

Many link, few connect

Employers and job seekers share the vision to make the internet the hub for all career activities. Companies invest more energy than ever into their online communication tools. Reality however shows that they are struggling with high expectations and the fast evolution of the internet.

It happens easily that career websites are overloaded and impersonal, application forms too technical, and attempts to be on Facebook not well-received by the audience. That is why companies are reacting with new strategies to not only link, but connect with talent online.

Career websites: Mission impossible forces creativity

According to the *TEWeB 2011*, more than 90% of students and graduates use the internet to look for jobs and careers. Out of these, the majority goes to companies' career websites.

Demands on career websites are higher than ever. They are expected to be full of information, but not lengthy. Entertaining and unique, but still credible and realistic, without the taste of a PR-campaign. Intuitive to navigate. To open up for networking, but not interfere with anyone's privacy. To have easy online application forms that are quick to fill out, but still help you to present your unique skills and strengths. Even if the company has hundreds of offices, departments, functions and career paths, it should ideally all fit in one simple website that shows everyone the right way without any hassle.

Still they compete with the intuitiveness of the modern internet where it is easy to book flights, shop bestsellers or exchange recipes with pictures and videos.

Most people have no hard time explaining in one sentence what the purpose of an airline website is, an online bookstore or a cooking community. Not so for career websites. They have become multi-purpose and multi-target-group platforms. It is next to impossible for them to fulfill everyone's expectations at the same time.

On top of that, job seekers do not solely rely on what employers say about themselves. Today it is common to ask your friends on Facebook or read third-party opinions on forums and opinion boards to differentiate between what is credible and what is merely a PR campaign. Students are cautious and not easy to impress. This is where employers lose control over their own image if what they say does not hold true outside their sphere of influence.

Applying Online And Loving It – a vision!

"Another question that many job seekers are asking is: why on Earth is it easier today to book a transcontinental flight on the internet than to submit your CV to an employer?" says Ziesing.

Potentialpark's APOLLO study 2011 shows what job seekers expect from an online application and how employers live up to these expectations. It covers

Few have the breath to keep up with the fast pace of the internet

The thinking starts from the questions that the job seekers have, not from what the company wants to get across

The biggest white spot on the map is not the career website, but the online application

the entire process from searching jobs, to submitting one's resume, to the surrounding support and communication.

This is the first ever benchmark of this kind and scope. It also shows the application software of which service provider the employers use, which reveals that no service provider is a guarantee to be in the top. Even some of the providers the most used by employers, such as Taleo, SAP or Kenexa, are represented in both the top and bottom of the rankings of the best online applications. In fact, how candidate-friendly an online application is seems to depend more on how the employer drives the project, embeds the system into the career website, and adjusts the implementation to their needs.

The study also shows that it is more common than ever to apply online. Most of the employers in the different regional TEWeB and the APOLLO rankings that Potentialpark audited have an online application form, and most of them offer password-protected user accounts to save jobs and applications. Many of them in fact have closed all other ways to apply and only allow for digital submissions.

Students and graduates have accepted that applying online is "what is common today". The problem is, the more they apply, the more they dislike it.

Today, most employers use powerful software to process applications digitally: the so-called Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS). What was meant to save recruiters time and costs and give them easy access to large numbers of CVs, has turned out to be not always quite so fun for the candidates.

This is not necessarily the fault of the service providers. They implemented the systems that were asked for: strong and effective – for the recruiters who ordered them. The candidate experience was not a priority. Soon however the negative impact of a bad online application on the employer's image became obvious: employers are losing candidates that are frustrated and simply give up.

The ear of the needle that every applicant needs to go through

Many of the promises that employers have built up on their professional career websites lose all their power and credibility once you click the 'apply now' button on a job ad and enter the application system. It is hard to believe an employer's claim to be forward-thinking and innovative if their application system is basically a time-machine back to the first days of the internet: technical, complicated and time-consuming.

The biggest concern of job seekers is the so-called black box effect: it is less personal and transparent than sending an email or letter. "Many applicants think that when they fill out the form and click submit, their application will actually never be read by a person, but automatically filtered with unknown knock-out criteria," says Ziesing. "Which may or may not be true, but this impression works against a trustworthy candidate relationship. It feels like dropping your CV into a big black hole."

Some companies have started to cooperate with business networks. They enable applicants to log in with their LinkedIn account, or to skip the biggest part of the form by pasting the link to their CV on LinkedIn.

