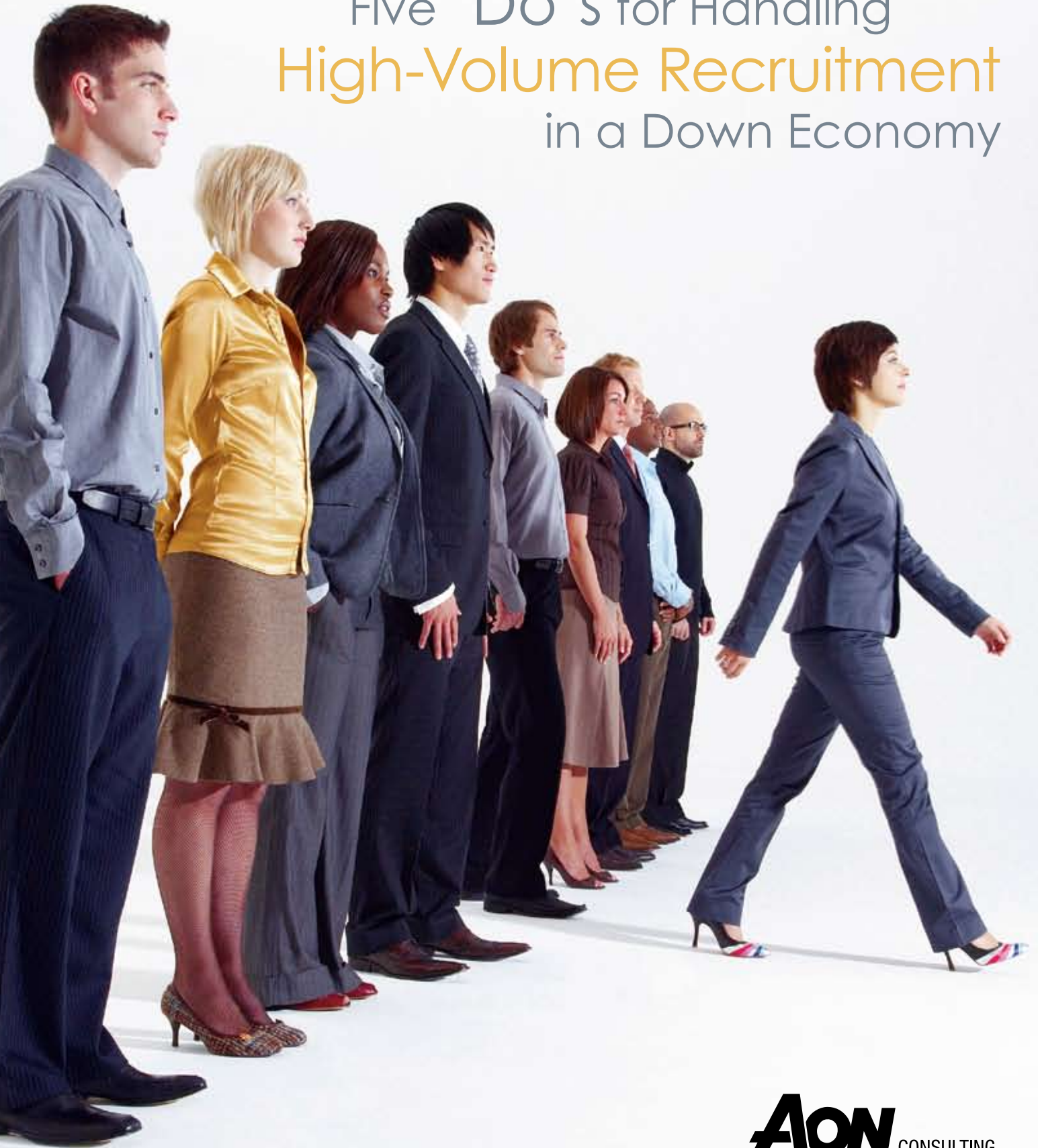


Five 'DO'S for Handling High-Volume Recruitment in a Down Economy



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Five “Do’s” for Handling High-Volume Recruitment in a Down Economy

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In a down economy, most organizations are recruiting for fewer open positions or adding headcount at a reduced rate—if not reducing headcount altogether. Consequently, the HR and recruitment functions become a seemingly obvious target for cost reduction. Conventional wisdom is that with fewer positions to fill, fewer resources are required—especially with a high unemployment rate.

