

Want better luck recruiting qualified and committed frontline associates?

The secret is in the data.

NEVER BEFORE has the parking industry had readily available big data to exploit its parking revenues and space utilization. With the help of a number of emerging tech partners, we can now analyze our parking customers in a number of different ways and cater to their specific needs in terms of providing spaces at attractive pricing before they even start to head toward their destinations.

Hand-in-hand with this continued modernization of our facilities is the changing role of the frontline associate from the perspective of both the employer and the job seeker, leading to the big question: How do we apply data analysis to the frontline associate when it comes to attracting, interviewing, and hiring this level of talent?

While hourly worker statistics specific to parking may not be readily available, we do know the following thanks to national census and comparative data:

- The Department of Labor states that hourly workers make up more than 60 percent of the entire U.S. workforce, equaling 75 million employees; the agency predicts that by 2020, this number will increase by 1 million.
- Both the retail and hospitality industries say frontline employee turnover can range from 50 to 105 percent.
- According to a study by The Aberdeen Group, the constant cycle of hiring and firing in retail results in more than \$1 billion spent in job advertising and hiring costs per annum.

CONSTANT

Add to the above what we know about our hourly workforce on the lot: Their job role has and continues to change in material ways, requiring a different skill set and behavioral makeup than in the past. In considering this composite, combined with the shift in operations and the parker profile, organizations no longer have to accept that the churn-and-spend is “just the cost of doing business” when it comes to hiring the frontline associate. Organizations can actually leverage available data to break legacy hiring and leadership habits.

Analyze Available Employee Data

If your organization hasn't examined its recruitment, interviewing, and hiring practices for frontline associates in awhile, there's potential opportunity to turn the recruitment process upside-down to drive better results.

As with analyzing revenue and parker trends, look first to the available data. The typical metrics related to recruitment and hiring include various hiring ratios, cost per hire, and days to hire, all of which are readily available from an applicant tracking system. When examining this information, like any other type of analysis, identify the drivers behind each statistic.

As an example, in our practice we find that while Craigslist continues to lead the pack in terms of drawing the highest number of applicants, this source may not yield the highest number of hires; we find it typically averages one hire per 10 applicants (recruitment industry statistics state one in seven is the target to shoot for). We continue to determine that employee referral programs drive the highest number of applicants to hire, averaging two hires per five applicants. Applying the math to the above comparison, if every interview takes roughly 30 minutes,



CHANGE

By Colleen M. Niese

hiring managers spend five hours hiring one employee through the cited posting route versus two and a half hours interviewing to hire two. These types of analytical exercises can shed light on how organizations can shift time, money, and resources to attract larger numbers of applicants who are more qualified for the open positions.

Who Is Your Ideal Candidate?

We once worked with a client in a fairly large market whose hiring practice required applicants to travel up to 60 minutes for the interview. All candidates were told they had to pay for their own background check and uniforms, and the interview questions centered around the applicants' transportation options and flexibility with working evenings and weekends. Not surprisingly, when we examined their data, we found that more than 70 percent dropped out after the interview and their subsequent turnover was in the

low triple digits. We then asked detailed questions regarding their ideal candidate profile and compared it to current hiring practices and the analysis. Needless to say, the hiring managers became quite engaged to shifting all of the above so we could close the gap between what they defined as their desired workforce and who they were, in reality, attracting.

With the proper analysis completed, any organization can conduct a similar exercise, first redefining the ideal candidate with great detail and clarity. Putting job postings and job descriptions aside, brainstorm the characteristics, skills, and behaviors of the frontline associate through three different lenses: parking customer, leader, and co-worker in terms of needs, expectations, and performance. This simple diagnostic always identifies some surprising aspects that can then be used to update job descriptions, job ads, and the applicant process itself.



The typical metrics related to recruitment and hiring include various hiring ratios, cost per hire, and days to hire, all of which are readily available from an applicant tracking system.

