

## Tech hires: Not just a help-wanted ad and a handshake

There are many variables in the high-tech market: financing, market share, competition, products, the economy.

However, one thing remains constant: the need to hire and retain good people.

Tech companies need to be particularly sensitive to this because they frequently need to respond to changes in other parts of the organization brought on by the ever-changing requirements inherent in the industry.



### Expert Opinion

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Of course, every company wants to recruit the best and the brightest. Have you ever heard of an employer who only wanted the worst and the mediocre? But for high-tech companies, this is often a bigger challenge than for non-tech organizations.

Whether you are a startup or an established high-tech company, the speed at which you make hiring decisions can be critical to finding the talent you need to stay on the cutting edge of your industry. Successful recruiting in the high-tech industry often means changing your mindset in the search for talent.

Here are some fundamental principles that will lead you to success:

■ Have a strategic plan.

It's amazing how many companies skip this step. By not planning, you increase your odds of wasting time and money looking in the wrong places; missing out on opportunities at job fairs and in special media sections; and alerting your competitors that you are looking for special talent.

Don't just put an ad in the paper or on a Web site to fill a position. Know exactly what skills you are looking for, what the market will pay, what positions your competitors are recruiting for and what they are paying for new hires. Decide if the skills you are recruiting for are to fill a long-term or short-term need. This will help you avoid major headaches in the future.

■ Know that not all "good" talent is currently working.

In 1999 and early 2000, companies were putting together unbelievable compensation packages to recruit and retain high-tech employees. Now employers can be more selective, right? Wrong.

You still need to exert some effort to find good employees. And don't think that just because someone is unemployed, she isn't talented. Sometimes the best employees are the first to quit a job because they know their value in the industry. Other employees may have been the victims of the dot-com meltdown. Be curious and interested in all candidates, whether they are currently employed or not.

■ Develop a marketing plan.

Yes, I said marketing plan. Recognize what makes your company great. Create the "hook" so that the prospect chooses you over your competitor. Be able to answer the "What's in it for me?" question from the candidate's perspective.

Talk about the company culture, benefits and compensation, promotional opportunities, types of assignments, etc. Understand your company's turnover rate and why employees stay and leave. Most importantly, know your business and be able to explain how your organization links to or relates to the greater good.

■ Understand your company culture.

It's important that new employees be a fit not only in terms of talents but also in terms of attitude. Showcase your company and its culture. Do you have a free-thinking environment, a heavy research and development focus best suited for individual workers or are you looking for employees who will work in groups to solve problems or serve customers?

Do your internal company structure, dress code and Web site match the ad you placed or the interview you conducted? And does the employee you are looking for complement your organization's culture?

■ Realize that one-track strategies don't always work.

If you place an ad in the local paper, you may get lucky. However, when the labor market is tight and you are competing for that "one-of-a-kind" employee, you'll have to look a little harder.

Know where the employees you are looking

for spend their time. If you are a high-tech company and your Web site isn't set up to take electronic resumes, "techie" candidates probably won't respond.

Stay connected with local associations. Research targeted Web sites that focus on the skills you are looking for. Develop relationships with universities. Establish an employee referral program with a significant "bounty" for those hard-to-fill positions. This multi-targeted approach will give you the best chance of success.

■ Make sure you prepare for the interview.

You may have conducted hundreds of interviews, but many of today's candidates are very savvy. You should be as prepared for the interview as you expect them to be. Know exactly what skills, knowledge and abilities you require.

■ Know how to close the candidate.

Many organizations work really hard at the previous steps, only to blow it at this stage. Don't make a candidate wait for several weeks after an interview to hear good or bad news. It needs to be delivered quickly so everyone can move on.

Start with a solid offer. We all know there is room for negotiation for those hard-to-fill positions. High-tech talent is usually easy to lose because they may be entertaining a number of offers. Understand your hiring timelines and don't expect employees to start tomorrow.

■ It's not over yet.

The recruiting process is not the hard part. The real challenges comes in keeping employees happy, productive and continually challenged.

Both parties are assessing, judging and adjusting during the first thirty to ninety days. So make sure you welcome the new employee that you spent so much time, money and energy wooing. Provide an orientation. Spend time setting expectations and check-in every week to see how she is doing.

Remember, the key to retention is to combine recruiting with commitment. Just like with a sales prospect, it's much easier and cheaper to retain a good client or employee than to have to find a new one.

Protect your investment.

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