

Headhunting in the web 2.0 era

A total of 59% of Swiss Internet users visit social networks and blogs. Some are already using these tools to get a new job. But this is just one part of the story...

BY CYRIL DEMARIA

Recruitment is, along with the travel and communication industries, at the forefront of the evolution brought about by online networks. It is hence no surprise that the web 2.0 and social networks evolve dramatically – albeit without cutting out the “middle man”. In fact, as explained by Serge Roux-Levrat, Group MD at getTalented AG, a headhunting firm in Zurich, “social networks have not really changed recruitment as such. They are just another tool that companies and recruiters can use to brand themselves and to find, communicate and engage with candidates.”

Recruitment through online networks is indeed more about redefining the role of the different parts of the value chain. Sabine Steinhorst, Associate at Dr Bjorn Johansson Associates, a headhunting firm in Zurich, says that “social networks have ushered a new era, a new paradigm in recruiting.” This paradigm shift comes from a swing from scarcity to abundance of information. “Recruiters have to be proactive and pull the candidates from these networks”, adds Hervé Peitrequin Social Networks Manager at Adecco Switzerland, a global interim and HR firm. “All recruiters use them in the US, with search strings and hunting strategies”, declares Penelope Trunk, Founder and Chief Evangelist of Brazen Careerist in Madison (US).

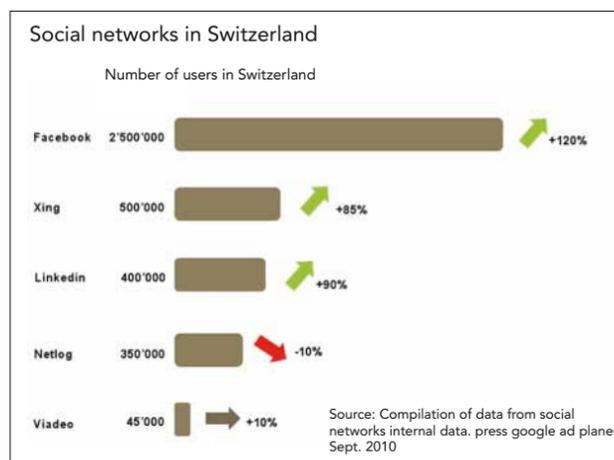
As a consequence, online networks such as LinkedIn, Xing and Viadeo have professionalised recruitment by “adding transparency and visibility to the process”, states Olivier Fecherolle, COO of Viadeo. “They are the new ‘pipe-line’ of candidates for the recruiting industry”, states Penelope Trunk. The role of HR consultants has

developed to help companies navigate through these new networks. “Even if information is accessible in high quantity, there is a need to filter and carefully check it”, says Franck Babin, Director of The Triple P, a headhunting and HR consulting firm in Zollikon. “Social networks create value and synergies, but cannot replace our work and the quality of service provided to clients. The very foundation of the business remains unchanged: bringing together the right people”, explains Sabine Steinhorst.

