



THE RIGHT FIT:  
HOW TOP EMPLOYERS  
FIND THE PERFECT  
CANDIDATE

## Introduction

Finding the right fit for a job is complicated, especially for harder-to-fill positions with specialized skills. Many organizations are finding that older methods of recruiting, such as posting position descriptions on job boards or using print ads, are no longer effective or sufficient in achieving their ideal hire. Adding to this challenge is an apparent skills gap. Organizations cannot find candidates with certain technical or specialized skills.

In addition, passive candidates have become the focus of recruiting for many organizations, and are not easily recruited via traditional recruiting channels. Passive candidates are not actively searching for careers on job boards, are not regularly paying attention to job advertisements, and generally require a different approach.

Finally, the emergence of new online marketing strategies and social media are revolutionizing the recruiting industry. In fact, our research shows that social media usage for recruiting has more than doubled in the past three years.

These trends seem to suggest that recruiting has entered a new era, an era where methods are changing and strategies are evolving. More employers, particularly those on the leading edge of recruiting, are evaluating their recruiting strategies and seeking unique or creative tactics to land the right fit. These organizations are investing more time, thought, and creativity in devising sourcing strategies.

The following white paper explores common and unique recruiting tools and practices of top employers:

- Preferred Recruiting Tools of Top Employers
- Unique & Creative Recruiting Tools
- Overlooked Talent Pools
- The Recruitment Message
- Is Your Recruiting Working? Tips for Measuring Success

# Preferred Recruiting Tools of Top Employers

Top employers in Northeast Ohio tend to use similar recruiting sources to find top talent. Most frequently, they use employee referrals. Eighty-five percent of NorthCoast 99 winners rate employee referrals as “frequently used.” Anecdotally, most winners say the best sources of talent are their top performers, who tend to refer higher quality employees. On average, about a quarter of new-hires are referred by winners’ top performers each year, and contemporary theory suggests that about a third of new-hires should be referred by current employees (Source: ERE Media). Similarly, networking is a common source frequently used by 79% of winners. Winners use their talent’s networks to expand their applicant pools.

Another very common source frequently used by most NorthCoast 99 winners are internal postings. Internal postings were rated as “frequently used” by 83% of winners. Top employers tend to look for talent internally before expanding their search externally, and are willing to train and develop that talent into new roles. The benefits of using internal postings are many. Talent usually already “fits” in the organization, there is more knowledge of and experience in working with the candidate, and it allows current employees to explore new career opportunities.

## Top 10 Sources Frequently Used by Top Employers

All Industries
1. Employee referrals (85%)
2. Internal postings (83%)
3. Networking (79%)
4. Electronic advertisements (70%)
5. Job boards (68%)
6. Social networking websites (56%)
7. Online career centers/websites (51%)
8. College recruiting (49%)
9. Professional associations (43%)
10. Internships (42%)

Source: 2012 NorthCoast 99 Winners Report

Generally, online recruiting is a common practice among top employers as other common sources frequently used by more than half of top employers in the region are online advertisements, job boards, social networking websites, and online career-centers. Among the sources not very frequently used by top employers are print advertisements, competitors, career centers, and customer referrals. In general, these sources do not appear to be as effective or widely used to consistently land top talent.

Additionally, NorthCoast 99 winners in different industries tend to use similar sources to find top talent, but with differing frequencies. Below is a table summarizing those differences. The percentage in which organizations rated the source as “frequently used” is in parentheses.

