

HIRE STANDARDS, HIRE STRATEGIES

STORY BY MATT DAMSKER

Smaller service providers such as **Talent Plus** and **TruStar Solutions** help big companies—from Dupont to Kodak, Dell, and Ritz-Carlton—recruit and screen job candidates, using solid technology, sure strategies for selection, and the guiding focus of their top executives.

LeRoy Robbins can barely contain his glee as he acknowledges that, yes, it means a great deal to him that his small, Fishers, Indiana-based company, **TruStar Solutions**, not only hit the 2003 *Inc.* magazine 500 of America's Fastest Growing Private Companies at Number 33, but that it also ranked as the Number One HR company on the list.

"We're very fortunate," says TruStar CEO Robbins. "It's our first year of really getting going." Indeed, Robbins is carrying something of a family flag for TruStar, which his brother, Bruce, founded back in 1997 amidst the surge of Internet job boards, such as

Monster. Bruce Robbins (now TruStar's board chairman) felt it was a good time to help corporate HR make sense of the job board revolution and its technology. So TruStar offered a kind of agency model, negotiating on behalf of job board clients and helping them implement strategies to use the boards effectively.

"What came about really quickly was that we got **Dell Computer** as a client," recalls Leroy, whom Bruce lured to TruStar from HR stints with **Hillenbrand Industries**, **3M**, and **PepsiCo**. "At that point in 1998, Dell was posting 800 to 1200 jobs a week on about 15

job boards, and had people inefficiently cutting and pasting jobs onto those boards. They came to us seeking efficiency. At that point we had developed our proprietary product, Postmaster, which allows you to post a job just one time and get it out on the boards."

Postmaster proved quite effective in reporting and managing postings for HR client and has grown in sophistication over the years, providing various technological edges over a lot of applicant tracking software, Robbins affirms. Partnering with HRIS leaders such as **PeopleSoft** and **BrassRing** also enhanced TruStar's status and capabilities.

Big Funnels and AI

Of course, as the new century dawned, HR grew more comfortable in using the Internet, and soon technology was affording companies with what Robbins calls “big funnels” for candidates. Suddenly, companies were avalanched with tons of resumes, which required more solutions from the likes of TruStar. One result was TruStar’s HireYield product, an on-demand recruiting and screening tool that brings an edge of artificial intelligence (AI) to the process.

“HireYield allows HR to post a job. Then we run it back through an AI technology that parses resumes, scores and ranks them against profile job descriptions, and gives the client the top five or 10 candidates, allowing them to manage the end of the process for a fraction of what headhunters are charging,” Robbins explains.

“The sweet spot for this is where you’ve got HR generalists out there in *Fortune* 500 companies or the mid-market, and they wear all the hats and just don’t have time to leverage the power of the Internet. The only work they have to do, really, is sit with us long enough to do a good job of specing the job they’re posting.”



*TruStar's Robbins:
Carrying the family flag
of candidate screening.*

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**Talent Plus's
Rath: Selection
as the key to
long-term talent.**



At this point, TruStar's clients range from mega-pharmaceutical firms, such as **Eli Lilly** and **Glaxo SmithKline**, to **Aetna**, **Dupont**, **Kinko's**, and **Kodak**, all the way to **Batesville Casket Co.**, one of the world's leading producers of burial caskets. Batesville sits in a remote location in Batesville, Ind., and is somewhat challenged when it comes to recruiting employees for skilled and niche positions.

One such opening gathered 303 resumes using HireYield, seven of which were presented to Batesville for phone interviews and four of which filtered down to interviews by HR generalists. According to Batesville's statistics, implementing HireYield has been a factor in improving the company's job-fill cycle time by 53 percent and reducing overall recruiting costs by 67 percent.

The Access Model

"Basically it's a matter of letting technology do the work that an HR generalist has had to do for years and years—going through resumes—work that needs to be done, of course, but not by human hands now," Robbins points out. All the same, he and TruStar are looking beyond the obvious advantages of software solutions that parse resumes and screen candidates toward an even newer frontier of recruiting.

"What's coming on strong now," Robbins reflects, "is the whole access model of recruiting. In a way, job boards are just an extension of the old Sunday paper, reaching active job-seekers, mainly. The key now is to get a share of the nonactive job-seekers, using employment branding. In that sense, the whole online advertising trend is back, and companies are paying big bucks to connect, say, their recruiting efforts to the search words which nonactive job-seekers may enter on Internet search engines like Google and Yahoo! In a sense, it's all about search, now."

It's certainly about search and access, Robbins points out, to various affinity groups—nurses and health care workers, the many thousands who have opted into online job notification systems.

"Nobody sees us as a vendor anymore," he adds. "They see us as a value-adding partner. Clients don't care so much about the job boards or applicant tracking approaches. They just want a solution that brings them value."

Building Talent-Based Firms

The value proposition offered by an ambitious HR consulting firm such as Lincoln, Neb.-based **Talent Plus**, encompasses online screening all the way through developmental, career-path consulting. Talent Plus describes its mission as one of "building talent-based organizations" and has created methodologies that attempt to fill in the typical gaps in what HR generalists do in their staffing efforts.

"There are several key HR processes that all great companies need to look at," notes Kimberly Rath, one of Talent Plus's managing directors and a key architect of its holistic approach. "One is selection, one is orientation, another is communicating strategy and vision, and then there's training and certification. Now, we focus on selecting the right individuals; once you do, the rest is a refinement. Because companies don't spend 80 percent of their time in the selection process—they hire instead of select, then spend 80 percent of the time on training."

The hit-or-miss inefficiency of hiring first and, in a sense, asking questions later, is obvious enough, and companies like Talent Plus put a great deal of technological savvy and consulting skills into crafting a more scientific routine for companies. Through such approaches as online screening systems, structured interview processes, and work experience tracking techniques, Talent Plus partners for the long-term with such clients as the **Ritz-Carlton** hotel chain with its 30,000 employees.

"What's so difficult about a job interview in most cases is that things are just not so obvious," Rath explains. "Maybe the candidate is high in relationship skills, but you don't see their integrity level. We try to get to a core understanding of a person. We've built an online capability that screens candidates and sets them up for the interview, after which we capture their talent profile, their relocation information, compensation, work experience, and languages. And over time, after they are selected, we can put all of their performance metrics together."

One by-product of this sort of databasing is the capacity to locate existing talent within an organization that might otherwise be overlooked. "A client needed French-speaking workers to open a number of stores," Rath recounts, "and in an employee base of 30,000, we found four people to fill the bill, so they didn't have to go outside for candidates. Most companies just haven't built a system to track their talent that way."

Still, Talent Plus hangs its core-competency hat on a screen-and-select process that amounts to an engine for successful selection. Rath takes no small pride in noting that Talent Plus is a sharer in the Malcolm Baldrige quality awards won by the Ritz-Carlton over the years.

"With the Ritz-Carlton, there are 25 to 30 people in every hotel who are certified on the interview process we built that questions candidates truly effectively," Rath adds. "We spend our validation and research time on discerning how the best five candidates for a given position respond to certain key questions."

"These are questions that discern between top performers and contrast performers, poor performers. What is the difference? Where are the big gaps in terms of personality, values, work ethic, and building harmonious relationships? You need to see that in an interview, but you need the tools to see it."

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