



White Paper

Using Automation to Overcome Challenges in Healthcare Recruiting

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Projectix

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Introduction

Healthcare delivery is at a crossroads in the United States, with demand increasing exponentially due to an aging population while an explosion of new technologies creates greater opportunities for health services. Costs are rising dramatically, and healthcare delivery organizations are forced to reduce expenses in every way possible. Every department from clinical functions, to food service delivery, to human resources is tasked with finding ways to deliver more services for less.

While recruiting and staffing are complex functions for any organization, healthcare organizations are responsible for patient lives, and must find and attract a competent clinical workforce in what has become an extremely competitive field. Nursing shortages have reached crisis proportions in every state and region, and certified specialists and technicians often can choose from multiple job offers.

For many healthcare recruiting teams, applicant tracking and talent management automation solutions have helped them overcome many of the challenges in the recruiting process, and have improved the quality and quantity of the candidate pool. Automation also helps healthcare recruiting teams to lower costs and manage the complexities involved in staffing for a multi-shift, multi-specialty workforce.

This paper will outline the challenges faced by healthcare recruiting teams, and explain some of the ways that automating the recruiting and applicant tracking process can benefit healthcare HR teams.

Challenges of Healthcare Recruiting

As baby boomers age and medical demands increase, the demand for healthcare workers is exploding. Healthcare facility recruiters are struggling to keep jobs filled at a time when the applicant pool is failing to keep pace. Recruiters face an overwhelming set of challenges to meet these demands:

- **Workforce shortages make sourcing a competitive challenge.** Hospitals, clinics, assisted living facilities, and others in the healthcare delivery system face numerous challenges due in part to their diverse staffing needs. With both support staff and clinical sourcing requirements, recruiters must do double-duty to find, attract, and retain a variety of job slots in this growing field.

The clinical workforce shortages are dramatic. According to the US Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics¹, registered nurses are the largest part of the healthcare workforce, representing 2.3 million jobs. Demand for

registered nurses will increase 27 percent by 2012, and it will be a challenge to fill those jobs. The RN workforce in the United States is aging, and the reduction in nursing schools means that there are not enough nurses in training to replace them.

Finding enough nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants to fill the gap will be equally as challenging, as the Bureau of Labor anticipates the demand for these jobs will rise 25 percent within that same time period. Even more dramatic, the report shows that demand for home health aides will increase by 48 percent and medical assistants by 59 percent by 2012.

A recent survey from the American Hospital Association (AHA)² reports that the recruiting efforts for specialty technicians also are failing to keep pace. It noted that average pharmacist vacancy rates were 21 percent in 2001, with half of all hospitals reporting increased difficulty in hiring pharmacists. The survey also found that 43 percent of hospitals reported increasing difficulties recruiting laboratory technologists, and 63 percent reported increased

Automated Healthcare Recruiting At Work:

Exempla Relies on Projectix to Boost Clinical Healthcare Workforce

Exempla, a three-hospital healthcare system based in Denver, CO, has relied on the Projectix applicant tracking program to boost responsiveness in finding and recruiting clinical workers. According to Bob Morrison, Director of Recruitment for Exempla, "We have to do everything we can to fill open clinical positions. For every RN we find, we have to be responsive and act quickly."

Morrison uses Projectix to adopt a paperless application process and incorporate a behavioral assessment system, all of which have yielded positive results. Because Projectix is an ASP solution that is accessed via a web browser, implementation was easy and fast, with virtually no integration issues.

Projectix's online capabilities offer benefits to candidates and Exempla management alike. "Resumes aren't getting lost, and candidates can apply 24 x 7 via the web," says Morrison. "We can track where people come from, and understand which advertising is working for us."