## Top 10 Sources Frequently Used by Top Employers by Industry

<b>Manufacturing</b>	<b>Health &amp; Human Services</b>
1. Internal postings (89%)	1. Electronic advertisements (100%)
2. Employee referrals (84%)	2. Internal postings (100%)
3. Electronic advertisements (79%)	3. Employee referrals (93%)
4. Job boards (68%)	4. Online career centers/websites (93%)
5. Networking (68%)	5. Networking (79%)
6. Social networking websites (58%)	6. Professional associations (79%)
7. Online career centers/websites (37%)	7. Job boards (71%)
8. College recruiting (32%)	8. College recruiting (64%)
9. Internships (32%)	9. Job fairs (43%)
10. Professional associations (26%)	10. Social networking websites (43%)
<b>Technology</b>	<b>Professional Services</b>
1. Employee referrals (93%)	1. Employee referrals (86%)
2. Networking (93%)	2. Networking (82%)
3. Internal postings (68%)	3. Internships (71%)
4. Job boards (64%)	4. College recruiting (68%)
5. Electronic advertisements (57%)	5. Internal postings (68%)
6. Social networking websites (57%)	6. Job boards (61%)
7. Online career centers/websites (43%)	7. Social networking websites (61%)
8. Professional associations (43%)	8. Electronic advertisements (54%)
9. College recruiting (21%)	9. Online career centers/websites (43%)
10. Competitors (21%)	10. Customer referrals (39%)
<b>Other For-Profit Organizations</b>	<b>Other Non-Profit Organizations</b>
1. Employee referrals (87%)	1. Internal postings (100%)
2. Internal postings (87%)	2. Electronic advertisements (89%)
3. Job boards (73%)	3. Job boards (78%)
4. Networking (73%)	4. Networking (78%)
5. Electronic advertisements (60%)	5. Social networking websites (78%)
6. College recruiting (53%)	6. Professional associations (67%)
7. Online career centers/websites (47%)	7. Employee referrals (56%)
8. Job fairs (40%)	8. Internships (56%)
9. Social networking websites (40%)	9. Online career centers/websites (56%)
10. Customer referrals (27%)	10. College recruiting (44%)

It's clear that top employers' sourcing methods work in driving larger applicant pools. Using these sources, on average, NorthCoast 99 winners receive 62 applicants per open position. This compares to an average of 42 applicants per open position reported by the Great Place to Work Institute, based on the best places to work it recognizes. The following table breaks down average number of applicants reported by NorthCoast 99 winners across industries.

## Average Number of Applicants by Industry

Average Number of Applicants	
Health & Human Services	30
Manufacturing	64
Professional Services	76
Technology	47
Other Non-Profit Organizations	57
Other For-Profit Organizations	82

## Unique & Creative Recruiting Tools

Top employers use unique and innovative recruiting practices to gain a competitive advantage in sourcing top talent. Without a creative recruiting strategy, unique message, or using effective sources in a new or unique way, organizations risk not being noticed amidst the high volume of job postings, and thereby may miss the perfect candidate.

The case for using unique recruiting tactics is fairly clear-cut. National research on best places to work shows that organizations that employ creative sourcing tactics hire better talent than those that don't (Source: Great Place to Work Institute, ERE Media). Local research also seems to suggest that top workplaces in Northeast Ohio find the talent they need by employing unique recruiting practices. Below is a list of creative recruiting ideas that some top employers use.

- **Direct mail.** Send a piece of unique direct mail (not a traditional newsletter or advertisement) to a targeted list of potential recruits that would be of interest to them. For example, one NorthCoast 99 winner sent a recipe card to prospective female recruits.
- **Digital content.** Have your employees or your recruiters write blog posts on issues of interest to job seekers, or on hiring and career management topics. Take pictures of and create videos to highlight employees or showcase your culture. Create a digital story or picture book that applicants can explore to learn more about your organization's history and culture. Deploy your content on your website and via social media.

