

Help Wanted? Find It with Social Media

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Forget sifting through résumés from people you don't know. Use LinkedIn, TalentVine and other sites to engage and cultivate talented workers.

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Much as singles use social media sites to find a good match, employers and prospective employees see them as great conduits for getting to know one another, taking a lot of the guesswork out of the hiring process.

Long a leader in building business contacts, the venerable and popular LinkedIn is now joined by less expensive options, such as [Facebook's BranchOut](#), [BeKnown](#) and [Talent.me](#), as well as [Twitter](#) and [SelectMinds' TalentVine](#). There are also industry-specific sites, such as the [Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers](#), or IEEE. Its focus is on the engineering community.

Uncle Sam is helping to expand the online universe, too. The U.S. Department of Labor, Facebook and various employer organizations have created the [Social Jobs Partnership](#) Facebook page. It's regularly updated with research materials plus tips for recruiters and job seekers. The site also plans to create a large network for job postings in the not-too-distant future.

Building relationships is key to finding good employees quickly when a position opens up.

"You can be a lot more targeted in who you're going after," says Charles Bretz, recruiting sourcing manager at Crowe Horwath LLP, a public accounting and consulting firm. "You can research and discover who are some of the high performers, or up-and-coming individuals."

Bretz notes that so far this fiscal year, 8% of his hires have come through social media contacts.

"Where it pays off ... you start conversations six months, nine months down the road. So when [applicants] start looking, they know who your company is, so it's a warm relationship already," Bretz says. "We've seen people who reached out two years later. They call us."

Maintaining a presence on social media sites gives employers good insight into a job seeker's online presence and personality. Looking for a new salesperson? Here's how social media can help: A certain applicant's scant social media presence or small group of online contacts is a clue that the person may not be a good fit for the job. Another candidate with far more contacts suggests someone who knows how to reach people.

Obtaining referrals -- being directed to a certain job seeker by someone in your company who knows the person -- is a proven way to help minimize hiring mistakes.

TalentVine, for example, creates an invitation-only network for your company and potential job applicants. It lets employees e-mail invites to their acquaintances whether or not they're actively looking for work. Once an acquaintance joins the network, he or she can add a personal link to his or her LinkedIn or other profile. Users can also sign up for relevant job alerts or apply directly for positions.

TalentVine, which offers the option of pay per click or a flat monthly fee for unlimited use, also tracks who referred whom, making it easier on the human resources folks, according to James Milton, director of product marketing at SelectMinds.

Mastering search engines is also key to finding good employees online. Keywords are what draw in qualified applicants. Be specific about the skills and certifications you're looking for in an employee. For example, when searching for an accountant, be sure to specify whether you want the person to have passed the Uniform Certified Public Accountant Examination.

"The main thing that employers do that is not good is use their own company jargon or abbreviate their job titles and use abbreviations in their descriptions," says Nancy Holland, vice president of marketing and communications at DirectEmployers, a nonprofit association of employers. "Candidates will not search for these; nor will they be able to decipher the jargon if they stumble [upon] the job."

Note that the same job title may mean different things in different companies. "What some companies may call a network engineer, other companies may call a network architect," says Bretz. To attract qualified applicants, be sure to describe exactly what the job entails -- and where it ranks in your corporate hierarchy.