With Projectix, Exempla has been able to double its hiring, particularly in the hard-to-fill clinical positions. "Projectix has been a big factor," says Morrison. "It is our backbone in recruiting." Incorporating the behavioral assessment tools within the Projectix solution also has helped Exempla discover the best candidates from its pool of applicants. It has developed a behavioral assessment process within Projectix based on multiple-choice questionnaires for each family of open positions that applicants complete online. Results gauge how well matched a candidate is for each position. "It gives us one more tool to let the cream rise to the top," says Morrison.

challenges recruiting radiological technicians. The need for other clinical technicians also will grow rapidly: the demand for physician's assistants will grow 49 percent, the need for medical record and health information technicians by 46 percent, and the demand for occupational and physical therapist assistants and aides by 45 percent³

In total, the increase in demand for healthcare workers is forecast to be upwards of 14.5 million by 2012, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics⁴. These numbers add up to what has become an extremely competitive field for healthcare recruiters. Unfortunately, the forecasts for support staff are equally as challenging. As the U.S. economy continues its shift from traditional manufacturing jobs to a service-based economy, the demand for customer service representative jobs will increase 24 percent by 2012, and food preparation and serving jobs will increase 23 percent⁵.

Clearly, healthcare organizations will need to exploit every possible method of sourcing candidates and successfully hiring qualified workers to fill their extraordinary number of open requisitions, including streamlined and aggressive recruitment and applicant tracking procedures. Traditional recruiting methods such as newspaper advertising are giving way to an expanding range of web-based strategies such as online job postings, company career portals, and dynamic candidate communication software tools. As the importance of online sources such as Monster.com and other niche job boards increases, the need for healthcare organizations to have a clear recruiting technology strategy becomes critical.

- **Paperwork and bureaucracy cripple healthcare HR departments.** Healthcare is among the most regulated of industries, requiring staggering amounts of paperwork and bureaucracy in every step. In most healthcare companies, this includes the hiring process where virtually all forms are paper-based, consuming time and resources to complete, file, store, secure, and manage. Simple hiring workflows such as job requisition and offer approvals move slowly and data-entry tasks swamp HR teams with basic resume management and candidate communication activities. Furthermore, many parts of the organization are staffed with various types of union members working under strict labor contracts, often adding another layer of regulation and bureaucracy to manage and document. These manual processes drive up costs to the HR department's budget, and more importantly, slow down the recruiting process.

Healthcare recruiters need to take advantage of automation to free them from the time spent processing these mountains of paperwork. Typically, HR departments cannot afford the additional overhead required to properly manage and respond to an increase in staffing process requirements. In addition, they must devote as many resources as possible toward finding, attracting, and hiring candidates to fill open requisitions.

■ **Varied staffing levels add complexity to recruiting processes.** While many industries focus either on filling hourly positions or salaried jobs, in healthcare, the recruiting departments must manage both. Some facilities, particularly the hospital setting, require a varied staff of clinical, specialist, and support staff around the clock, seven days a week. Patients need care every day of the year, including holidays, nights, and weekends. Hiring practices need to reflect this reality.

Many facilities meet the challenge by utilizing the concept of full-time equivalents (FTEs), which focuses on hiring based on hours that will be worked rather than purely “headcount.” The resulting hiring process flexibility accommodates both full-time and part-time workers, an important dynamic in the clinical and nursing workforce. For the recruiting department, this increases the staffing challenge as it must fill a range of shifts for a variety of specialists and support staff with the best candidate for the position. Recruiters need to find candidates willing to be on call and who are available to work on short notice as well as to insure they have the proper educational credentials and professional certifications for clinical positions.

Recruiting departments no longer can continue to manage this process in a traditional manual format if they expect to meet the demands of the changing industry landscape at the same time. Recruiting technology tools are a necessity in today’s complex healthcare environment.

■ **Retention issues create staggering costs.** During the economic slow down in 2000, hospitals and healthcare facilities were able to attract workers who viewed the industry as stable. As the economy improves and stabilizes, it will be important for healthcare recruiters to avoid complacency — these workers, particularly clinical staff, will be extremely desirable to competitors. Healthcare HR departments will need to focus on retention strategies.

This will not be easy: even within a down economy, retention is an issue in healthcare. Turnover rates for hospital nursing staff rose from 11.7 percent in 1998 to 26.2 percent in 2000⁶. Nurses report a variety of reasons for job dissatisfaction, including workloads and staffing levels, issues with role clarity, as well as organizational recognition.