- **Mobile devices.** Create mobile applications and content for applicants to access. Redesign websites to be mobile compatible. Use text messaging and mobile video to reach candidates.
- **Advertising.** Post job ads or use online advertising in non-career-oriented places where job seekers spend most of their time, such as Google+, YouTube, Pandora, Spotify, Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter, other social media or web platforms, or venues job seekers frequently visit (i.e. movie theatres, sports events, etc.).
- **Online social media profiles.** Search social media profiles on LinkedIn and Google+. These profiles contain access to thousands of professionals who you can target for job opportunities.
- **Reinvented job ads.** Scrap the traditional job description format. Develop an attention-grabbing subject line, tagline, and a short, but compelling description of the job and your organization's culture. Don't forget to include some color, pictures, and content that will attract job seekers.
- **Key words and search-engine optimization.** Research common and relevant keywords and phrases that are searched for on Google. Use these keywords on your blog, website, and careers webpage to optimize search-engine traffic that drives job seekers to your website.
- **Products and services.** Integrate recruiting messages into your products and services and marketing collateral.
- **User groups.** Peruse online user groups and talent communities, or attend in-person user groups to target key influencers and find specialist talent.
- **Contests and games.** Host contests where individuals make submissions to receive a prize or advance to the next stage of the hiring process. Allow applicants to showcase their ideas and contributions in creative form, rather than merely a resume. Doing so also allows you to select the brightest candidate for the position.
- **Alumni.** Keep in contact with past employees who have moved on from your organization. Create online alumni groups or host alumni events. Past employees often appreciate the opportunity to continue to connect with their organization and past coworkers.
- **Applicants that weren't hired.** Consider recruiting candidates that were not hired, but stood out as solid candidates during the application or interview process.

- **On-site events and continuing education.** Sponsor industry events and continuing education programs. Host workshops and networking events. Top talent consistently looks for opportunities to develop their capabilities and expand their networks.
- **Employees as recruiters.** Use your employees as recruiters. Encourage them to attend networking events and become involved with community organizations, take them to job fairs, and send them to training events. Have them connect with candidates online or in-person. Promote open positions, ask them for referrals, and reward them generously for successful ones.
- **Colleges and universities.** Volunteer your employees and leaders to speak at local colleges and universities – either at events or for classes. Develop strategic relationships with faculty.
- **Job fair booths.** Make your job fair booth stand out as unique. Dress differently, use bold colors, bring collateral about attractive benefits, and provide a creative giveaway that attendees will remember.
- **Job training programs.** Start an apprentice-like or unique job training program for a technical position that you are having difficulty filling. Assess program candidates for ability, motivation, willingness to learn, potential, and achievement.
- **Perks.** Make a unique perk or combination of attractive perks/programs your competitive advantage and use those perks as a marketing and recruiting tool. Employees flock to organizations that become known for their unique perks in the marketplace.
- **Everyday encounters.** Look for candidates in everyday encounters and experiences (at restaurants, retail shops, etc.). When you encounter a candidate with such qualities as a great work ethic, sense of urgency, and customer focus, offer them an interview for a position that requires those key characteristics.
- **Employment brand.** Create a unique employment brand and consistent message that resonates with the types of individuals you are seeking and market that brand to your prospective job seekers.

The key to creative and unique recruiting tactics is reinventing current effective sourcing strategies including internal sourcing, advertisements, networking, and more.

## Overlooked Talent Pools

Overlooked talent pools are a key and sometimes untapped source for talent because some organizations are unwilling to make accommodations, provide additional training and development, or abandon stereotypes. The following are some commonly overlooked talent pools.

- **Unemployed.** Top employers refrain from instituting policies that prevent them from hiring those who are unemployed or who have gaps in employment. In fact, a number of top employers actively target the unemployed when recruiting by sourcing candidates through community organizations that serve those individuals. Some even offer remedial skills training for those who have been out of the workforce for a lengthier period of time.
- **Disabled.** Top employers may hire disabled workers and those with physical impairments. For example, one NorthCoast 99 winner created a special hiring partnership with a community organization that helps the visually impaired. The organization implemented certain accommodations to enable visually impaired individuals to perform certain call center positions.
- **Women.** With women, it's not so much that employers overlook them, but rather overlook opportunities to make employment at their organizations more attractive to females. Many top employers uniquely address traditional female barriers in the workplace, creating workplace flexibility arrangements that suit their needs, and targeted leadership development programs to help women succeed.
- **Youth.** There is rarely a stigma against young workers and their lack of experience among top employers, with most recruiting from local colleges and universities for internships and entry-level hiring. They are willing to invest in the training and development of young workers and often accept no or little work experience.
- **Unskilled but able.** Similarly, many top employers are willing to invest and develop the lesser-skilled hire or employee via apprenticeship programs, tuition reimbursement, vocational-skill programs, and job training. These organizations focus more on ability and raw talent when hiring as opposed to specific skills and experiences.

