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Hub recruiters cast wary eye on Internet job boards

By Jennnifer LeClaire - Special to the Journal

The online job board buzz is building, with the New York Times Co. and Monster.com forming a strategic recruitment advertising alliance in March -- and staffing firm Bullhorn Inc. declaring Internet job boards are the most productive source of candidates.

Many Boston recruiters, however, aren't banking on the boards.

Despite Bullhorn's survey results, which indicate 56 percent of respondents believe Internet job boards such as Monster and CareerBuilder.com dominate recruiting methods, Boston headhunters said the Internet is only one small aspect of the search strategy.

"Job board candidates are either unemployed, unhappy or in a situation where their back is against a wall," said Colm Allen, CEO of Boston-based Construction Recruiters Inc. Allen classified most job board dwellers as "Grade B" candidates. His clients, he added, are paying him to deliver "Grade A" candidates who can more often be found working contentedly at their desks.

Like other recruiters, Allen uses Internet technology to search out those contented, passive candidates, but his strategy for finding them doesn't include job boards.

Internet job boards, he reported, typically yield one in 200 resumes that even fit the job description he's posted.

"We are always looking for construction project managers," he said, "but 99 percent of project managers today work in the information technology field. Candidates see the word 'project manager' in the title and just send their resume without a thought. We have to sort through the rubbish."

Dora Vell, managing partner at Boston-based recruiting firm Vell & Associates Inc., has had similar experience with Internet job boards. She would never post a CEO position on the job boards, she said, because her experience tells her the boards catch "anybody and everybody." She does, however, post more generic executive positions on TheLadders.com and alumni association boards.

"You really have to dig through resumes you get through job boards. Many people just apply blindly without even looking at the requirements," Vell said. "I might get one or two candidates who are worth looking at, so it's worth the time, but Internet job boards are not enough to get the job done."

Vell isn't knocking the Internet for recruiting strategies, though. She does visit ZoomInfo.com to search through profiles of executives who may be in between assignments or could be wooed away from their current employer with a more attractive offer.

Her rule of thumb: Job boards are good for generic executive positions that call for skill sets that are in abundance, but not for specialized positions, such as like mobile infrastructure technicians or CEOs.

Mark Eldridge, COO of Sapphire Technologies, an IT staffing solutions provider in Boston, said job boards may indeed be the most productive source of candidates, but certainly not the most productive source of hires.

His talent pool does draw from job boards, but he said the percentage of placements from job board candidates is much lower than other recruiting methods.

Eldridge credits a third of his placements to newspaper ads, a third to referrals and a third to candidates in his internal databases.

"The Internet definitely has its place in recruiting, but it has to be coupled with strong human processes," Eldridge said. "Job boards do a better job of qualifying candidates based on skill sets, but we've had more success with personal referral networks."

Sapphire Technologies offers financial rewards for referrals, which helps prime the pump, and Eldridge attends networking events to build relationships with potential future candidates.

"Job boards have peaked," Construction Recruiters' Allen said, though he admitted he still uses them. The value he sees in online job boards is attracting potential clients who are looking for employees.

They see his postings peppered across the Internet and it generates awareness of his services.

"Many job boards produce zero candidates," he said. "But clients see how active we are and come to us to find employees for them. It's a marketing strategy."



Dora Vell is the CEO of Vell Executive Search, a premier retained technology executive search firm in Boston. Ms. Vell is an internationally recognized expert in recruiting technology executives including: CEOs, COOs, CTOs, CMOs, CROs, board members and others. She works with VC-backed, PE-backed private companies and public companies. She can be reached at dora@vell.com.