a new enterprise resource system and opening a state-of-the-art distribution center to improve operational efficiency. This proved to be a perfect time to reevaluate our organization and the sales-representative role.

We conducted interviews, focus groups and surveys with both new and long-term sales reps. We learned what their perception of Lawson Products was prior to application and during the candidate experience. We also learned if any gaps existed between perception and reality, given their current sales-rep experience. We also learned what Lawson's strengths and areas for improvement were in relation to demonstrating why we are an employer of choice.

Continues on back

This process of talking to existing employees served as a very powerful engagement tool in itself. It also helped to rebuild their trust and increase motivation.

Dedicate Your Team to Creative, Efficient Enhancements

Using what we learned from our evaluation, we created the Lawson Products Employee Value Proposition. Our goal was straightforward -- to stand out as different and accurately reflect reality. This was an important step for our company, considering that many young people entering the workforce today don't necessarily think of the distribution industry as a career path. Therefore, clearly communicating the benefits and opportunities that exist within our industry is key.

With our new EVP in hand, we were better equipped for recruiting. But to further increase our opportunity for success, it was imperative that all of our recruiting tools and communication supported our enhanced Employee Value Proposition. Here are the highlights of what our team did to support our new EVP and improve the candidate experience. You might expand or abbreviate any of these approaches to fit your own program, or try a pilot to see what works best in your environment:

Mobile Recruiting

Considering the tech-savvy job seeker, we revamped our employment application so job seekers could view jobs seamlessly on their mobile devices. Giving job seekers a mobile friendly tool, we have seen an increase in our applicant pool.

Targeted Recruiting

As a result of collaboration with our communications and marketing departments, we created two new branded micro-sites -- one focused on our U.S. sales positions and one focused on our Canadian recruiting efforts. These sites include searchable job opportunities, hiring events, testimonials from current sales reps, and more. In addition, we've increased our offline exposure by conducting open houses and participating in career fairs across the United States and Canada.



Lawson Products Recruiting Campaign Banner

Leadership and Employee Involvement

From sales managers to the C-suite, our leadership agreed to improve their LinkedIn profiles incorporating our new EVP and actively supporting our efforts by sharing posts. We also encourage our employees to serve as brand ambassadors and share their experiences on Glassdoor, which improves our rating. Today, we have about 100 reviews on Glassdoor, with more being added all the time.

Employment Video and Social Media

The employment video we created with the help of our marketing department provides job seekers an inside look at the sales rep position at Lawson Products. The video, viewable on our website, micro-sites and YouTube, features current sales reps sharing their unique stories in a way that helps job seekers understand what it's like to work at Lawson Products. It helps us better target the right candidates, while helping those who may not be a best-fit self-select out. In addition, we've increased our presence on Glassdoor, LinkedIn, Facebook and YouTube to give candidates more insight about our company culture. We plan to further take advantage of the opportunity that lies within the social media platforms.

Public Relations

Thanks to our communications department, Lawson Products is featured in the press. We share this recognition with employees and prospects. One of our district sales managers wrote an article for Industrial Distribution magazine about her experiences in the field, and applicants have mentioned her article during the interviewing process. Being named one of the 50 Best Companies to Sell For is also a great recruitment marketing tool.

Hiring and training sales representatives is key to Lawson Products' growth. As the company's talent acquisition manager, my responsibilities include managing our employment brand and ensuring the candidate experience is a positive one.

Given the costs associated with hiring, every single candidate touch point must be managed with the utmost care. After all, every single touch point reflects on your employer brand.

Trista Jones is the talent acquisition manager for Lawson Products, an industrial distributor of maintenance and repair products to a wide range of industries that has five distribution centers in North America. Trista joined the company in 2000 as a recruiter and received a Lawson Products Excellence Award in 2015.

Source URL

<http://www.recruitingtrends.com/REC/view/story.jhtml?id=534360775>