

How Technology Has Changed (and Will Change) Higher Education Employee Recruitment

John Ikenberry, Andrew Hibel, and Robert Freedman

Abstract

Higher education recruitment has evolved over the years to utilize new technologies. The Internet has had the greatest impact on higher education recruitment and paved the way for many new ways of connecting recruiters with job seekers. The further development of Web 2.0 tools and social media has changed the landscape of recruiting and job searching even more. In the future, the common goal will be to create connections that lead to strong working relationships.

Step back about 15 years and consider how colleges and universities used to recruit for talent. At the time, paper and word-of-mouth dominated the landscape. The process was slow, time intensive, and expensive. More importantly, it was incomplete.

When positions came open, college and university employers typically purchased print ads in either national or discipline-based higher education publications. The ads were often expensive and took weeks to appear. Due to the cost of print ads, employers typically only listed a portion of the actual opportunities available to apply for, thus greatly limiting the number potential candidates saw.

For candidates, the experience was not much better. In addition to informal networks, higher education professionals could learn of job openings by reading national and discipline based print publications. Unfortunately, because print schedules ranged from weekly to quarterly, jobs were often open weeks or months before candidates had a chance to see them. When candidates did review the openings, they could only review them in the order listed by the publisher. There was no way to change how the jobs were sorted, pull out jobs from a certain state or with certain words. Candidates had to read over countless job openings that often had nothing to do with their interests before finding a job opening that was worth applying for. The application process included printing off their resume and cover letter, stuffing an envelope, adding postage, sending them to the post office, and making countless followup calls just to confirm receipt.

Once the employer received the application, they frequently made paper copies for the search committee members and distributed them through inter-campus mail. After all that, they could finally begin the process of contacting the best applicants for interviews and going through the selection process.

The process was hard work for everyone. If the job-seeker was currently employed, it was even more frustrating—work a full day and then spend free time on such a laborious, but important process.

Today, when colleges and universities have an opening, they can post it online within a few hours, if not immediately. Furthermore, online ads cost a fraction compared to print ads. In fact, colleges and universities can now post all their jobs for one year online for about the same price as one print advertisement. As a result, institutions now advertise a higher percentage of their job openings, thus making a much higher number of positions available for job seekers to view.

The candidate not only has access to more jobs, but they see them sooner. It takes significantly less time for candidates to sort through the job postings to find the exact job they are looking for. Instead of flipping through pages and reading over all the titles, candidates can search by specific job category, location, or keyword. So, even if a site has several thousand job openings, candidates can usually find the jobs that best match their experience in less than a minute. When they want to apply for a job, they simply click a button to send their resume and cover letter directly to the employer or upload their resume to the employer's website. Furthermore, most employment sites let candidates sign up for free "Job Agents" or "Job Alerts," in order to receive an email when matching jobs are posted.

The different kinds of contemporary job searches can usually be divided up between active and passive job searches. Active job searches are motivated by a desire to move forward in one's career, make a lateral move for personal reasons, or to find new employment after an employment relationship has concluded. These are the job seekers who need to find a job. Something may not be clicking for them in their current position; be it pay, lack of opportunity for advancement, or their relationship with coworkers, they need to get out. The active searcher faces more challenges and personal pressures than the passive job seeker does.

Passive job searches are usually conducted by people who might wish to make a change in their career but are satisfied with their current situation. They do not need to change jobs; they do not need to be looking. However, according to Alison Doyle, we all ought to be passive job seekers, ready to take advantage of an opportunity if it presents itself (Doyle 2009). The passive searcher is waiting for that perfect opportunity to fall in their lap. Internet and online job boards increase the chance of that opportunity showing up.

Both kinds of job seekers use similar techniques for their searches and take advantage of the myriad outlets available to network and distribute their resumes to recruiters. Beginning between 1994 and 1996, job boards and resume posting sites began to supplement printed classified ads. By 2000, job boards evolved to include more functionality for their users. Also, at this time Internet sites started to develop networking and peer-to-peer communication capabilities. Around 2004, websites began

allowing users to collaborate on projects and share documents more easily; this is largely considered the dawn of Web 2.0 and social media. “Web 2.0 is the popular term for advanced Internet technology and applications including blogs, wikis, RSS and social bookmarking” (Warner 2008). With job seekers able to extend their networks via Internet job boards and Web 2.0 tools, universities and other institutions shifted their recruiting methods.