Whatever the reason for the increasing turnover rate, the problem is a costly one for hospitals and healthcare facilities. Replacing a nurse costs between 50 and 150 percent of his or her salary in lost productivity and vacancy expenses, according to the VHA⁷. High turnover and vacancy rates result in longer lengths of stay for patients, lower profitability, reduced quality, and increased operating costs. Assuming an average cost of \$46,000 to replace a nurse, an organization with an RN work force of 600 FTEs and a turnover rate of 20 percent will spend \$5.52 million a year to support its turnover. A 25 percent improvement in retention would mean a turnover rate of 15 percent, and a savings of \$1.38 million per year.

The high cost of turnover, coupled with the growing challenges in sourcing, provides recruiting departments with even more incentive to improve their retention rates. This is another area where applicant tracking and talent management solutions can help healthcare facilities overcome staffing challenges.

Overcoming Challenges with Recruiting Technology

Healthcare HR teams can no longer rely solely on traditional methods to manage recruiting. Healthcare recruiters need to take advantage of software technology and automation to improve recruiting methods, reduce paperwork burdens, manage varied staffing levels, and boost retention. Finding the right software solution is critical to success. (For more information on choosing the proper technology solution for your company, see “Six Steps to Success” on page 9.) When researching a solution, choosing a system that enables the following principles will directly improve the healthcare recruiting processes:

- **Adopt a paperless, online system.** With candidate sourcing as the number one concern of any healthcare organization, the first step is to make it easy for candidates to work with you. Reach out and encourage them to meet you online. An online recruiting presence is a great way to “sell” a hospital or healthcare facility to a candidate — the site can outline what makes the facility stand out, what opportunities are available for candidates, and provide reasons why the candidate should join its team. In addition, it establishes a perpetual recruiting venue, available to candidates 24 x 7 x 365, allowing candidates to retrieve information and apply at their leisure.

A well-crafted online site can speed the recruiting process by providing a candidate with information that formerly wasn't available until the first in-person interview. Candidates can get the information they need when they are focused and able to act upon it, without waiting to receive or send forms via traditional mail. An online presence makes the recruiting process immediate, an important benefit in the ultra-competitive healthcare market.

An online application process makes it easy to capture information about applicants for future openings. If the jobs available do not match a candidate's interests or abilities, it is easy to use an automated system to send form letters and email invitations to urge a candidate to apply when a more appropriate job becomes available.

The right applicant tracking system also can deliver alerts to healthcare recruiters when a highly sought-after candidate applies. For example, pharmacist candidates are at such a premium that many healthcare recruiters set their system to deliver an alert as soon as one submits an application form online.

An online presence also provides benefits to the healthcare facility. From the start of the application process, the data entry effort is transferred from the healthcare facility staff to the applicant. By using standard Apply Online features, the applicant assumes the data entry effort for his or her resume, contact information and qualifications, thereby eliminating data entry requirements for the healthcare facility recruiting staff. Resumes and application information are captured electronically, which streamlines a host of recruiting processes, including sorting, tracking, storing, and “mining” applicant data. An online system also can help facilities simplify communications with hiring agencies and external job boards and can eliminate duplicate candidate records automatically.

UMass Relies on Projectix to Manage Growth

At UMass Medical School, the move to the Projectix applicant tracking and talent management solution has helped it speed time to hire and discover hard-to-find clinical and research candidates without increasing recruitment expenses.

UMass receives approximately 2,000 resumes per month, which it is able to receive, review, and transmit electronically using the Projectix system. "In the past, we were approximately 90 percent paper-based," says Phil Kerr, Director of Human Resources of UMass Medical School. "With Projectix, we are 90 percent online. It's much more efficient."

A majority of the school's managers now use Projectix's online requisition feature. With electronic signature capabilities, managers are speeding approval times for requisitioning new positions, and are able to start the recruiting process sooner. The school also uses Projectix to develop more comprehensive hiring profiles, which Kerr credits for improving the hiring process. "It leads our managers to better define competencies and technical skills, so that we can do a better job of recruiting," says Kerr.

Despite its rapid growth, Kerr says Projectix has enabled the school to maintain a lean recruiting staff and dramatically improve recruiting staff efficiency. "We have grown by more than 1,500 employees over the last few years, but have only added three Human Resource representatives to our staff," says Kerr. "The automation features in Projectix have contributed to that."

Projectix also has helped UMass expand its recruitment efforts to a broader applicant pool. "Time to fill our clerical jobs has come down five days, and we are getting a better applicant pool," says Kerr. "We are able to do keyword searches to identify the people who have the right skills we're looking for."

