

# Shining the light on talent sourcing



With labour the overriding cost of call centre operations, it becomes crucial to find innovative ways of reaching the best job seekers. Here is how to achieve an effective talent sourcing approach.

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By Warren Collier

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**I**n spite of anemic economic growth and high unemployment across North America, CEO's in almost every industry confirm the ability to source "optimal" talent remains a strategic priority. Contact centres are no different.

According to a recent survey from the Corporate Executive Board, "nearly 80 per cent of respondents said they plan to increase their use of job-board alternative methods as a key sourcing strategy this year, including employee referrals and other Web sites like Facebook or LinkedIn".

## Why talent sourcing is important

For contact centres, the ability to source a ready supply of

qualified people is a huge competitive advantage. It not only ensures the organization can sustain a high performing culture; it comes down to ensuring you have the right employee in the right job at the right time.

For example, the cost of attrition for one typical CSR in Canada ranges from \$4,000 to \$12,000. As well, the lost opportunity cost from the time of the job vacancy to when the new employee arrives and successfully passes the first 90- day learning curve is significant. A reduction in these hidden costs should form the basis of the ROI that would fund the tools necessary to help you achieve a well-executed talent sourcing strategy.

Regrettably, this is where most contact centres fail to achieve this objective. Why? Primarily because leaders do not either have the capacity to champion this across the organization or they simply get bogged down in the time it takes to create a "Cadillac" strategy when a scaled down "Chevy" will do the job.

## Best-in-class talent sourcing

Achieving this goal starts with a strong talent-focused culture that prevails across the entire organization. It's a culture where leaders and employees embrace the importance of acquiring top talent. To start an effective sourcing strategy, keep in mind the following simple incremental steps.

## Be innovative!

Regrettably, the traditional approach of sourcing talent for most contact

centres remains unchanged. While tactical approaches have evolved including the emergence of social media as a push /pull sourcing strategy, the notion of contact centre recruitment is usually limited to filling a job requisition, while success tends to be measured by how quickly one can bring a “cheek in the seat”.

While many companies would deny this sort of sourcing approach, the reality is many leaders have unfairly abdicated the ownership of talent sourcing to a small group of people (usually residing in HR) who shoulder the burden of executing this strategy. Many contact centres are also starting to reduce their reliance on traditional online job boards, as they tend to generate an avalanche of mostly unqualified candidates.

The integrated approach to sourcing starts at looking at doing things differently. Top talent do not necessarily search for jobs online, and this is why an employee referral program is an effective first start to sourcing talent at a small fraction of the cost of traditional methods of sourcing.

Shifting your recruiters (and employees) mindset from gatherers to hunters of talent and rewarding them for it has consistently demonstrated an effective approach in sourcing. Several contact centres across Canada have been forced to innovate as a result of the concentration of their business presence, and this includes areas such as Moncton and Halifax where the competition for talent (including bilingual capability) is prevalent.

## The “agent” job description

This is one area where most contact centres spend considerably little time positioning their company and the role. All contact centres want the best agents and ask for a laundry list of skills and experiences, and are quite happy to pay at the “lower end” of the market to achieve it.

However, it’s critical to create a realistic inventory of your minimum “non-negotiable” job requirements and shift the emphasis towards specific actions and results, including why it’s a great place to work. Understanding what are the key traits and behaviours that drive the performance of your existing successful agents must also be considered.

Look at your competition and go back and speak with your high performing agents and determine the priority of your ask. This will also help you ensure you are targeting the right candidate pool for the right job.

## Your brand

Differentiating your brand and creating a compelling statement through actions that make you unique are critical to selling the job and career.

Leverage your people, job content, vision, value statements and Web site to do the talking for you. Look at your most successful competitor and observe how and why they are successful.

A well-defined integrated, brand-focused approach should contribute to a professional candidate experience through each step of the sourcing and hiring process.

## Networking

Leveraging technology to automate your hiring process via a cost

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efficient talent management system will enable your people to focus their strategic efforts (and time) on networking for talent.

It also involves ensuring you have the right networker doing your sourcing in the first place. This coupled with shifting the cultural mindset to ensure you have the capacity via social media to connect with colleagues, peers, business acquaintances and friends, while also leveraging competitive intelligence in your community is a critical success factor.

Developing a database of prequalified talent with specific or unique skills (i.e. French speaking agents) and keeping in touch with them even if you are not immediately hiring is a competitive advantage.

While many other tactical sourcing strategies and tactics exist, commencing with small incremental and measured steps will allow you to create an effective sourcing strategy in a very short period of time.

The pressure to source and hire new quality talent continues to be significant across Canada. Leveraging all the tools and processes available will enable successful contact centres to seize opportunities and create a competitive advantage into the future.

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