

Seven Key Considerations When Renewing Your ATS

Executive Summary: Technology has dramatically changed the way we do business, and nowhere more so than in the recruiting industry. With web-enabled systems, candidates can now apply for a job with a click of a button, and managers can access talent pools almost instantaneously. With business intelligence tools, companies can easily analyze everything from time-to-hire and cost-of-hire to quality-of-hire and recruiting-source effectiveness.

A wide array of applicant tracking systems (ATS), at different stages of maturity, now compete for the opportunity to help your organization meet its staffing and recruiting needs. But with over 100 vendors to choose from, where do you start? If you are responsible for renewing your company's ATS, there are many factors to take into account. Here are some key considerations to bear in mind when renewing your applicant tracking system.



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1. How will workforce trends affect your recruiting/staffing needs?

Chances are that today's marketplace for skilled workers is very different from when you first implemented your current applicant tracking system – regardless of whether that selection was made in a “boom” or “bubble-bursting” year. Key demographic trends have a powerful influence in shaping your organization's staffing and recruiting needs, and therefore your strategy, for the foreseeable future.

For example, the much-vaunted “talent gap” that the U.S. economy faces – with a forecasted shortage of 10 million workers by 2010 – may require your organization to rethink the relative emphasis it places on discrete aspects of the recruiting process, such as:

- sourcing large volumes of qualified candidates,
- tightly managing the flow of candidates through the pipeline,
- streamlining interactions between recruiters and hiring managers, or
- creating a consistent and compelling brand experience for candidates.

In today's environment, emerging capabilities like tracking quality-of-hire or utilizing data collected during the recruiting process throughout the employee life cycle may be critical. Taking a careful look at how workforce trends have changed your recruiting and staffing needs is an essential first step.

2. Do you know your talent acquisition workflow?

To understand which capabilities your ATS must have in order for your recruiting efforts to succeed, focus on your recruiting workflow. Having a clear understanding of your recruiting *process*, including all the steps from lead generation to closing the deal to evaluating a new hire's subsequent performance, will make it easier for you to define the *process automation* that your ATS should deliver.

It's also important to confirm that your recruiting process is aligned with the goals of your organization. Find answers to questions like, *What are the pains your company is experiencing in recruiting? What do your hiring managers want from the recruiting function, and why? Which qualities is the organization looking for in your recruits?* The better you understand the business imperatives that shape the way your internal constituents think about recruiting, the better equipped you'll be to devise a recruiting process that meets their expectations...and to know what you need from your ATS to support that process.

3. What is the strategic focus of your ATS vendor?

What is the growth strategy of your current vendor? Are they a market leader, and do they have the staying power to be a survivor in the increasingly consolidating Talent Management market? Does your current vendor focus its product and services energy exclusively on customers like you – customers with large, complex organizational and product needs? These are all important questions to consider. You want to make sure your vendor has been in the business for a while, is still strong and growing, and has the experience and best practices to solve your long-term goals. You want them to be around and to keep investing in their products. It is also important that they have adequate resources to meet your needs and that they are focused on customer service. Customer support and follow-up are among the most frequently cited reasons for dissatisfaction with software vendors. The quality of their help-desk team, efficiency in handling bugs, and availability of training programs for new hires are all of importance.

4. Does your current ATS help build better relationships between recruiters and hiring managers, increasing the usefulness of requisitions and the quality of hires?

Streamlining the interactions among all participants in the recruiting process – hiring managers, recruiters, candidates, and HR executives – is becoming increasingly important. In particular, collaboration between hiring managers and recruiters leads to higher-quality candidates, delivery of more “best-fit” talent to the organization, and greater overall satisfaction with the recruiting process.

When they develop stronger relationships with hiring managers, recruiters gain insight into what’s coming, which improves their ability to attract and deliver top talent to your organization. Likewise, when hiring managers can give immediate feedback to recruiters on the quality of candidates under consideration, it enhances the likelihood that the next set of candidates they’re presented with will be even “better fits.” Key capabilities to look for include:

- Role-specific dashboards that present each participant with all the data they need, when they need it;
- Analytics and key performance indicators that help to identify bottlenecks in the recruiting process;
- Post-hire quality surveys that automate the collection of hiring managers’ satisfaction with new hires; and
- Systems that allow you to track new hires back to their source, making you aware of where you are finding your best talent.

5. Does your current vendor help you build meaningful relationships with candidates over time, promoting your employment brand and developing private talent pools of candidates?

In its *Enterprise Talent Management Benchmark Report: Hiring Smart, Hiring Right*, the AberdeenGroup reports that 50 percent of enterprise respondents see themselves in a cycle of reactive, emergency-driven hiring management. But with more job openings and fewer skilled applicants than ever before, it is imperative for companies to have proactive hiring practices in place now – before they find themselves in an emergency-driven situation.

The ability to create and leverage private talent communities, containing both external and internal candidates, puts candidates at your fingertips, demonstrably lowers your agency and job-board costs, and reduces time-to-fill. It also helps you to better identify diverse candidates. Often, candidates emerge who are clearly desirable and interested in the company, but may not be the best fit for a current opening – especially if it’s a niche position requiring special skills. By periodically engaging with these candidates, getting your company’s name in front of them and informing them when appropriate opportunities arise, companies save time and expense in future searches. It is important to remember that just as an organization’s brand represents the company’s values to its customers, an employer brand establishes the identity of a company as an employer.

The same is true for internal candidates. Maintaining proactive relationships with your current employees through a branded internal-mobility program that includes a systematic process of communication, content, and technology, can help you to ensure your best talent isn’t lost to the competition.

6. Does your current vendor allow you to utilize all the information you learned about a candidate in the recruiting process?

In most organizations, the knowledge that was painstakingly assembled about a candidate during the recruiting process goes into a “deep freeze” as soon as that candidate crosses the threshold and becomes an employee. Too often, valuable data and insights gathered during the course of initial contacts, assessments, screening questions, and interviews are simply shunted aside to a server and ignored, when they could have been shared with other HR functions – such as Performance Management and Succession Planning – and leveraged over the life cycle of the employee, for his or her benefit and the organization’s. Imagine the value of:

- having the employee's career-development plan kick in on Day 1 of his/her on-boarding, because the hiring manager is fully aware of the skills and experience that the employee disclosed when he/she was a candidate; or
- Allowing the organization's succession-planning program to capitalize on granular information about new hires, to help plan for future workforce needs.

According to the Recruiting Roundtable study, *Maximizing Returns on Recruiting Investment*, new hire performance can be dramatically improved by simply providing better organizational support and the needed tools. An ATS that automatically transfers the knowledge gained during the recruitment process to the hiring manager, and to the broader Talent Management knowledge base, will shorten the time-to-proficiency of new employees and increase their long-term value to the organization.

7. Does your current vendor allow you to go beyond attracting and recruiting the best talent, to managing, developing, and retaining it?

The impending workforce shortage may be the greatest tactical business challenge and driver of organizational performance in the immediate future. The ability to build and strengthen talent at all levels is more crucial than ever. Workforce planning and talent management are key elements to success. Unlike standalone applicant tracking systems, an ATS that is tightly integrated with other essential talent-management functions – including performance management, succession planning, and compensation management – allows you to utilize all the information you've learned about an employee, from the candidate stage right through the employee lifecycle. You can even gain insight into the skills and competencies that succeed in your most critical positions, enriching your succession-planning initiatives...and your ability to recruit and staff for those positions in the future.

In a fast-changing business environment, the applicant tracking system that's right for your organization today may well be different than the one that served your organization in days gone by. As you consider renewing your ATS, be sure to keep these key considerations in mind.

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