Both job seekers and recruiters have found places to connect on the Internet, such as LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>), established in 2003 with currently over 40 million registered users. This new openness and freer flow of information has made a positive impact on the job search process. More of the search can be completed from the comfort of one’s home, office, or local coffee shop. Online job boards such as HigherEdJobs.com, Monster.com, and CareerBuilder.com can email both job seekers and recruiters when matches to their search queries are found. Many job boards allow users to apply for positions and contact institutions right from the job post rather than having to leave and enter a different site.

On networking sites a job seeker can create a profile detailing work and education experience, ask for and display recommendations from people familiar with their work, join online professional discussion groups, and network with people in their field of work or study. If one is seeking a position with a particular institution they can use the site to find someone within two degrees of their network who works there and either ask someone to introduce them or do it themselves via e-mail. This ideally would give a person some useful information about the institution and position that would not be available to them through a more traditional job search approach (Jansen, Jansen, and Spink 2005).

Job recruiters can search job board databases and networking sites for people who are close matches to their institutional needs. Recruiters then initiate contact and invite a person to apply for a particular position. Ideally this would increase the ratio of qualified candidates a department or recruiter would need to sort through before finding a pool of candidates to interview. Recruiters and seekers also connect on blogs and websites of professional groups. Often a recruiter will see works published by someone who may or may not be looking for a job, and the recruiter encourages them to apply for a position. By using these online tools, people can be more efficient with their time and resources.

The first Internet recruitment revolution significantly reduced the costs associated with recruitment and changed the recruitment process to a few simple clicks of a mouse; “Web 2.0” offers academia another chance to refine the process of attracting candidates to open positions. Whereas online recruitment of the past required merely getting a presence online, the online recruitment of tomorrow will require administrators, faculty, and candidates to think about how their presence is viewed online via multiple media options.

The technological advancements for recruitment are absolutely a benefit to higher education; however, they have come with unintended negative consequences. The Internet has allowed so much innovation so quickly because the barriers to enter the online market are low. This has created two main issues in online recruitment: The first issue is that it is globally more difficult for recruiters and job seekers to make vendor choices as new service providers are entering the market at faster pace. The second issue is the overload of applications from both qualified and unqualified applicants. Employers and candidates must struggle to ensure the continued candidacy of valid and qualified applicants. This is the classic example of two ships passing in the night, in a very crowded ocean. The consequences of making poor online recruitment choices for employers and candidates alike are more significant today than ever before. With this large caveat in mind, the future of online recruitment in academia is very strong. The online job boards that are able to provide the most up-to-date services and are proficient at connecting recruiters with qualified candidates will stand out in the crowded seas.

Presence

The first consideration for candidates will no longer be “Is my resume online?” but rather “How and where do I present myself online?” Once a job seeker accepts that a successful online search requires a candidate to be both an active applicant and a passive marketer of their candidacy online, a candidate will map out a plan on the following:

1. **How to Store and Manage Documents**—The résumé or curriculum vitae has been a staple of an academic career for decades. However, when used in transitioning between jobs in a career, they serve a singular focus in conjunction with a well-written cover letter—getting a first interview. While the general purpose of any action by a candidate is to further the conversation, and thus the candidacy, candidates must use similar documents to accomplish this goal. Considering that a completed packet (which may consist of a résumé/CV, cover letter, references, salary requirements, and publications/presentations) may be needed at various stages of a candidacy, candidates need to make sure the appropriate documents are supplied at the appropriate time and in the appropriate fashion. For example, if a school desires an online application to be used only for the initial contact, as is becoming increasingly common, a candidate must follow suit.
2. **How to Manage Job Applications**—Candidates need to keep their search organized as well as on point. Whether a candidate is in active search or passively monitoring the job market during a good point in their career, it is important that they have a central place to manage their documents, receive their job agents/alerts, and track what steps they have taken to market themselves and apply for jobs. In addition, it is important to convey a specific message about candidacy, such as “I have a graduate degree in higher education and experience in admissions; I am interested in a position

that allows me to grow in my profession at a community college.” It is also necessary to know when and how to apply for a position.

