

Job Postings For Passive Candidates

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A Job Posting for Passive Prospects

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The Holy Grail for most recruiters is the “passive job seeker.” This person is normally a high quality candidate who is almost always employed someplace else. And there’s the rub. They aren’t job seekers at all. By definition, so-called passive job seekers aren’t even looking for a job. They are, in most cases, happily employed right where they are. So, will these passive people even consider another opportunity someplace else? Of course they will, but only if it’s presented persuasively. In a sense, they are the classic consumer; they have to be “sold” on an employer’s value proposition. That’s way I call them passive prospects.

How do you write a job posting with enough power to influence a passive prospect? First, you have to understand what goal you’re trying to accomplish. Unlike with active job seekers, a recruitment ad that targets passive prospects must be able to convince them to change devils: to go from the devil they know—their current employer, boss and commute—to the devil they don’t know—your employer, a new boss, and a different commute. Your job posting, therefore, has to be persuasive enough to sell the reader on doing the one thing humans most hate to do: change.

No less important, passive prospects never look for a job; they search for an employment opportunity. That means your posting must do more than simply describe the requirements and responsibilities of a particular opening. If you want it to connect with and influence an employed person who has other employers knocking on their door regularly, you must craft an ad that sells all of the following aspects of your organization’s employment experience:

- the leadership of the company and its vision for the present and future,
- the culture of the macro organization and the micro-culture of the team or unit where they will work,
- the open position and the role it plays, directly and indirectly, in the success of the larger organization, and
- the ancillary advantages the employer offers to its workers (e.g., work/life balance, community support).

Unlike the printed page, the Internet provides enough physical space to present such information and more. Indeed, the average commercial job board will permit postings to run as long as 1,400 words—the equivalent of two typed pages—and for passive prospects, you need every syllable. To convince someone to change devils, you must see your posting not as the electronic equivalent of a classified ad, but as an **electronic sales brochure**. It has to be so informative and so compelling that even the most reluctant consumer will be moved to consider the opening.

There are two keys to developing such an ad:

- **Format**—passive prospects have the attention span of a gnat. They don't read on the Web, they scan. Therefore, you should lay out your ad in headlines and bullets so that the reader can quickly grasp its key points.
- **Content**—passive prospects care most about WIIFT. They don't want to read about requirements and responsibilities—those are employers' concerns. They want to know What's In It For Them.

All recruiters are good at verbal selling; they do it every day on the telephone and in interviews. On the Web, however, selling is done with the written word, and many recruiters don't have as much practice with that medium. For that reason, I've developed a template for job postings that arranges the information in the ad to optimize its impact on a passive prospect. The template has five sections described by this acronym: S—ABC—S.

S—Summary

The first five lines of a job posting are extremely important. Our research here at WEDDLE's indicates that if you don't get these first lines right, the passive person is unlikely to read any further. To be effective, the lines must include the following information in the following order:

- a compelling statement about why this opening is a dream job,
- an equally compelling statement about why the organization is a dream employer,
- a salary range; while most passive prospects do not make employment changes for money, they use their compensation to gauge what is important to them: their career advancement,
- a powerful statement about the organization's commitment to privacy protection. Since most passive prospects are employed, they need to be assured of full confidentiality.

ABC—Advantages, Benefits, Capabilities

The Advantages section of your posting addresses the responsibilities of a position, but from the WIIFT perspective. It answers all of the key questions a passive prospect is likely to have about an employment opportunity:

- What will I get to do?
- Whom will I get to work with?
- What will I get to learn?
- What will I get to accomplish?
- How will I advance my career?

The Benefits section of your posting is not boilerplate. It is not information conveyed in legal gibberish or in a long laundry list of HR jargon. Nor is it the same tired, old paragraphs that you insert into every posting. You might be able to get away with that if you're selling to active job seekers (although I wouldn't recommend it there either), but if you're trying to reach reluctant candidates who have other options, you have to create a Benefits section with focused appeal. It must be a tailored presentation that highlights the benefits that are most important to your target demographic. For example, if you're trying to reach passive prospects early in their career, you might emphasize tuition reimbursement and work/life balance. If you're trying to reach seasoned workers with a lot of years in the workplace, you might emphasize child or elder care programs. And, as with any good advertising copy, you must both describe the benefit and its value to the prospect. To put it another way, it's not a Benefit unless you explain what makes it so.

The Capabilities section deals with the requirements of a position, but again, presents the information from the prospect's perspective. In other words, it answers the questions:

- What skills and experience will I need to achieve success in this position?
- What knowledge must I have to advance my career with this employer?
- What preparation will enable me to make a significant contribution on-the-job?

S—Sign-Off

Once you've gone to all of the trouble of creating a job posting with enough power to sell a passive prospect, don't undermine your success with an incomplete or misconceived sign-off. This section of your posting is part "call to action for the prospect" and part "return for you on the time and effort it took to write the posting." Accordingly, it should include all of the following:

- multiple response options—passive prospects are finicky customers, so don't force them to use one method (e.g., online) to "buy" your organization. Encourage them to apply any way that's convenient for them (remembering that passive prospects often don't have a resume).
- a referral request—passive prospects know other passive prospects. If your opportunity isn't right for someone interested enough to get to this point in your posting, make sure that you ask them to pass it along to an appropriate friend or colleague.
- an opt-in opportunity—passive prospects change their minds. Ask if you can stay in touch with them through a regular e-mail communication that will keep them informed about the developments and opportunities at your company.

Selling passive prospects isn't easy. It can be done and efficiently, however, if you transform traditional recruitment ads online into electronic sales brochures. These alternative postings can set your employer apart and strengthen the persuasive power of its message for top talent.