

Sales Job Classified Ads That Don't Work

By Peter Weddle

There are plenty of reasons why sales Rainmakers aren't beating down your door to work for you. The wrong job ad is high on the list.

Job Ads That Don't Work

This fall, the *Advertising Research Foundation* delivered some very bad news to companies: they are wasting one-out-of-every-five dollars they spend on advertising. That's right; a study by the Foundation found that the cost of employment ads that fail to communicate their message effectively now equals \$50 billion per year.

What's behind such lousy performance? The study concludes that two factors cause much of the miscommunication:

- Many ads simply deliver the wrong message, and
- Companies continue to invest in ads beyond the point of diminishing returns. How do these factors impact on recruitment advertising? Let's take a look.

Ads that deliver the wrong message

Sadly, many if not most job postings today deliver the wrong message. In many cases, that message is conveyed by using a print classified or, worse, a position description as the content for the online ad. As a result, these ads have little information, very little appeal or both. When that occurs, the message the job seeker receives is loud and clear: here's a company that is too lazy, too arrogant or too incompetent to use the online medium to its full advantage. Said another way, here's a place you don't want to work.

Job seekers, in general, and the best talent, in particular, expect much more. They know the Internet doesn't have the space constraints of the printed page, so they want employers to provide job postings that are both informative and compelling. They want ads that answer their questions before they even have a chance to ask them. They want enough detail to be able to evaluate an opportunity carefully and make an informed career decision. And, they want to be wooed. They want an ad with enough selling power to sway them into considering a new position, even when they aren't looking for one.

Such ads transform the job posting from a print classified ad listed on the Internet to an electronic sales brochure. Ironically, this "alternative advertisement" is more akin to an old fashioned, full page print display ad, but one on steroids and at one-tenth the cost. It not only sells the opening the organization has to fill, but it makes a powerful statement about the organization's employment brand, as well. Explicitly and subliminally, it transmits the right message: here is a company that understands the importance of hiring the best and brightest and of helping them to succeed in its employ. In short, here's a place where you do want to work.

Companies that continue to invest in ads beyond the point of diminishing returns

Print ads grow weary over time, and thus fail to motivate buyers as they once did. Job postings online lose their effectiveness in a different way. Although they typically remain visible for 30 days or more and could conceivably suffer the same exposure fatigue, their poor performance is actually driven by their location. In other words, the ads continue to be posted at certain sites even though the quantity and/or quality of their yield is insufficient to meet recruiting

requirements. The results aren't diminishing; they're diminished. The net effect, however, is the same: the advertiser achieves a sub-par return on its investment.

Why do ads continue to be posted at websites that generate "diminished returns"? There are at least several reasons:

- Habit. Employers can get into ruts and continue to use sites long after the results warrant a change. More often than not, these "behavior locks" occur when an organization lacks a process by which it evaluates the performance of its ad spending at each online source and makes timely adjustments to that spending, as appropriate. Without such continuous assessment and adjustment, organizations inevitably perpetuate mistakes and guarantee disappointing results.
- Finances. In some, perhaps many organizations today, the CFO negotiates a special deal with a job board and then requires all managers to use that site regardless of the kind of opening they are trying to fill. While this forced level of usage may justify the deal in financial terms, it all but eliminates the value of the resulting advertising in recruiting terms. Limited sourcing inevitably limits managers' reach into the candidate population and that, in turn, limits the quantity and quality of their yield.
- Awareness. There are, today, at least 40,000 job boards and career portals on the Internet. You can write a job posting with the right message, but if you place it on the wrong site, its yield will be just as disappointing as the yield you achieve from an ad with the wrong message. Managers who fail to acquire the information necessary to identify and evaluate all of the relevant job boards for any given requirement are, in effect, advertising by guesswork. And, the odds are against they're being successful.

In the survey conducted earlier this year, over half of the respondents said they were filling a quarter or more of their vacancies with candidates sourced from the Internet. That's proof positive that online ads do work and that online ads with the right message and at the right site work best.

Peter Weddle is a recruiter, HR consultant and business CEO turned author and commentator. Described by The Washington Post as "... a man filled with ingenious ideas," he has earned an international reputation, pioneering such concepts as Human Capital, Career Fitness and the Internet as a resource for recruiting and HR management. He has authored seven books, edited six others and published dozens of articles in professional and trade magazines.