Why is it easier today to book a transcontinental flight on the internet than to submit your CV to an employer?

Many think that their application will never be read by an actual person

The key players are reacting. “We know of HR managers that have a pile of desperate complaints from recruiters on their table who tried their own application system,” says Ziesing. “And we know that service providers are working hard to improve their offer.”

The pure purchase power of the employers has already brought the candidate perspective on the development agenda of the service providers. Change is going to come. The competition is on!

Companies are on Facebook & Co, which is not where job seekers expect to meet them

In its research, Potentialpark discovered a surprising paradox: on the one hand, the majority of students and graduates explicitly state that they do not want to be involved with their future employers on social networks, such as Facebook. They feel uncomfortable about it and think that social networks are not the right environment to initiate talks about careers. On the other hand, this is exactly where employers go today in order to be seen by their target group.

Also, students say that business networks are much more suitable to get in touch with recruiters and company representatives. And by nature, they should be, after all LinkedIn is made for career-related networking. Still, this is not where most of the visible interaction happens.

How is that? First of all, job seeker’s objections are partially ungrounded. They do not need to show their party pictures and hobby activities to employers and recruiters at all. They can follow a company’s activities and even interact with them without becoming their “friend” and opening their private profile to them. Once they find this out, users are much less reluctant to engage with employer profiles and events on Facebook & Co.

Secondly, as career-related as LinkedIn & Co. are in their approach, as far are they behind in terms of functionality and connectivity. This can be seen in two facts: company profiles on these sites are far less dynamic and really not much more than static online flyers; and the platforms do not enable activity feeds outside their own sites. While it is technically simple to connect a Facebook feed with a career website, the same cannot be said for business networks.

Thirdly, simply too few students and graduates have accounts on business networks. It feels right to be there to meet employers. But unless you have a career track record as well as former and current colleagues to link with, signing up here does not seem to be a priority.

“Facebook is light years ahead of LinkedIn in making anything that happens visible to anyone else and engaging people in interactivity,” says Ziesing. “Employers who have something interesting to say about themselves, their people, events or work places will be seen, linked and commented on when they post it on social networks.”

At the dawn of the mobile revolution

Today, mobile phones are more common than computers to go online in many parts of the world. In Asia, the US and Europe, students use their phones not

Recruiting on Facebook is like showing up at a student party to do job interviews with a megaphone

Employers and job seekers are trying hard to find each other online and build relationships. A few have found ways to make the tunnels meet in the middle

only to check emails on the subway, but also more and more to surf the internet between classes, upload funny snapshots to their social profiles or locate the shop in the area with the best price for a laptop they just saw in the library. Employers know that looking for careers is just a logical consequence, and they are preparing for it – under the hood, for now.

According to Potentialpark’s research, only few employers offer a mobile version of their career website, and even less a career-related app for smartphones. And if they do, it is mostly limited to the search of jobs. At the same time, already around one third of the job seekers would use mobile career sites, and even more see themselves using a job app in the future.

Mobile recruiting is a niche, the amount of jobs found through mobile recruiting is marginal at best. However, what employers know they need to deal with is not only a new technology, but the way it changes and accelerates how people communicate, even outside the technique itself.

“Like with many of the latest trends, the question is not who has the best mobile career strategy today,” says Ziesing, “but who is learning today how to create it tomorrow?”

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About Potentialpark

Potentialpark is a research institute specializing in employer branding, recruitment communication and application processes. Since 2002, Potentialpark has monitored the information-gathering, decision-making and application processes of job seekers globally. Since 2003, Potentialpark has published its annual Top Employer Web Benchmark, the independent study and ranking of corporate career websites and webcentric recruitment. In 2011, Apollo was added as a parallel study focusing on online applications. Regular Trend Study Reports help monitor the development of hot topics today and over time.

Fact Box: Potentialpark Research 2011

Studies: TEWeB, APOLLO and Trend Series 2011

Respondents: 30,000+ students, graduates and early career professionals in the US, Europe and Asia, representing the top business schools, universities and technical institutions.

Web audits: 755 online career communication and application tools

Research period: September 2010 – January 2011

Refer to the following studies for more details:

TEWeB 2011: Top Employer Web Benchmark - The Career Website Study

APOLLO 2011: Applying Online And Loving It - The Online Application Study

Trend Series 2011: Trend Reports on Hot Topics In Employer Branding

Please contact us for access to details, full rankings and company-specific results

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