Given this scenario—open positions with many unemployed—the remaining HR and recruitment professionals have a tremendous need for processes to manage the dramatic increase in the number of candidates applying for positions. Key considerations include:

- How can HR effectively screen and manage a pool of candidates that is 10 to 20 times the number of typical applicants without jeopardizing the candidate and hiring manager experience?
- How can HR capitalize on the opportunity to make the best hiring decisions and meet hiring timeframes within tight cost constraints? Organizations should conceivably have the best candidates available to them in this economy, but HR is at risk of being overrun by sheer volume.

Executing on some key precepts can ensure that your recruitment organization capitalizes on every opportunity to upgrade your talent inside of tight financial constraints. You can still strike the right balance of cost per hire, candidate quality, and cycle-time-to-fill for your high-volume positions by applying the following five “do’s” of hiring in a down economy.

Do post the position internally first, before you have explored all other options.

Do show the candidates the good, the bad, and the ugly of the open position.

Do use assessment tools that measure for both position-specific competencies and retention.

Do use phone screening for high-volume positions.

Do make the process as easy as possible for the hiring manager.

1. **Do post the position internally first, before you have explored all other options.**

Focusing on sourcing almost seems illogical with such a glut of active candidates. Many might argue that in today's economy, you could post any job on the internet and have it filled within days. Most high-volume recruitment departments know that this is not the case; we suggest that by posting a position on the job boards, you are making it harder on your internal team as well as reducing your chances of finding the most qualified candidates for the lowest cost.

Before you post anything externally, drive open positions towards internal transfers and employee referrals. Our experience shows that companies fill about 20 to 30 percent of all positions with internal transfers and promotions. In this economy, that number is increasing to nearly 40 percent. Additionally, employee referrals are the best external source for new hires when evaluating cost per hire, interview-to-hire ratio, and new-hire retention. These two sources are invaluable.

Once referrals and employee transfers are exhausted—but before posting a position on major job boards—design a customized targeted communication aimed at attracting the best candidates and use a comprehensive résumé sourcing system technology to aggregate high-potential candidates. The time invested up front will certainly be worth the time saved from receiving thousands more applications than you need, which have to be tracked, communicated with, and reported on.

If the targeted campaign does not generate sufficient applicant flow, you can then turn to any of the thousands of job boards; the candidates will still be there.

2. **Do show the candidates the good, the bad, and the ugly of the open position.**

A poor economy with very high unemployment leads to desperate job seekers, who will do just about anything to earn a paycheck. One of the problems facing recruiters in high-volume environments, such as retail, restaurants, call centers, and logistics/distribution, is candidates often think they understand the job requirements and environment. However, once they are on the job, they soon realize the job is not what they expected.

You can avoid this scenario by presenting all critical aspects of the position up front. For example, in the retail sector, employees need to be flexible enough to work varying shifts and double shifts to account for coworker absences. In a logistics environment, employees have to work with loud equipment in very tight spaces while on their feet all day.

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Screening tactics include presenting the work environment as a requirement in the online pre-screening, including it in the job description, or asking the recruiter or the hiring manager to discuss the work environment in the interview. Our experience is that people tend to accept the conditions you give them if presented in yes/no pre-screen questionnaires and do not fully read job requirements online.

We found success with presenting these challenges in a multimedia-based realistic job preview (RJP). In an RJP, applicants can hear from various employees who are currently in the position – describing what work is like on the job, both the good and the not-so-good aspects. This can also serve as an effective branding tool, communicating the culture and values of your organization, and providing a sense of relevance in the market.

For example, a program we manage requires 10,000+ new hires in the security industry across more than 450 locations in every state. An upfront RJP presents the challenges and sense of teamwork required. It serves as both a recruitment and a self-selection tool, ensuring that candidates fully understand the real demands of the work as described by a dozen incumbents.

3. Do use assessment tools that measure for both position-specific competencies and retention.

A pre-employment test is still an appealing way to pre-screen large volumes of candidates. However, the cost effectiveness and ease of administration should be balanced with what can truly be tested for in an unsupervised environment. Using cognitive bio-data to predict if a candidate has the cognitive abilities to perform the job allows measurement in a way that is not easily breached. It also keeps cost and cycle time to a minimum.