Costs to recruit have gone down, even with the workforce growing. There has been a 39% decrease in advertising expenses due to the online integration capabilities of Projectix. Because Projectix captures electronic data from online resumes, Kerr has been able to use more cost-effective online advertising rather than expensive print-based sources. "We can take advantage of these web features, because the online recruiting services make posting resumes to Projectix very easy," says Kerr.

Automated applicant tracking systems also can use data collected in the online site to verify and measure job-sourcing venues. Simply by asking candidates where they heard of the opening — a radio ad, a job fair, a referral, an agency — enables recruiters to discover which sourcing strategies deliver the best return on investment.

A wide variety of online, self-service options in an applicant tracking and recruiting software package help facilities find more candidates with less time and manpower than traditional, manual processes.

- **Use the candidate sourcing database as a reusable asset.** Using the right applicant tracking technology allows recruiting and sourcing efforts to build a highly valuable candidate database over time. Powerful searching tools and qualified candidate alerts allow recruiters to quickly and easily find candidates who may fit open or upcoming requisitions. By auto-matching existing candidates to jobs, keyword searching, and analyzing other data gathered, recruiters can make quick work of finding the clinical or technical specialties your facility needs.

Flexible and searchable assessments and skill profiles are a critical part of any robust applicant tracking and recruiting solution. These tools enable recruiters to quickly discover candidates with the right skills and profile to match open jobs and ensure that they can hone in on the most qualified applicants immediately. By using automated candidate communication and outreach tools, recruiters stay focused on the strategic sourcing of new employees rather than manual data-entry and candidate-management tasks. The right recruiting system will enable an HR team to discover a top-notch candidate quicker — and extend an offer before the competition.

- **Automate paperwork to reduce administrative costs, focus staff.** Every step in the hiring process that can be streamlined frees the HR staff to focus on recruiting, not paperwork. A well-rounded applicant tracking solution should support the overall hiring process from the day a job is created to the first day of work. Managing multiple forms and processes electronically is key: from initiating and managing the requisition, to scheduling interviews, to offer approval, to candidate on-boarding.

In addition to freeing staff to focus on strategic functions, hiring-process automation saves money. The entire requisition process can be streamlined, shortening approval times, eliminating manual tasks, and on-boarding candidates faster. Every paper-based form can be automated electronically to reduce administrative overhead. Electronic forms storage improves retrieval and provides an important audit trail.

- **Diversify recruiting sources.** Healthcare recruiters must branch out beyond traditional newspaper advertising and job fairs to find the broad candidate pool needed to fill open requisitions. The right applicant tracking

solution enables healthcare recruiters to connect seamlessly with online job boards, and manage third party recruiting agencies and contingent labor. It also opens up possibilities for employee referral programs, internal job boards, and “send to a friend” programs — important features in a competitive labor market.

■ **Enable clinical staffing solutions.** A robust applicant tracking solution can help healthcare facilities staff for hourly, salary, full-time, part-time, and FTE positions. The software can collect available shift times from candidates and store them in a searchable manner. An automated tool can help HR departments adopt a consistent, accurate, and easy-to-use method for handling FTEs. In addition, the right platform can ensure that the technology is an appropriate fit for existing business processes.

■ **Improve retention.** Recruiting technology can impact retention. In addition to making a good first impression with candidates and new employees, the right technology solution can provide a better match between candidate and job opening. Assessments and skill-profiling features identify better job fit, which is a significant factor in retaining staff.

The importance of a positive experience for the candidate during the recruiting process cannot be underestimated. The first interaction any employee has with his or her employer, and the “first impression” made is key to long-term job satisfaction. Using the right technology solution to provide a great online experience, timely communications, and an appropriate job fit ensure the employer-employee relationship gets off on the right foot.

Hiring Process Automation Delivers a Powerful Recruiting Edge

Healthcare facilities face a unique set of challenges in recruiting, and workforce forecasts indicate that the market will only become more difficult. HR teams must use every tool available to improve efficiency, broaden applicant pools, and automate tasks to enable them to focus on the strategic aspects of recruiting. Using the right applicant tracking and hiring process solution can provide the edge that healthcare HR teams need to proactively staff their openings at all levels of the organization.

