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Putting out the garbage

AN ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE CAN HELP EMPLOYERS SORT THE CHAFF FROM THE GRAIN WHEN IT COMES TO RECRUITING WORKERS, WRITES ED CHARLES

THE internet is a wonderful thing for job hunters. Once an online resume is created, it can be sent almost effortlessly to as many potential employers as the applicant wishes. The SME recruiter, however, is fast becoming overwhelmed by resumes -- many from people who are inappropriate for the job.

According to Carolyne Burns, managing director of web-based recruitment company Expr3ss!, applicant numbers are increasing but the quality is lower.

In a study of applicants to a call centre group, she found the numbers applying for jobs increased 75 per cent in the 12 months to June. But the number who were unsuitable increased 96 per cent.

The problem is common. It has also been faced by Jon Gilbert, an owner and director of Adelaide-based Adams Cleaning and Maintenance Services, who has discovered that by filtering, he can save a lot of time -- he often does not even need to read resumes.

After buying the company two years ago, he is refining the business strategy and operations.

One obvious area he focuses on is recruitment, because the company, like most of the cleaning industry, has a high staff turnover. "It tends to be a bit of a body shop," he says. Employing 350 people, it has to recruit 60 to 90 people a year. If the company wins a new contract, it may have to recruit 30 to 40 new cleaners at once. That just compounds the problem," Gilbert says.

He was introduced to the concept of Expr3ss! through The Executive Connection, an training and mentoring group. Expr3ss! filters out the best applicants based on a series of questionnaires and the profile of a perfect candidate.

First, an ad was placed on a job website, seeking full- and part-time cleaners in Adelaide. Hundreds of people saw the ads, which directed the applicants to a secure section of the expr3ss.com website. Some 85 of them filled in the checklist. Applicants were asked to give contact details and answer some pre-screening questions -- such as "Are you completing this yourself?" -- to filter out people with poor English skills.

Gilbert says that while many employers may expect people to say no, the statistics show that people are very honest when filling in an electronic questionnaire. "Because it is not face-to-face there is no need to lie. What our experience is suggesting is that by and large people are very honest," he says.

There are nine questions in the first screening. Then the applicant is drawn into an online questionnaire.

"It is a simple tool which allows us to assess their suitability for our job," Gilbert says. "On the basis of the answers to that questionnaire, they are assessed against a benchmark."

The benchmark is a virtual cleaner -- the ideal person the company would like to employ. The system allocates one to five stars, with five being a very close match and one a poor match.

"On the basis of that we have determined that we will interview four- and five-star applicants only," he says. "Our experience is that, based on the four and five stars, we are getting more than enough applicants at that screening level, and we are finding the results more than satisfactory."

The service is proving popular with Gilbert's managers, who until now had to sort through resumes and interview people.

"If we were starting a major new contract and were looking for new cleaners, that would possible occupy the best part of a week's work for them," Gilbert says. "Now they don't see someone until they have gone through all the filtering processes.

"We don't even read resumes any more."

Gilbert, an accountant and a former partner in a national firm, says: "I don't see why it wouldn't work in any circumstances."

In recently headhunting a manager, the company simply asked the candidate to fill in a checklist, rather than asking for a resume. "And that gives us an understanding of their motivators and how they are going to behave on the job," Gilbert says. "That in itself is very valuable."