- 3. How to Manage Online Presence**—Candidates have many choices on how to present themselves online. They need to make sure their choices are wise and reflect the quality of the candidacy that they desire. The media and brands they choose will influence how employers perceive their candidacy. A candidate needs to constantly be aware that their presences may be viewed on desktop, laptop, or mobile devices and how the media and brand allow for the connection through these formats. Many candidates will be tempted to make sure that they cover all their bases and have as many online presences as possible, but they should resist this temptation. Technology today has allowed employers to track applications and candidates accurately. As a result, employers today are less interested in candidates who have a “shotgun” approach by applying for many different jobs that they may or may not be qualified for. Similarly, employers in the future may also shy away from candidates who take the same approach to their online presences. Once a candidate has decided where their online presences will be, they must convey the same specific message about their candidacy that they would if they applied for the position. By placing a profile on a social media site, they have effectively already applied for any position an employer views them in. Candidates should pick the social media outlet the best fits their needs and do it well.

Candidates should find a central hub to manage their documents, application flow, interview/follow up schedule, and online presence. Some job boards offer user-friendly tools to assist the job seeker with these tasks. Centralization makes the job search process less stressful and makes more efficient use of a job seeker’s most important resource: time.

Employers are equally challenged to ensure that their use of technology is appropriately purposeful and professional to attract and identify the candidates they desire for their open positions. Employers should manage the following items:

- 1. How to Manage the Message**—As with candidates, the most important decision an employer needs to make is to settle on their message. It needs to convey to candidates who they are and why a candidate would want to work with their school. The message needs to be consistent and appropriate. Once again, with so many choices of media and brands, the message will be the core of who they are. A school should be encouraged to be descriptive and honest about themselves and the position.
- 2. How to Communicate with Candidates**—Much like candidates, employers can expect to communicate through a variety of methods—such as desktop, laptop, and mobile. It is important for the message to be easily understood through various media. The employer has the unique ability to

define how candidates actively promote their candidacy (i.e., apply for a job). While it is important for the employer to make sure the communication includes what they desire, the information should be appropriate in order to not make a good candidate shy away from a position. For example, while an online application through an applicant tracking system (ATS) is appropriate, asking a candidate's social security number at the initial application stage may make a good candidate think twice about applying.

3. **How to Identify Qualified Candidates**—Once an employer has established their message and how candidates will communicate, they will need to be effective at finding qualified candidates. In the future, this step may be the one that will be most difficult. Today getting qualified candidates to apply is the biggest challenge. Although this challenge will still be at the top of the list, finding the qualified candidates in the applicant pool may be just as big. Removing barriers to application will create more applicants. An employer's ATS must make sure that the information gleaned from applicants allows the process to not miss the truly qualified applicants.

Like job seekers, employers should centralize their online job recruitment efforts for easier management of positions, application flow, candidate communication, and the search committee's communications. As campuses grow and become more globally connected, the people who make these decisions are less likely to be in the same state, let alone on the same campus. Finding effective systems for tracking information and streamlining communication will be key to future success.

Media

A conversation about careers in higher education is not complete without the discussion of social media. Many discussions focus on the media. While the media are important as methods of communication, the dominant part of the process, for recruitment, is the social aspect of these new methods.

The recruitment process, at its heart, is truly about people. Over the years, the media that employers and candidates use to find each other may have changed, but the connection is what both parties are looking for. Just as Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>) may have replaced MySpace (<http://www.myspace.com>) as the dominant social media player on the Internet today, it is important to remember that the media will change constantly. For recruitment, the need for the social aspect will always be present. Employers and candidates must understand how they will communicate in the future.