Six Steps to Success with Applicant Tracking Systems

Automating the applicant tracking process can provide exceptional benefits for HR managers by slashing time to hire, getting the jump on finding the best candidates, and reducing overall costs. Yet lengthy deployments, inappropriate product selection, and user opposition can derail the process and cause many organizations to waste their investment in time and money. These six steps will set your company on a course for success.

1. Evaluate the Big Picture

Many companies start their search for an applicant tracking solution by developing a list of features and functions. The more appropriate first step is to determine broad requirements and desired outcomes, such as reducing the time to fill open requisitions or improving the quality of the hiring pool. This list will help you determine which features and functions are critical to your success as you review the various systems available in today's marketplace.

2. Manage Roadblocks

It's a rare employee who embraces change — the change resulting from automating your recruiting process is no exception. Transform that resistance into enthusiasm by including the front-line recruiters into the decision-making process for an automated tool. Listen to their concerns, and be sure to communicate the benefits of the new system. A new system will allow your employees to work at a higher level and reduce administrative burdens. Make sure your employees know the new system is not going to replace their jobs, but will help them be more effective.

3. Choose Features and Functions

Once you have determined overall objectives, develop a list of features and functions required of the new system. Be sure to consider the big issues such as multilingual support, centralized vs. decentralized staffing models, department vs. enterprise-wide deployment and configuration vs. customized tool sets. Spell each item out, and then rank each from must-have to nice-to-have. Features that support your overall objectives should be on the top of the list. Also, be certain to consider workflow requirements. Talk to the prospective vendors about your current and optimal staffing process to better understand how their solution will actually help you reach these goals. Look beyond the “point and click” presentation and consider your base issues such as: “Will my users really adopt this system,” and “Will this support our process, or will this require us to change our process.”

4. Look Beyond the Sticker Price

When evaluating the initial price of a system, look beyond the package price. Get information about customization, integration, and upgrades as these can turn a low-cost system into one that's out of reach. If the system you prefer

does not run “out-of-the-box”, get hard estimates on what it will cost to customize it, in terms of dollars and time. Make vendors explain what the software currently does versus what it can do with customization.

5. Getting Started

Deploying a solution, even one billed as out-of-the-box, requires careful planning and integration. Talk to reference users of your chosen vendor to get a realistic insight into their installation and integration process. Be sure to include ample time for user training: the best system will make no difference to your company if your recruiting team does not know how to use it. Most companies use 20 to 30 percent of the software features available in any given system. Be sure your team is capable of leveraging all the features in your chosen applicant tracking system platform.

6. Measuring Results

Be sure you know your starting metrics from before you launched the system so you can accurately compare the results from your new applicant tracking system platform. Within several weeks, you should have measurable statistics on productivity improvements such as time saved in processing application documents, generating correspondence, and tracking open requisitions. Within the next six months, results on larger issues will emerge, such as reduced time to hire and improvements in quality of applications.

About the Author

Robert Neveu founded Recruiternet in 1999 as a value-added reseller of recruiting software and services for the staffing industry. He recognized the power that automation could bring to the recruiting process, and led the company to develop the Projectix applicant tracking and talent management solution. As President, Robert is responsible for identifying trends and opportunities in the recruiting industry, and setting company direction. Under his management, Recruiternet has become one of the leading US providers of talent management solutions for corporate human resource departments with a strong concentration of healthcare clients. The national client base includes firms such as Exempla Healthcare and the UMass Medical School, which use Projectix to help them discover and recruit highly desirable clinical personnel.

About Recruiternet

Founded in 1999 and headquartered in Portland, Maine, Recruiternet is the enterprise behind Projectix, a leading recruiting technology solution for human resources professionals around the globe. Projectix supports a wide range of clients, including Dunkin' Brands, CVS Corporation, Mercy Hospital, The TJX Companies, Inc. and SGI. Recruiternet is exclusively focused on partnering with its Projectix customers to cost-effectively enhance the recruiting and staffing process. Recruiternet Europe, headquartered in the U.K. and dedicated to supporting European Projectix clients, is a wholly owned subsidiary of Recruiternet. Recruiternet is a Microsoft Certified Partner.

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Resources

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