Mixed reactions

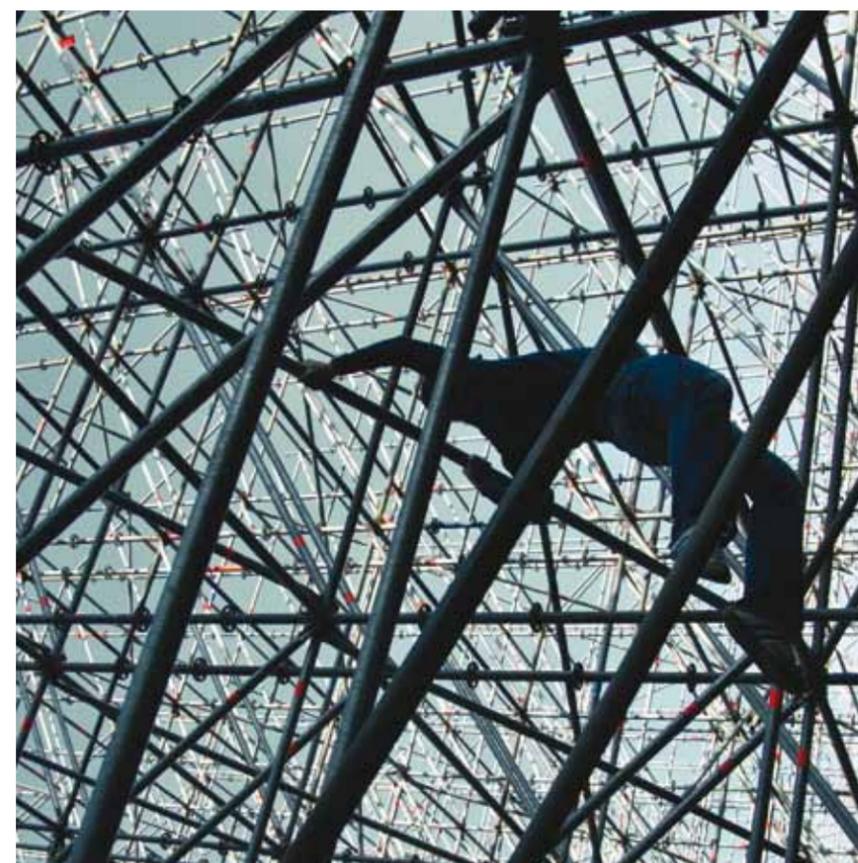
Reactions have however been mixed so far. Individuals, such as applicants or professionals, “now spend 25% of their time online doing social network activities. This cannot be ignored as it is the number one activity online in the US”, declares Hervé Peitrequin. A total of 59% of Swiss Internet users visit social networks and blogs (see Graph). Out of 7.5 million inhabitants, 0.4 million use LinkedIn and 0.5 million use Xing. The progression is rather strong even though candidates still perceive social networks as unreliable to apply for vacancies. A survey of 650 American candidates conducted by CV-Library states that direct applications remain at 53% the preferred way to conduct a job-hunting strategy. Job boards come next (25%). Social networks amount to only 1% of answers.

Nevertheless, “online professional social networks have gained a coveted position for the managers recruitment”, states Olivier Fecherolle. This is confirmed by their popularity and the profile of the users, as most of them have at least a university degree. Fecherolle goes on to say: “That also changes attitudes towards joining and leav-



ing a company: it is viewed as ‘just business’ and less as something emotional.” And Penelope Trunk goes on to confirm that “indeed, candidates will have at least three to five careers in their lives – and a lot more jobs.”

Companies are more reserved about the use of such tools. According to a survey developed by the Workforce Central Business Connection in the County of Pierce (Washington), only a fraction of employers is using social networks to recruit. The alternative is hence either to be passive, with published ads and listening to the market, or proactive, with a covert search and the identification of persons



to recruit. “Social networks have made finding 18-35 year-old candidates (Generation Y) much easier anywhere in the world if you know how to enter into contact with them. Not only because it only requires a few mouse clicks, but because most of them keep their online profiles up to date”, states Serge Roux-Levrat.

A different approach has been built by Experteer, which is a headhunters’ network targeting high end profiles. The choices have been quite bold: they ask candidates to pay and offer the service free to headhunters. “We now have two million members, 8,000 headhunters and can count 80,000 jobs on our platform”, states Christian Götsch, CEO and founder of the firm. Experteer positions itself as a “closed” social network, as opposed to an “open” social network such as Xing and LinkedIn. “The model is close to matchmaking, with a flag at each step to keep the parties involved informed”, describes Christian Götsch.

Reshuffling cards

The role of recruiters is hence evolving to target actively certain profiles, with

the help (or not) of headhunters and HR consultants. “Social networks enable recruiters to ‘observe’ key talent pools, tap into them and know more about targeted people before contacting them. However, once the identification step is complete, the following steps remain more or less the same”, states Serge Roux-Levrat.

Online social networks have changed the way recruiters are approaching candidates. “Job board postings are now seen more as a way to advertise information about a company than actually attracting candidates: recruitment is done elsewhere”, explains Franck Babin. “From a recruiter’s perspective, the debate has shifted from ‘How are you going to get our attention?’ to ‘How are we, as a company, going to get your attention?’ A lot of effort is now put into company branding and employer attractiveness”, says Hervé Peitrequin. “In fact, job boards and online social networks will probably collaborate more often and build a model of ‘co-opetition’”, concludes Olivier Fecherolle.

More than attracting a flood of applications from unemployed people, what is at stake is identifying potential candi-

< Digital identity is more than a profile on a website >

dates at work. Implicitly, a new stigma is attached to being unemployed: the candidate did not actively manage his career while he was employed and did not prepare his next move. Indeed, “...people who have the job have the power. This is a major power shift. People are already identified by who recruited them rather than by who employs them in the US”, argues Penelope Trunk. Hence Ms Steinhorst’s recommendation: “Get a digital identity! And once you have created a profile, don’t forget to update it.”