Most importantly, everyone needs to accept that as many schools and employees have various online presences, there will also be a number of accepted media for those presences to find each other to communicate.

Examples of the evolving methods of communication include Adobe Acrobat Connect Pro, Blackboard, and Google Wave. Adobe's Connect Pro is a powerful Web conferencing tool that schools could use for conducting long-distance interviews, committee meetings, and job information seminars. Connect Pro allows for the integration of graphics and presentations alongside video and audio feeds. These can be live or recorded for play later. Blackboard is a popular suite of programs designed for use in education to enhance communication and the productivity of both education professionals and students. Blackboard is continuously evolving its products to meet the changing communication tools of its users. Blackboard programs are now available on many mobile platforms, including Android phones, Blackberry devices, and the Apple iPhone. Google's new tool, Wave (<http://wave.google.com>), may change the way employers communicate internally and externally. Waves are conversations that are conducted by a group of people in real time. The participants in a Wave can watch a blurb be written out, edited, and replied to in real time. Waves allow participants to embed images, documents, and widgets (tools) into the Wave directly to enhance the conversation, taking away the need for each person to open attachments and worry about compatible software. The media choice needs to reflect the online reputation that a candidate or employer wants to present to the public. It is important that all parties stay current on how people are connecting and be willing to make adjustments to their own strategy as appropriate. Many people will use these tools to connect to their job search or recruitment hub.

Brands

The choice of brands differentiates higher education from many other fields. The needs of professionals working in academia differ from those working outside. The good reputations of both employers and candidates are imperative to a successful hire and career, respectively. The brands that deliver on their promise of quality results will make a difference in online recruitment of the future. Job boards, social media sites, and others will all have a role in the process. Although technology has changed how the process carries out, the outcome of the process remains the same.

For higher education, a trusted brand that understands the changing needs of schools and professionals alike will attract the most significant communication between them. In turn, this communication will enable the same "connecting" that leads to finding a quality employee and experiencing a quality work experience.

Certainly, the vast majority of professionals working in higher education would agree about the amazing effects of technology on recruiting talent. Not too long ago, recruiters had to put job postings on bulletin boards in departmental hallways and in print publications with limited circulation. This netted fewer applicants thus limiting the ability for schools to get the best talent available. Candidates were limited more geographically for their searches and relied heavily on word-of-mouth to hear about openings. The rise of the Internet and other digital media made connecting recruiters with a larger and more desirable pool of job seekers much easier. While there have been many advances in how these digital media are used, recruiters and job seekers

continue to make adjustments to their strategies to find each other. Online job boards provide a crucial hub for connecting all the parties together and as the use of Web 2.0 tools expands, that centering role will continue to be very important. The future of communication and building lasting professional relationships between recruiters and job seekers is very exciting.

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Author Information

John Ikenberry is president and cofounder of HigherEdJobs.com, the leading source for jobs in higher education. John earned his Ph.D. and Master's degrees in higher education from Penn State and he earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in economics and history from Northwestern University.

HigherEdJobs.com
328 Innovation Boulevard, Suite 300
State College, PA 16803
E-Mail: johni@higheredjobs.com
Phone: 814-861-3080 (ext 202)
Fax: 814-861-3082

Andrew Hibel is a cofounder and chief operating officer of the leading academic job board, HigherEdJobs.com. Andrew holds a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Education (Higher Education) from the University of Illinois, Urbana, and a Juris Doctor from Indiana University, Indianapolis.

HigherEdJobs.com
1010 Lake Street, Suite 611
Oak Park, IL 60301
E-Mail: ahibel@higheredjobs.com
Phone: 708-848-4351
Fax: 708-848-4361

Robert Freedman is the social media administrator for HigherEdJobs.com. Robert earned his Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degree from National-Louis University and his Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from Loyola University of Chicago.

HigherEdJobs.com

1010 Lake Street, Suite 611

Oak Park, IL 60301

E-Mail: robfb@higheredjobs.com

Phone: 708-848-4351

Fax: 708-848-4361