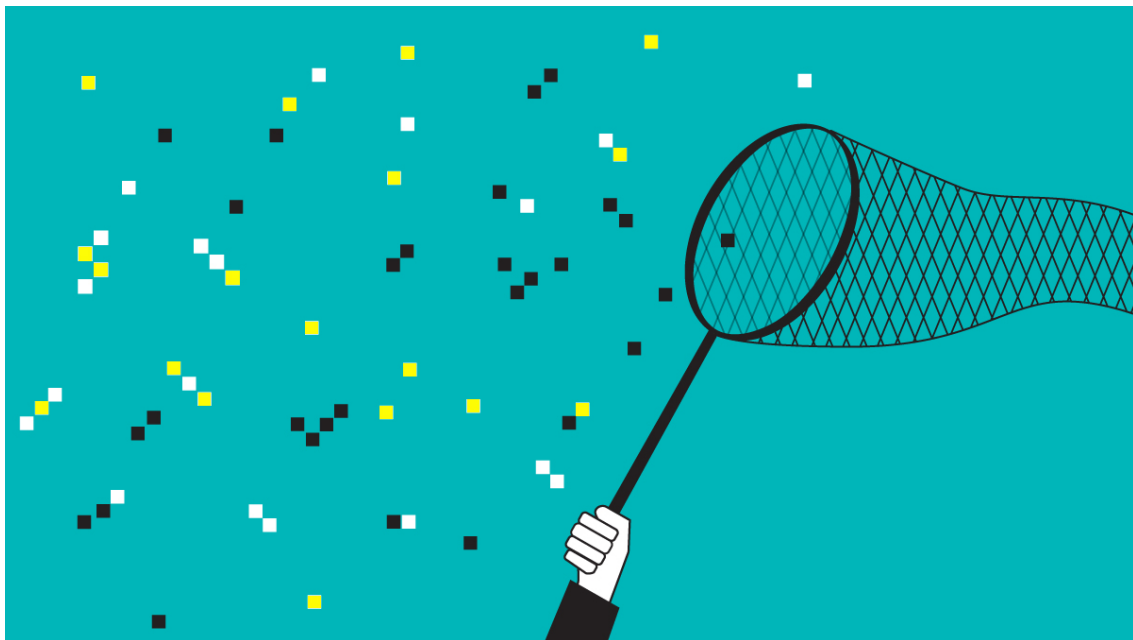


**Hiring**

# **Simple Online Tools to Make Hiring Easier**

by Diomidis Spinellis

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Nicholas Blechman for HBR

Running an open recruitment process – one where the position is openly advertised – can be overwhelming, especially if you don’t have at your disposal an HR department that’s organized to handle the process. This is often the case in small businesses, volunteer organizations, and some government branches. I’ve often seen recruitment calls receiving too little interest, or, worse, paper CVs piling up on a desk, with no clear plan on how to deal with them.

No wonder so many managers choose to avoid advertizing openings. An extensively cited 2010 study found that 42% of hires happened at companies that didn't report a vacancy. But hiring like this, by word of mouth, is a mistake. Recruiting with an open call, rather than through your and your associates' personal networks, dramatically expands the talent pool you can fish from. It can also increase the diversity of the people you hire, which has been shown to increase a firm's competitive advantage.

Fortunately, time-strapped managers can use freely available tools to publicize your call, gather applications, and collaborate with your team for evaluating the candidates.

Utilize multiple channels to advertize your call. Online social networks, such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook, can work wonders. Consider paying to promote your call — promoted posts are often cheaper than traditional advertising channels. Put the word out through your newsletters, mailing lists, and internal channels as well. By creating a specific link for each channel through a URL shortener, such as Google's, you can compare their effectiveness and geographic reach.

Don't even think about inviting paper CVs. These are certain to bog you down if you receive more than a handful of applications. Instead, create a Google form where job seekers can enter their details. Once an applicant submits a form, the details get automatically entered into a spreadsheet, which makes comparing the entries much easier.

Add ample fields to the application form, allowing the applicants to express all details that might indicate they're particularly suitable for your opening. If, for instance, you're hiring chefs, create a field for each cuisine they can cook, one for each formal qualification (such as diplomas and certificates in professional cookery, food safety, hospitality supervision, patisserie, leadership), as well as fields for attendance at industry events, awards, and types of experience. Don't

fret about the exact relevance of these fields to your particular opening. During evaluation you'll use them mainly as proxies to highlight the most promising candidates.

Here's an example. In 2009, I was hiring aides for a senior IT management job. The application form I created had countless fields for indicating proficiency in tens of programming languages and IT systems. Few were relevant to the position. However, those who scored high demonstrated both their interest for IT and their self-improvement drive. Both were qualities that made them suitable for the job.

Make the form's fields easy for you to process. You can quickly tally in a spreadsheet answers to multiple choice, checkbox, and number fields, so prefer these types. In contrast, evaluating free text fields requires a human eye; use such fields sparingly. Even when you can't avoid free text, try to restrict it with suitable guidance. For instance, instead of asking candidates to tell you where they went to school, ask them for the school's website – this will give you one consistent answer, such as [www.berkeley.edu](http://www.berkeley.edu), instead of a variety of names used to refer to the University of California, Berkeley.

If you're hiring as a team (which you should be doing), once the application deadline expires share the Google spreadsheet with the rest of the team, allowing each member to vote on the applicants. One method I've used, is to give team members a fixed number of votes (say 20), and ask them to allocate these among the applicants. I also allowed for negative votes to let members identify particularly risky applicants. Create a separate spreadsheet column for each of your colleagues' votes. To avoid the groupthink trap, set the vote cell font color to white, thus obscuring the votes from other team members. For higher confidentiality you can create a separate voting form, where applicants are identified by a unique identifier, such as their email. You can then merge the results of the two forms with a simple spreadsheet lookup formula.

With completed fields and votes in one giant spreadsheet it's then time to grade the applications. Here you'll use spreadsheet formulas to convert completed form fields into weighted values, (say 10 for our chef's food safety qualification and 150 for a James Beard Foundation Award). If it's difficult to write a formula to grade a particular field, create a new column and enter the grades by hand. If you're into this, you can even write some Google Apps code to automate the task. When evaluating new editorial board members for the *IEEE Software* magazine, I wrote a small program that would complete each applicant's number of publications and co-authors based on a supplied link to their online library publications' list.

Finally, add the calculated field values to obtain the total grade for each applicant. With an (admittedly crude) grade assigned to each applicant, you can sort the spreadsheet by the corresponding column to obtain a ranked applicant list. Given that many of the measures you've used for grading are rough proxies for the qualities you're actually looking for, some more work lies in front of you. Go through the top ranked entries and carefully evaluate the applicants to create the shortlist of the ones you'll invite for an interview. Be generous in the shortlist's size to compensate for the lack of your grading's sophistication. As an example, in 2009 case, from a list of 750 applications I shortlisted about 20 people to interview for five positions.

Having read this far, you may have come to the conclusion that open recruitment and messing with forms and spreadsheets is too much for you. But make no mistake: this process allows you to hire the best. Bringing such people into your organization is the single most important thing you can do for it.

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