

## **Social Media and Online Networking: Friend or Foe?**

There has been much talk recently about the impact that social networks will have on the executive recruiting business. Some comment that online professional networks, in particular LinkedIn, could spell the demise of external recruiting services and that organizations will in future both identify and recruit candidates on their own. Like many sweeping claims, the truth only emerges with the passage of time, often with the claim much diluted.

But let's be clear - social media has already had an impact on executive search. Some organizations are taking on the recruitment of mezzanine level appointments between middle and C-suite management and there are even instances where Chief Executives are being recruited either via Job Boards or via the use of social networks.

But the reality is that much of the use of online recruiting tools and social networks is in the form of advertising, i.e. passive recruiting, and that many of the positions posted on these sites are either posted by organizations directly or by recruiting firms who are fishing in a larger pool. Those of us who have ever handled advertised recruitment know that it has specific characteristics. First and foremost responses to advertisements are extraordinarily random, secondly the responses require substantial time for processing and thirdly at the end of that time you have no idea whether you have recruited one of the best candidates in the market.

Too often retained executive search is confused with passive methods of recruitment. But proactive recruitment requires smart and focused work with one clear goal – make sure that the very best potential candidates are tapped on the shoulder and that your client receives the best that their money or opportunity can buy.

There is a vast difference between the two and often we forget to point that out. The advantage gained in initiating a proactive search is immeasurable compared to writing an advertisement, whether online or not, and waiting to see whether a big fish replies. It also provides considerable competitive advantage.

Time is money and the advantage of retained search is that the client has on his or her side an experienced partner used to “identifying the tallest ships and then bringing them into harbor” (Gerry Roche). It's more difficult and much more time consuming than many people imagine and thus the only real competition to an external search consultant is an internal search consultant who is prepared and qualified to spend the time and effort in proactively recruiting themselves.

Whichever method is used someone experienced has to mastermind the recruitment strategy, define the criteria for selection, exercise judgment in selection.... and then negotiate with favored candidates.

But by embracing social media consultants can not only speed up the process of search but can promote their own skills and services to a broader market. Thus the emergence and growth of professional networks such as LinkedIn, Xing, Viadeo, and even Twitter might actually present an opportunity rather than a threat. Social networks, used now by 78% of global Fortune 100s, have become a platform for differentiation and branding. The opportunity exists to emphasize the consultative side of our business, to remind clients that we do more than just locate candidates but act as a trusted advisor and strategic partner on issues of human capital.

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