In combination with this exercise, consider the profile from the actual job seeker's perspective with the following insight:

- 39 percent of today's hourly workers are younger than 25; 33 percent are between 25-44; and the remaining 28 percent are 45 or older.
- More than 80 percent listed a five-mile commute and flexible hours as top priorities when seeking an hourly career opportunity.
- 75 percent of candidates are looking at three jobs at the same time and will, on average, last in any given application pipeline between 30 and 60 hours.
- Hourly job seekers increased mobile usage to apply for jobs by 113 percent between 2012 and 2013.

And an interesting trend that will undoubtedly continue to grow is the job seeker's evaluation of the organization itself. According to an article from *The Telegraph Report*, 20 percent of rejected applicants shun their potential employers and amplify their dissatisfaction online (think Glassdoor.com and Yelp).

All of this points to a very important implication—an organization is still posting generic job ads, treating applicants more like numbers than individuals, and hiring based on short-term staffing needs, two potential risks are created: The organization is unknowingly attracting the truly desperate job seeker, and those more qualified who choose to withdraw from the opportunity are potentially sharing their disappointment with the process online.

Market to Win the Top Talent

With the data analysis and candidate profile in hand, this insight can now be applied to practical tactics, starting with the job description and job posting. Ensure the description very clearly defines today's frontline associate position requirements and essential duties as identified in the previous two exercises. It was during this drafting process that one of our clients realized that his company still required cashiers to be able to drive manual vehicles and valets to have their driver's licenses for a minimum of seven years. When compared to today's world, these two legacy requirements were adjusted, and the organization experienced a notable improvement with its applicant pool.

What your job opening communicates is as important as where it is actually posted. The job posting should sell the opening as a career opportunity and not just tell the basic requirements of the position. How it's placed on your organization's website and elsewhere will largely determine both the quantitative and qualitative results. Look at any retail website to gain a strong sense of this recommendation: The career page is typically buried

somewhere at the bottom of the landing page, and three clicks later, a perfunctory form appears. In stark contrast, view the career page of Southwest.com: It states working at Southwest "isn't just a career, it's a cause" and goes on to explain how the way Southwest values the customer experience is applied to their associates' respective careers. Mystery solved as to why they can have set times during the year to accept job applications and continue to win accolades for both customer service and employee satisfaction.

Beyond the organization's own employment page are countless posting sites with new ones cropping up every year. In a quick search, I found several sites that actually source hourly candidates on behalf of the employers' specific requirements and another handful that cater to niche labor pools and offer bilingual functionality. All of these continue to be very cost-effective and, in some instances, won't charge a fee until a certain number of applicants complete the interview process.

With all the effort placed in drawing a better-qualified candidate, be sure to exploit the process by conducting a robust and meaningful interview. Make sure the interview questions strike a solid balance between technical and behavioral-based questions and always include the selling points as to why working with your organization is of benefit to the job seeker. One sure way to demonstrate your organization's continued commitment to hiring top talent is by providing a simple one-pager to the candidate that includes both the job description and all that is offered in exchange by the organization. In addition to listing base salary, also include vacation, benefits, retirement allowance, and training with each item monetized and tallied. Candidates immediately connect with all they can gain by performing to an organization's standards when it's viewed through the lens of dollars and cents.

Speaking of this: According to several retail and hospitality associations, 30 to 50 percent of a frontline associate's annual wages can be spent on average per hire. We've determined in the parking industry an organization can spend up to \$1,200 in direct costs per new hire. By conducting your own data analysis when it comes to the frontline associate, identifying the ideal candidate profile, and then exploiting the findings throughout the recruitment and interview process, you can ensure the time and money invested in drawing qualified candidates at higher volumes will yield the anticipated results: an accelerated hiring process that brings better talent to your organization that ultimately improves the customer experience, which all translates to better bottom-line results. **P**



COLLEEN M. NIESE is principal of The Marlyn Group. She can be reached at cniese@marlyngroupplc.com.