This digital identity is more than a profile on a website. “Individuals have to manage themselves online. They should be easy to find, build a reputation and a pipe-line”, advises Penelope Trunk. Indeed, connections and other information provided by the professional community are key. Serge Roux-Levrat uses “several social networks to identify not only potential candidates, but also people who can provide us with informal references on candidates or leads.”

Online networks have brought speed and access to a wider range of profiles of professionals who are in other traditional social networks. Online social networks are propelling old fashioned alumni networks towards a new dimension. Franck Babin, also President of the ESSEC Alumni Association in Switzerland, explains that “LinkedIn is used by the association to stay in touch with the alumni abroad (we recruited 40 out of the 300 alumni based in Switzerland over a week), and also to coordinate actions of alumni such as the ASAGE, which is the network of the French top business and engineering schools.”

The need to gather and network in person has grown. “Even if it is easier to get connected to people to find your dream job, what matters is relationships: this is what gets you the job”, confirms Penelope Trunk. Events and forums are increasingly popular among professionals. “For employees, I would suggest that they use

RECRUITMENT TRENDS

Hiring :

- > 85% of companies report recruiting difficulties
- > Active job seekers are not always the best
- > Strong need for CV quality vs CV quantity
- > Changing demographics patters will require new sourcing methods to reach the right audience
- > Business pace requires short recruitment delays

Applying :

- > 65% of employees want to change job
- > 26% of middle managers found a job via the Internet
- > 40% of middle managers found a job via referrals
- > 60% of people made referrals, of which 25% were successful

social networks to enlarge their own networks with like-skilled, like-minded people so that they can be a vehicle through whom their companies can recruit talented people”, advises Serge Roux-Levrat. As a side consequence, the HR department of companies is often bypassed by candidates and line managers: the direct relationship is built, and HR departments are shifting towards a mere support role.

The incentives of HR consultants and headhunters have also changed: clients are less inclined to pay on a time-spent basis, and are increasingly focusing on success fees. The map of the recruitment sector is hence evolving: major players are merging to focus on volumes, while small firms target specialised niches. Independent players are multiplying as the barriers to entry are now lower thanks to the technology.

However, positions are not necessarily easier to find and get: word of mouth remains paramount. “Posting jobs online for higher level positions is not advisable: with such a passive approach, you have little control on the quality and number of respondents”, continues Serge Roux-Levrat. This is confirmed by Anita Meli, CEO of Meli & Partners, a recruitment company in Zurich: “For us, online social networks are not really accurate. Candidates are impatient and short-circuit intermediaries. We focus on potential candidates with a job, with the highest quality and no time to look for other positions.”

The latest trend has been the emergence of crowd-sourcing (outsourcing tasks, traditionally performed by an employee or contractor, to an undefined, large group of people or community, through an open call) and word of mouth recommendation in the recruitment sector. In fact, “people are recommending their friends for a job”, explains Fabio Magagna, co-founder of Hirschfactor, a recruitment crowd-sourcing company in Zurich. “This is an alternative to job boards and executive search. It’s a push of job offers towards people through their friends.” If the method is rather new, it represents the latest extension of online social networks in the recruitment area.

This is also an alternative to going through email filters: top quality candidates already employed complain that they are too solicited and hardly read their messages on online professional networks. The candidate is thus the one dealing with the flow of information – just like Robinson Crusoe who would regret the solitude and quietness of his island while coming back to the chaos and furor of civilisation. +

ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKS POPULATION

Over time recruiters have built a specific jargon to refer to generations of professionals using social networks. Three main categories are identified:

- The Boomers (born: 1945 – 1964) is a generation of late adopter of technologies, compared to the two following. Their use is more circumspect, aware of confidentiality and privacy issues. They also are more difficult to reach online, but also more valuable in terms of recruitment as their seniority positions them more frequently for managerial jobs.
- The Generation X (born: 1965 – 1980) grew up with the emergence of personal computers, Internet and early online services. Even though familiar with interactive media, its approach relies on a combination of new and old media. Personal referrals are privileged, as well as direct communication over the phone or in person.
- The Generation Y (born: 1981 – 1995) is a generation of high consumers of technology and interactive media. Social networks and other alternative media are their main way of expression, alongside text messaging and instant messaging (synchronised or not).



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