By tapping into these groups, top employers access talent that many other employers are overlooking to fill their hiring needs.

## The Recruitment Message

The right sourcing tools can only produce the perfect candidate if the recruitment message contained in them is attractive and matches what job seekers are looking for in an employer and in a job, what you want in a candidate, and what you can offer to a candidate. Top employers usually develop recruitment messages with all of these preferences in mind.

### Job Seekers: What They Want

The job seeker is looking for certain attributes in a job. Although these preferences can sometimes vary according to demographics, job type, and industry, generally-speaking job seekers are usually looking for similar things in an employer: challenging and meaningful work, competitive compensation and benefits, work/life balance, and career development/ advancement opportunities. Essentially, the job seeker usually wants to know answers to these basic questions:

- Will the job be challenging, fit their interests, and allow them to use their best skills and abilities? Will the work be meaningful?
- Will the job meet their compensation and benefits requirements?
- Will they be able to meet their personal and family needs?
- Will they have opportunities to learn and grow into other roles?
- Will they fit into the culture of the organization? Will they like their coworkers and manager?

### Employers: What You Want, What You Can Offer

The employer, on the other hand, needs to understand and communicate what they want and need in an employee. They also need to communicate their culture and what they can offer to a candidate. Use these questions as a guide:

- What qualities and characteristics would a top performing candidate have?
- What qualifications, education, and past experience are essential AND preferred?
- What skills and competencies would a top performing candidate have?
- What attributes must a candidate have to fit culturally in the organization, in their team, and with their manager?
- What can we offer a top performing candidate? (i.e. compensation, benefits, career opportunities, perks, special programs, culture, etc.)
- What values or cultural aspects of the organization are important for a candidate to understand?

## The Message

A compelling recruitment message answers the questions job seekers have, and it communicates what you are looking for in a candidate and what you can offer them. The

message also gives job seekers an understanding of the organization, what it does, its values, its culture, and what it offers to employees. Here are some tips:

- Keep it simple, clear, consistent, and brief. Choose a couple distinct words or phrases that are memorable.
- Insert some emotion, humor, or a good story. People connect with these elements of recruitment messages.
- Be honest. Misleading messages for the sake of attracting a large pool of talent are not effective.
- Refrain from providing extremely detailed information about the job or organization, which can be communicated later. Recruiting is primarily about *attracting* the right fit.
- Use varying media to convey your message. Perhaps culture is best summarized in a short video or with graphics, and maybe what you offer is best described in a short brochure.
- Vary the length, types, format, and even timing of advertisements and postings.
- Don't rely on media alone. Your own employees can be the best communicators of what your organization can offer.

## Is Your Recruiting Working? Tips for Measuring Success

Understanding best practices and unique methods of recruiting is important in finding the right fit, but just as important is learning what works best for your organization. With recruiting, no one-size-fits-all needs and each organization needs to uncover its most effective ways of finding top talent. There are a number of metrics that can help you identify the sources that work best, most of which are standard in applicant tracking systems. Below are some of the most helpful metrics:

- Number of qualified applicants by source
- Number of new-hires by source
- Percentage of top performers hired
- Ratios (i.e. resumes/applications to phone interviews; phone interviews to in-person interviews; in-person interviews to offers)
- Quality of hire metrics (i.e. performance, turnover, tenure, manager satisfaction, length of time to promotion)

Top employers use these types of metrics to identify the most effective recruitment tools, messages, and strategies for landing top talent. Certainly, there are others (cost per hire, time to fill, etc.), but these tend to be more effective metrics, especially in tracking whether recruiting strategies are producing quality applicants and new-hires.

## Conclusion

Top employers, such as the NorthCoast 99 winners, are model organizations for finding the right fit. These organizations have a strong track record of recruiting top talent and do so through the best practices and unique strategies described throughout the paper. If your organization is challenged in attracting and finding top performers, using some of these same strategies can increase the chances of finding the perfect candidate.

For more information about the NorthCoast 99 winners and their practices, please visit [www.northcoast99.org](http://www.northcoast99.org).