Recruiting tech: The best is yet to come

By Lisa Burden

From blockchain resume solutions to the rise of AI and machine-learning, recruiting has certainly come a long way from the not-too-distant days of newspaper ads.

A number of those trends are entering the mainstream this year, while others are still developing. Still, the most exciting advances may be those yet to come.

Artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence is software and algorithms. It can sift through hundreds of resumes, notify candidates that they do not meet requirements, suggest other available positions for them and tackle both drudge work and highly detailed functions with very little human supervision — and much faster than the typical HR department.

AI's time has come, according to the respondents of a 2017 survey. Talent Tech Labs surveyed 105 companies last year and discovered that almost three quarters – 73% – of respondents said they are using some form of AI, and 22 percent said they expect to implement AI in the next two years.

Study respondents also indicated the types of AI they are using. Machine learning is the most widespread with 74% of the survey respondents indicating this is the AI they use, while 68% said natural language processing was their AI of choice because of increased demand to analyze text and other unstructured data. Twenty-two percent said they use chatbots. And 12% said they use deep learning tech while 10% said they use neural networks – not surprising finding given the more complex nature of these two solutions, according to the study.

When using AI and machine learning, HR has to be careful to show that the algorithms are not just pulling one type of candidate, said Nancy Holland, vice president of marketing for DirectEmployers Association, adding, "right now, we haven't been able to show that is not happening."

She said AI is getting better, but, "it's not foolproof." Poorly aligned AI can discriminate, past reports have said, and HR can't afford to make such mistakes.

Data/analytics

HR analytics and big data can be used in various ways in the workplace — for talent acquisition, training and evaluation, employee performance, financial compensation, retention, marketing and planning.

HR is planning to invest heavily in people and data; 47% of professionals said they will be more data-driven in 2022, according to a study by Paycor.

Jennifer Paxton, director of talent for LevelUp, said she is using data analytics to examine post reports — the postmortem of a job process — to determine, among other things, how long it took to fill the job, how many applicants converted to a phone screen or to onsite interviews, how many applicants were minorities and other key metrics.

With the prevalence of computer hacks, "you need to be able to trust companies with data" and companies need to make sure they are compliant with domestic and, in some instances, foreign regulators, said Ankit Somani, co-founder of AllyO. And with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) on the horizon, more employers are going to need to consider a data ethics plan to remain compliant.

Video

Today, employers are using video for interviewing, recruiting, training, knowledge-sharing and more. Convenience and cost-effectiveness are among the reasons for its growing popularity. Candidate videos can be reviewed from remote locations and employers don't have to pay to fly job candidates in for in-person interviews.

Some have raised questions about whether the use of video interviews discriminates against those who don't have video capability, and whether it's accessible enough for individuals with certain disabilities. The key may well be keeping a close eye on the candidate experience.

Gamification

Gamification can be used in several ways. During the job application process, applicants can be asked to play a game so that a profile can be created based on their choices. An HR manager can use a game to train new workers on job functions, or encourage engagement through the creation of profiles.

But gamification creates several questions. "How good is that factor in predicting employee performance?" Somani said. "How do you make it so that it applies broadly and not just to one company? It takes so much effort to make one of these," he said, and designers may need to make one for each company. Also, he said, accessibility must be considered.

There are also a few other compliance concerns, too. "You have to be able to show that every single person was treated equally and was given the same opportunity to pass or fail. That's hard to do with gamification," Holland said. "What kind of computer set up do they have? What kind of atmosphere are they in when they are playing the game? Same with testing. You an open yourself up to some pretty big ramifications and liabilities with any kind of testing. Also, how valid is it? How valid the assumptions about their performance on the job?"

Texting

Industry observers agree that texting is an increasingly popular way to reach applicants and communicate with employees, as there is demand for it.

"Texting is on the rise," Somani said, adding that applicants like it and consider companies that text to be super accessible.

But, as with the other technologies, there are plenty of questions that have yet to be answered. How do you allow employers to converse with applicants on all of the platforms – texting, Facebook, Snapchat and more — that they use? "How do you make it appear like a single conversation? How do you make that conversation personal?" Somani asked.

Holland said employers are starting to play with the tech to find answers. The easiest way to use texting, she said, is for jobseekers to opt-in to have jobs texted to them and then to save the job on an app. Fast food places are using this kind of texting, for example, she said. She described one nationwide fast-food chain that was having trouble finding staff in its suburban locations, so it started a test market with texting and a window sticker on their doors that told jobseekers to opt-in so that jobs could be texted to them. It's important to note, however, that these efforts have to follow any applicable rules, such as those regarding spam.

Holland also pointed out that, although texting casts a wider net in broadcasting jobs, some don't have access to texting or the capability to text — a factor that potentially could be used against an employer in a discrimination suit.

The future

While all of the recruiting tech available today may seem exciting, the biggest game-changers may still be on the way.

Resume puffery remains a major problem. A survey by HireRight revealed that 85% of HR professionals found exaggerations on resumes, up from 66% reported five years ago. So, third-party verification becomes a necessary step.

Blockchain — a means of accessing goods, services or information directly from the source without a third-party — may be poised the solve that problem. Schools can post degrees and educational details, for example; Employers can share dates and titles, and credentialing

entities can make similar information available. Candidates can then authorize employers to access their records directly. "We're starting to hear more about blockchain," said Gal Almog, CEO of Talenya, but no one understands how it meshes.

Blockchain is all about trust, Somani said. "It will come back to compliance. Can you trust this? Can you use this next time you are audited?" he said. "Where is the oversight? What if data shows up in two different places? What kind of data can be stored? Who is comfortable storing it?"

Another advancement may just be the holy grail for which employers have been waiting. In about three years, we may have tech that follows a worker end-to-end — from getting hired by a company to exiting the company, Somani predicts. He said he expects pilots in six months by a few different players, and case studies to follow sometime next year.

Seamless integration will be difficult, Holland said, adding that it's something companies want but that it is difficult to do because there are so many pieces involved and because systems don't usually speak to each other very well.

All of this tech is aimed at making HR's life easier. "Machines are not going to replace humans in any way in the foreseeable future. But, they can do, maybe, 70% of the work," Almog said. The best recruiters will work right there in the mid-space, aligning their human expertise with the agility that new tech can provide.