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Manage the deluge of job applicants

By Mary Clare Jalonick, special for USATODAY.com

Once you've posted that job opening, you can expect the deluge of e-mails and resumes to begin — especially in the days of mass industry layoffs and tight job markets. Fear not: Finding a quality candidate who stands out from the field need not be daunting.

Follow our guide to manage your search for the ideal job candidate:

Prepare to sort

Even before you get your first response, you must be prepared. Start by making a list of the indispensable qualities you want from a candidate.

Some employers advertise a phone number for applicants to call. Consider setting up a separate voice mail for the incoming job calls so that your direct line isn't flooded with calls.

Leave a message at this voice mail. Include information for candidates about your screening process.

"Be specific in the voice mail about what the job requirements are, what it pays and the basics," says Richelle Shaw, CEO of workz.com, a Web resource for small business owners.

If candidates are responding to your opening via e-mail, use the auto-response feature to let them know if they should expect to hear back from you and how long the process is expected to take.

If you are receiving e-mails, create a folder on your computer to hold incoming applications.

If you want to be thorough about the screening process, keep in touch with every applicant — unless they don't seem serious enough to really want the job.

"I think it's important to respond to everyone, unless the contact from the applicant is clearly part of a bulk e-mail job campaign," says management consultant Paul Glen. "I don't feel compelled to respond to applicants who



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By LYCOS

haven't bothered to look into the company they are applying to."

Replying to applicants saves time, in the long run, says Jeffrey Evans, president of the Burbank, Calif. staffing company OnStaff.

"We respond to everyone to let them know where they stand in the process," he says. "This cuts down on wasted time in dealing with candidates who follow up with phone calls to find out their status."

Organize the influx

Before diving into the first resume, take a moment to figure out how you'll sort through the candidates. Many experienced screeners start by creating three piles for "yes," "no" and "maybe."

"Pile one is people with no chance at getting the position, and a polite but firm rejection letter is sent out immediately. Pile two is people who have a subset of the skills needed. We may want to meet with and talk to these people. Pile three is those candidates who meet all of the requirements and on paper look like a perfect match," Evans says.

The candidates who are dubbed "maybes" might be diamonds in the rough, so spend some time looking them over.

Mark each piece of paper after you review it so you remember what you were thinking at the time. "Circle things, highlight things and make notes," Glen says.

Be methodical in your review.

Shaw says she goes over each resume more than once, eliminating more candidates every time. She then ranks the remaining candidates by employment history, professionalism of the resume and presentation. By the time she schedules interviews, she says she already has a good idea who her ideal candidate is.

Hire help

Some companies receive so many resumes they feel overwhelmed. A screening company could be the solution.

Dean Suposs, general manager of ADP Screening and Selection Services, a New Jersey screening company, says his business is based on having the hiring and screening resources most companies don't have.

"Good providers retrieve information directly from its source, which may be found in numerous locations across the country," he says. "Retrieving this information from all these locations in a quick and cost-effective manner may prove to be difficult for a company's internal human resources staff."

But some hiring managers contend an outside company can't understand their needs. And it may be difficult to describe every single quality you are looking for in a candidate to an outsider.

Shirley Webb, director of contract staffing for Express Personal Staffing, an Oklahoma based staffing company, says companies lose out when they don't go through the process themselves.

"The company should invest any training necessary to have their employees up to par when it comes to the pre-screening process," she says. "It is impossible for anyone to know or sell the company better than an employee — this is a major edge when operating in a competitive market."

Either way, once you've weeded your applicants down to the best, you're ready to interview.

An advertisement banner for AT&T Wireless. On the left is the AT&T logo with the word "Wireless" below it. In the center, the text reads "WIRELESS PLANS STARTING AT JUST \$19.99" in large, bold letters. Below this, it says "www.attwireless.com" and "PLUS, free shipping". On the right side of the banner is a small image of a mobile phone and the word "more" with three orange dots to its right.

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