Human Resources Marketing and Recruiting: Digital Recruiting at Sodexo

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Abstract

Digital recruiting has become an important element of sourcing, attracting, and recruiting top talent at Sodexo, a world leader in Quality of Life Services with 125,000 employees in the USA. As an early adopter of social media and one of the first to launch a mobile app allowing candidates to apply for jobs directly from their mobile device, Sodexo has recognized the cultural shift in preferred communication methods by job candidates. Because of this, they have deployed a number of digital recruiting campaigns in recent years. In this case study, details are provided about the comprehensive digital campaign deployed to expand

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outreach and engagement with student members of the National Society for Minorities in Hospitality – a target audience for Sodexo's hospitality pipeline sourcing.

Introduction

Sodexo, Inc., is a world leader in Quality of Life Services with 125,000 employees in the USA. Annually, they recruit for more than 6000 executive and management positions. To meet aggressive growth goals, the company recognized the potential of using digital recruitment approaches to expand their ability to source, attract, and recruit top talent.

What Was the Challenge?

Sodexo's challenge was to maximize technology as a competitive advantage.

Looking back at the evolution of digital recruiting, new opportunities via social media and the concept of building talent communities became central to many of the techniques used today. As each new platform emerged – from LinkedIn to Facebook to Twitter – companies around the world looked for new ways to communicate with external audiences, including potential job candidates.

From 2006 to 2012, social media adoption and the emergence of new platforms grew at phenomenal rates. Facebook saw an annual compounded growth rate of 109 % during this time frame, topping off with one billion registered users globally – the equivalent of becoming the world's third largest country. Twitter increased by about a 507 % annual compounded growth rate. And newcomer Pinterest, in short 3 years from its launch in 2010, saw a 4,900 % annual compounded growth rate – the fastest growing of these three platforms.

Additionally, in 2008 another clear trend was emerging: an increasing adoption and reliance on digital and mobile technology. Very quickly, mobile technology use was increasing at exponential rates – for everything from news gathering to banking, from connecting with friends/family to entertainment, and for professional networking through social media sites. And, at that time, Sodexo saw trends indicating that minorities were adopting mobile use at faster rates – thus creating an opportunity for the company to further its diversity recruitment goals through the use of mobile technology.

In 2014, this trend continued. According to the Pew Research Center (2014), 90 % of American adults own a cell phone, and 58 % have a smartphone.

Additionally, 32 % of American adults own an e-reader and 42 % own a tablet computer. Even more telling about the mobile trend is the fact that 63 % of adult cell owners use their phones to go online and 34 % of cell Internet users go online mostly using their phones and not using some other device such as a desktop or laptop computer.

Because of this, it is clear that developing a comprehensive mobile recruiting strategy will significantly enhance a company's ability to attract and recruit top talent by making it easy for candidates to learn about the company, connect with recruiters, and view and apply for jobs from their mobile devices. Additional research also shows that a mobile strategy would have a positive impact on the diversity of candidates and the opportunity to promote internal mobility to employees.

And so, in response, Sodexo developed a mobile recruitment strategy that included on-the-go access to online properties, and they developed one of the first mobile job search apps that allows candidates to connect with recruiters, access Sodexo's online career properties, and apply to open positions directly from their mobile device. Additionally, candidates can opt-in to receive various messages and newsletters from Sodexo via the mobile app.

Throughout the company's engagement with social and mobile media technology, it became clear that digital recruiting requires an integrated philosophy. Gone are the days of posting job advertisements in newspapers. Today, candidates and employers alike are using the Internet to find each other and to build relationships that were not possible even just 10 years ago. From e-cards to social media posts to mobile engagement via QR codes and text messaging, the landscape has changed. If a company wants to truly engage candidates, their efforts need to involve digital technologies and be seamless across all platforms – from digital to traditional.

What Was Our Plan to Master the Challenge?

- Sodexo increased the use of integrated digital tools to support diversity in entry level hospitality roles.

One area of focus for Sodexo is supporting their value of diversity while attracting top talent for their hospitality clients. One way this is achieved is by developing relationships with key professional organizations and select colleges across the country to build a pipeline of top entry level talent. The National Society for Minorities in Hospitality (NSMH) is one example of such a professional organization that the company has partnered with for a number of years.

NSMH is the premier professional organization for hospitality students – and a source of diverse future leadership for Sodexo's talent pipeline. Each year, NSMH assists members in making the transition from "Today's Students to Tomorrow's Leaders" through networking and professional development opportunities, most notably at the national conference where students can engage with experts in the field as well as prominent corporations.

As a corporate sponsor of NSMH, Sodexo is able to leverage strong partnerships within the company to pursue this diverse talent of student members as well as attendees at the national conference. The company's annual campaign uses a range of approaches, including social media techniques, speaker panels, and on-the-spot hires. Additionally, the NSMH campaign assists in developing relationships with students from diverse colleges and universities starting in their freshman year, leading to internship placements across the country as well as permanent placements after graduation.