We have years of data to show that assessing for retention is possible in an unsupervised environment. In addition, position-specific competencies such as sales, service, or screening for potential workers compensation claims are also very successful and demonstrate hard-dollar ROI from the predictive nature of the assessments.

Leveraging the responses to basic pre-screen questions also enhances the assessment process. As noted above, most online pre-screenings typically ask yes/no questions and target “knock outs.” This type of questioning, which can include questions about preferences, times available for work, etc., can effectively be used to segment candidates for interviewing and processing.

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Employers also need a plan to maximize the valuable information from each of the basic pre-screen questions and pre-employment testing. You can then feed critical information to the hiring managers and provide them with recommendations on topics and probing questions for the final interview based on the candidates' responses.

Assessments are a great tool to help screen candidates and provide the hiring manager with better insights into the candidates being presented.

Aon Consulting has found success with a computer manufacturer by creating a custom salesperson selection tool that used a common hiring process for various sales roles within the organization. We then worked with the organization to source and select the sales professionals using the new test. Candidates with top test scores ultimately averaged 12 percent higher sales.

4.

Do use phone screening for high-volume positions.

Phone screens are still an effective way to ask candidates some basic questions and probe his/her background before submitting the candidate to the hiring managers. However, phone screenings add cost, take time, and can be cumbersome. They are likely to be reduced as costs are eliminated from the recruitment process.

There are alternatives to optimizing high-volume phone screening. One method is to automate the questions and record the responses for someone to listen to at a future date. Another is to use prescheduled, call-queue-based phone screens. These allow the candidate to be phone-screened by an assessor who rates their answers on some predetermined questions but also allows the assessor to evaluate the candidates' communication skills and probe their backgrounds.

Building a schedule with a variety of slots (mornings, afternoons, evenings, and weekends) into an automated system where candidates can self-schedule streamlines the administrative process. Flexibility in scheduling also increases the show rates for interviews. Of course, the assessors need easy access to the interview schedules and questions to maximize efficiency.

For example, Aon Consulting manages a program for seasonal hiring at a large manufacturer that utilizes this process to allow thousands of candidates to get the same core interview experience across a few-week period. The unique response for each candidate is easily transferred to the hiring manager, making the interview and selection process simpler and more cost effective.

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5. Do make the process as easy as possible for the hiring manager.

The recruiter is not the only one involved in the recruitment process who has to do more with less; hiring business unit managers are also stretched very thin. Response time and feedback from the hiring managers have always been issues for internal recruitment departments.

The design of a high-volume recruitment process needs to maximize efforts at the hiring manager level. Three viable enhancements include:

- An automated scheduling process
- Standardized and meaningful presentation of candidates
- Targeted recommendations on where to probe based on information previously provided by candidates

Automation of the scheduling process can lead to great efficiencies. Understanding the hiring manager's schedule and getting it to match the candidate's schedule with HR as the "go between" is a recipe for disaster in a high-volume environment. We've had tremendous success with getting the hiring manager to agree to a certain timeslot each week and then allowing candidates to self-schedule.

The hiring unit must have the ability to monitor real-time scheduling to determine if there is a need to add more slots or free-up time. It is very easy to lose the business unit's trust when you request a three-hour block of time for six interviews and then no one is scheduled or there is a high no-show rate. When candidates self-schedule and have multiple date/time choices, the show rates go up. Multiple reminders to candidates also help.

Providing the hiring manager with a simple dossier-based report that compiles all of the meaningful information that you have collected from candidates is always useful, especially for high-volume jobs where candidates are less likely to have well-written résumés to use as guides during the interview.

Many hiring managers still struggle with the interview process. While many organizations use standardized behavioral interview questions, many managers typically need ideas on where to probe. Recommendations based on earlier answers (especially from the pre-screen questions and the pre-employment test) can really streamline the interview process and demonstrate that the HR department is adding value in preparing the hiring manager for the interview.

Conclusion

Screening for and filling just one key position in the current environment has the potential to stress your reduced HR staff to its limits. By using these five precepts, you can manage the process in a reasonable amount of time for less cost and end up with a better pool of candidates.

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