How to Hire Employees Using an Applicant Tracking System

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Since the start of 2020 and throughout most of 2021, the U.S. has seen a surge in the number of employees who have left their jobs in search of more rewarding uses of their time and skills. This is simply one of the latest examples highlighting a skilled labor shortage that has been steadily growing in the U.S. over the past three to five years.

The job market of today is vastly different than it was even just a few short years ago, and employees — particularly those who possess niche and valuable skills — have taken notice. As a result, companies have had to use a broader array of tools and techniques to bolster their hiring efforts to attract and retain a greater number of talented employees.

One such tool is an applicant tracking system (ATS) (or sometimes called a candidate relationship management system), which acts as a customer relationship management (CRM) software for hiring. Implementing an ATS at my own company has allowed our team to hire a greater number of employees with valuable skills in a near-seamless process that mitigates (if not, outright alleviates) many of the stressors associated with more traditional hiring and recruiting methods.

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Using ATS to improve the hiring process

Most HR managers and professionals are not strangers to the struggle of finding talented and qualified candidates for key positions within their organizations. Without an efficient hiring system in place, this process becomes even more cumbersome and costly in terms of both company time and resources. This is a challenge that my team and I became intimately familiar with during our first year in operation, which was made all the more challenging by the onset of last year's pandemic.

Since implementing an ATS into our company's hiring process, however, both my team and I have witnessed a massive improvement in our company's internal hiring process. This is primarily due to the ATS's ability to place all incoming applications from candidates for open positions at our company into one single aggregated pipeline, regardless of where those applications came from.

For example, integrating an ATS into our hiring process has allowed us to post listings for any open position at our company to several different job boards online. We were then able to run advertisements to those boards with which we saw the greatest amount of movement and traction, further bolstering our recruitment initiatives. Whenever a candidate applied to one of our open positions through a job-hunting platform like Indeed or ZipRecruiter, their application was then automatically integrated into our ATS and began populating our aggregated hiring pipeline with each applicant's information.

From there, we were able to pinpoint which applications were deemed most promising for each specific role using a series of assessments and interviews, leaning on our ATS as a guide throughout the remainder of the recruitment and hiring

process.

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How integrating an ATS improves your recruitment pipeline

For insight as to how an ATS can bolster your own company's recruitment efforts, I want to exemplify how my team and I have utilized it within our own.

When a candidate applies, regardless of role, they receive an automated thank-you email for applying to work with us. We then integrated third-party assessment tools into our ATS system, where, if a particular candidate's resume strongly coincides with the role they applied for, the candidate will receive another automated email containing a link to complete their first-round assessment. This contains questions regarding both personality and emotional intelligence, along with a prompt to complete a brief writing sample, which further allows us to assess the candidate's written communication skills and writing abilities.

Upon a candidate's completion of their initial assessment, our ATS alerts the team, and we begin reviewing their answers to the assessment. If their answers are favorable, we signal this within the ATS, moving them further down the application pipeline. The candidate then receives a first-round interview with an HR director, who covers the details of the specific role they applied for at a high-level scope and answers any questions the applicant might have, as well as granting the candidate an overview of our company culture to ensure they are still a good fit for the role and organization.

Should the candidate perform well in this first-round interview, they are moved to the next portion of our ATS,

which sends them a second assessment. This second assessment is targeted more towards specific functions of the job itself – often consisting of a second longer and more detailed writing sample often in niche topic areas – as much of our company's work is heavily focused on writing and pitching press pieces for our clients.

If a candidate performs well in their second assessment, the ATS is prompted to send them an additional automated email alerting them of a second-round interview with a hiring manager. At this stage in the process, that manager is then responsible for taking a quality assurance role by reviewing the applicant's assessments and ensuring they are still a proper fit for the role. If the hiring manager deems that the candidate indeed is a good fit, they then perform a third and final assessment, consisting of another personality and intelligence test to solidify the candidate's values are aligned with those of our company.

If the third assessment is done well, the candidate is then moved towards the end of our ATS, which prompts a final automated email to be sent to the candidate, alerting them to schedule a final interview directly with myself or another co-founder of the company. Once the candidate is hired, they are moved to the end of our ATS pipeline and begin their official onboarding process with our team.

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Implementing an ATS in the hiring process removes bias

For any ATS program to provide its maximum potential value towards your company's recruitment process, it is crucial to use multiple job-hunting sites and platforms, which will greatly expand your talent pool. See which sites or platforms perform best, and then begin placing targeted ads on those

sites for the roles your company needs to fill more quickly with qualified talent.

Once this is done, your ATS will begin aggregating all incoming applicants into one unified location. This lets you and your HR team build a strong pipeline of qualified candidates to make sure you're truly assessing and reviewing people equally. Remember that the role of integrating assessments is primarily to remove any biases within the hiring process – and that the messaging used in this process should be structured in a way to best match your company's internal culture and operating processes. Subsequently, the removal of bias allows you to review and hire applicants based solely on the strength of their resume, assessments, personality and skills.

If you can successfully implement an ATS within your organization's hiring process in this way, it will only be a matter of time before a larger quantity and quality of applicants begin flowing into your recruitment pipeline, positioning your company to take advantage of the breadth of talent available and hire only the best candidates for each position.

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