Steps to Optimizing Digital Recruitment Programs

Digital recruiting encompasses the use of different electronic means to source, attract, and recruit top talent. This may involve the integrated use of a candidate relationship management (CRM) system to build ongoing relationships with candidates, online properties like websites and career centers, as well as social interactions on sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, and the like, and the sharing of information via blogs and e-newsletters. To maximize successful use of all of these platforms, recruiters at Sodexo are required to attain their Certified Internet Recruiter (CIR) credential.

It is also important to note, as mentioned earlier, digital recruitment programs are more successful if they are fully integrated across all of your efforts and across all of your online properties – the company website, social media profiles, mobile sites and applications, as well as blogs and other publications.

Creating and implementing a digital recruitment strategy can increase the frequency and the quality of your outreach while building stronger relationships with the members of your talent community. This is beneficial for top talent interested in working for your company in the future, even when an opening may not be available now. Additionally, digital recruitment can increase your access to the pool of top diverse talent and result in year over year savings in recruitment advertising. At Sodexo, they have been able to yield more than $300,000/year savings in advertising by using digital recruitment efforts.

And another way that Sodexo has maximized its use of social media is by utilizing a social sharing platform called QUEsocial. QUEsocial makes it easy for recruiters to share useful, relevant content generated by Sodexo's Talent Acquisition Brand Ambassadors on their individual social media profiles. Additionally, an outcome-based game engine in the platform issues challenges that encourage users to convert their social media activity into business outcomes.

To optimize digital recruitment programs, you should consider the following:

- Set clear, attainable goals that include details about your audience, how you will measure success, and the types of messages you want to share.
- Choose your platforms and the timing of messages to support engaging your different audiences. Will you use e-mail, website, social, and mobile platforms? Will you include live communication? Remember that using multiple mediums

can help build momentum for your campaign and can culminate in personal, live interactions that yield hires.
- Select your content – text/articles, videos, photos, stories, profiles, testimonials, etc.
- Plan for an all-encompassing approach that includes communications prior to the event, during the event, and following the event.
- Create a timeline or calendar detailing when and how you will communicate with your audience, i.e., schedule dates for specific Facebook posts, blog posts, cross posts, e-mail messages, etc.
- Consider the use of video interviewing tools like InterviewStream to save time and money and create convenient opportunities for managers and candidates to connect virtually.

And lastly, remember there is no one size fits all when developing your digital recruitment strategy.

Having a true understanding of what you hope to accomplish with each of your campaigns and selecting the right tools to use will bring greater success.

Dos and Don'ts of Digital Recruitment Programs

A few things to keep in mind as you plan your digital recruitment program:

- Be consistent in all messaging. Unify your messaging with an overarching theme and graphics/imagery.
- Create unique web pages and maximize the use of shortened URLs to track hits and your audience reach.
- Use a wide spectrum of media that include social, electronic, and live methods of communicating with talent communities to offer more opportunities to engage with your audience.
- Remember that not all social media sites are created equal. Choose the outlets you want to use that most closely align with your goals based on audience and type of messaging (i.e., short vs. long posts, strong use of imagery, etc.).
- If you use multiple communication channels to achieve your recruiting goals, remember to connect all of the communications with cross-links to avoid isolation within any one platform.
- Keep your content short and engaging, remembering that most people scan online content rather than read it word for word.
- Spell-check, spell-check, spell-check.

As you launch your campaign and begin to post content, do not become a one-way megaphone of information. Engage your audience with comments, likes, and Retweets. Be responsive.

Also, do not spam your audience with multiple, repetitive posts. Be selective and deliberate in all of your messaging.

Case Study: NSMH – Prior to the Event

Sodexo's involvement with NSMH begins long before the national conference each year. In fact, the company remains engaged with the organization throughout the school year building relationships with students beginning their freshman year of college via classroom presentations and live attendance at regional events leading up to the national conference.

However, when it comes to the national conference, they initiate regular meetings for a planning committee that organizes every detail of their involvement in the conference – before, during, and after.

Specific campaign elements include:

- **Culture of Synergy and Inclusiveness**: Sodexo engages students throughout the year at regional events leading up to the national conference opening ceremony and closing banquet through special events, networking and interview opportunities, and breakout sessions and panel discussions.
- **Strategic Planning**: Sodexo strengthens relationships with HR and operations to leverage their support and commitment to NSMH and college recruitment.
- **eCard Campaigns**: Sodexo sends eCards both internally and externally to build excitement, support, and engagement for the NSMH national conference, while encouraging hiring managers to make employment offers. eCards are also sent to students for pre-screening and pre-scheduling of interviews.
- **Online/Social Media**: Each year, Sodexo develops a specialized NSMH landing page on the Sodexo Careers website for students to get information about their participation in the upcoming conference. Additionally, they create a Facebook event page; leverage Twitter, Pinterest, and Google+; and promote the national conference through an e-newsletter called *Career Connections* to build relationships and excitement before the conference. All of this content is mobile optimized and available to students accessing content via the Sodexo Careers Mobile Jobs app.
- **Branding**: Through all communications, the company positions Sodexo as an employer of choice to students and as a corporate option to pursue outside of the traditional hotel and restaurant industry. Sodexo team member enthusiasm and energy at the national conference takes on a life of its own quickly and is valued by attendees.
- **Scholarships**: Each year, NSMH students can apply either for a scholarship to assist them in attending the conference and/or for an academic scholarship that is awarded to a deserving student to be applied to their college studies. The academic scholarship winner is announced at the national meeting each year.

Case Study: NSMH – At the Event

During the actual conference, Sodexo hosts a number of live activities, including a welcome/hospitality suite, and their recruiters, operations leaders, and Sodexo-NSMH

alumni participate in panel discussions and other breakout sessions. Additionally, they conduct a full day of interviewing intern and management candidates, and they are the only large company making on-the-spot offers to candidates.

Supporting all of Sodexo's activities on-site, their team actively posts to both personal and company social media profile information about Sodexo's on-site activities, as well as other relevant bits of information to engage with attendees.

Case Study: NSMH – After the Event

After the conference is over, Sodexo recruiters reach out to those who were met to continue engaging them with the company. To facilitate this process, Sodexo uses their candidate relationship management (CRM) system to stay in touch with those NSMH members currently in school who might be interested in internships and those who are preparing to graduate who might be interested in entry level positions.

For those students still in school who apply and are accepted into the Sodexo Future Leaders internship program, professional development webinars as well as virtual mentoring is offered as part of the program. And at the completion of the internship, former interns are granted access to the company's alumni network program called Reconnexions. Access to the Reconnexions portal gives the students access to additional professional development opportunities and job openings not available to external candidates.

Also, top students who complete the internship program as well as current employees who are former NSMH members are encouraged to become official brand ambassadors for Sodexo at their home schools, sharing information about careers at Sodexo and encouraging others to become active in Sodexo-NSMH events. Sodexo provides these ambassadors with social media training and guidelines on how to use Twitter and other platforms to engage socially with potential candidates, and provides opportunities for these ambassadors to be guest bloggers on the company's career blog.

For graduates and former NSMH members, Sodexo maintains contact with them for future career opportunities with the company and also encourages them to refer other candidates to Sodexo. In fact, the company has gone back as far as 2008 to source NSMH students who were previously interviewed and may now be ready for general manager positions.

Additionally, Sodexo works to connect students with jobs through internal marketing within the company's talent acquisition team. During their weekly talent acquisition department calls in the spring, time is dedicated to spotlight NSMH students to increase awareness of their availability. Additionally, invitation-only e-mails are sent internally to solicit HR partners to participate in workshops and panels in support of marketing and branding of Sodexo at NSMH.

What Was the Real Outcome?

Each year, metrics are gathered to measure the effectiveness of Sodexo's communication strategy as well as overall engagement with students who attend the NSMH conference. The 2014 conference was held in St. Louis, Mo., and was overshadowed by a winter storm that prevented many chapters from attending the conference.

However, Sodexo's use of Twitter in 2014 vs. 2013 saw an increase of 115 % in accounts reached and a 7 % increase in impressions. But the true measure of success was their on-site engagement – despite the overall low conference attendance: Sodexo conducted 56 management and intern interviews over a span of 8 h, resulting in 10 offers for management hires and 12 offers for internships, as well as identifying five students who are under consideration for employment after they graduate later in the year.

What Are the Lessons Learned?

The strategy developed for the NSMH campaign has become a best practice for Sodexo's future college recruitment strategies. Future campaigns will introduce new mobile technologies/techniques, continue the mentor/coach approach to students, and foster relationship building with students who attended previous events.

Sodexo's NSMH campaign is about more than increasing the number of hires achieved at the national conference. It is about building relationships with students who become part of a diverse talent pipeline that can meet future hiring needs in the company. It is about building relationships and strong partnerships with Sodexo's internal customers and colleagues in operations and HR who are willing to go that extra mile to pursue this talent. And, above all, it is about developing an innovative campaign that brings all of these relationships together to achieve results.

While new technologies have become the tool with which Sodexo implements its campaign, at Sodexo it is more about the people and the long-term relationships developed. Developing an effective recruitment campaign is not built simply to achieve better numbers than last year. An effective digital recruitment campaign supports the building of long-term relationships that meet hiring needs now and into the future.

Cross-References

▶ Human Resources Marketing and Recruiting: Essentials of Employer Branding
▶ Human Resources Marketing and Recruiting: Essentials of Recruiting Events

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