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Winning the numbers game.

How the past and present of volume recruitment can prepare you for the future.

Key challenges of volume recruitment.

In 2013, we published some research[1] into the key challenges of volume recruitment – a process we liken to finding needles in a haystack.

Three years on, those challenges still stand – but the context has changed. Ongoing globalization and digital advances have turned the world into a giant talent pool, where disengaged candidates are more likely than ever to be passive job hunters, willing to cross borders for jobs. A global ageing population means there are more generations than ever in the workforce. And economic growth is slowing in emerging markets such as China.

In other words, the haystack's got bigger, the needles more varied and the skies more unsettled overhead. Which means that finding the right candidates is harder than ever.

But there's sunlight peeking from behind the clouds. At Korn Ferry Hay Group, we believe that these circumstances offer a great opportunity to learn from the past, make good use of the present and evolve for a digital future.

If you do this, you'll have a less resource-intensive but more efficient and engaging process for your volume recruitment. One that offers a truer reflection of the role and gives every candidate a positive experience – whether they're successful or not.

[1] The Vicious Circle of volume recruitment: Talent Q survey report 2013

What is volume recruitment and why does it matter?

Volume recruitment – sometimes known as bulk or seasonal recruitment – is the process of recruiting large numbers of candidates at once, usually for front-line roles in sales and customer service, but could include graduates or other early talent.

Organizations might do this because the business or customer base has grown rapidly, or to cover for their busiest times of year. Or they might do it because they are reshoring a department, or have emerged from a recruitment freeze.

Whatever the reason, effective volume recruitment is about selecting the best candidate from a pool of tens, hundreds or even thousands of applicants. And the consequences of getting it wrong can be huge.

For example, if you're filling 1,000 roles a year, you may get up to 10,000 applicants – and have to reject 9,000 of them. That's an awful lot of people and potential customers to upset if you don't manage the process well. And with many countries increasingly moving to service-based economies, the number of these roles is only going to rise – along with the potential for doing long-term damage to your brand and business.

Get the process right, though, and you can build your employer as well as your customer brand, and develop a pipeline of talent at the same time. A great outcome for any organization.

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Learning from the past.

The research we carried out in 2013 revealed an alarming fact: faced with growing numbers of applications, 37% of respondents were unknowingly hiring unsuitable candidates just to fill a role quickly. Those people were then leaving, creating high turnover and starting the cycle all over again.

This could result in dramatically higher costs (we estimated that a 'typical' volume recruiter would spend more than $3.4 million a year on filling frontline roles). But it could also negatively affect how people perceive the organization.

We identified three key issues that were contributing to this problem – and the negative consequences they could bring.

The first was inefficient hiring processes. These included trying to use standard processes to recruit large numbers of people, or having long and slow recruitment methods. An example might be manually sifting through 200 CVs, then interviewing 20 candidates face-to-face – a big time investment that could cause the process to drag.

This led us to the second pitfall: inconsistent hiring decisions. Organizations that relied on face-to-face interviews to find the best candidates often got around the resource issue by delegating the job to non-HR professionals. But this could result in inconsistent interviewing processes, which could in turn mean hiring people for inconsistent reasons.

Both these factors led to a third issue: a poor candidate experience and damage to your brand. We know from our research[2] that two of the biggest irritations among graduate candidates are long, drawn-out application processes and the way that interviews are conducted. As non-graduates are likely to feel the same, there's a lot of potential to annoy large numbers of candidates – and potentially lose future customers. We still see organizations grappling with these issues today. In '3 ways to learn from the past', we explore how to get around them.

3 ways to learn from the past.

- **Create efficiencies wherever you can – even if that means being ruthless.** What's taking up the most time and what can you drop? Do you really need those telephone interviews, or CV/resume sifts?
- **Embed your values and watch them grow.** Values are the backbone of an organization. Use them to build consistent criteria into your hiring processes, and to show both current and potential employees what your organization is really about.
- **Use your brand to engage, attract and enthuse long before applications open.** Volume recruitment is about attracting the most suitable candidates, as well as sifting the unsuitable ones out. Social media is a cost effective and effective way to set out your stall, but it'll only work if your selection processes reflect your ideal brand image. If they don't, you'll need to adapt them to close any gaps.

On top of this, research[3] shows that to be a global player in volume recruitment, people need to see you as the 'best' place to work. That means making sure your culture, brand and organizational identity are attractive, and using social media to communicate them cheaply and effectively.

[2] Through the Eyes of a Graduate: Talent Q survey report 2013

[3] Talent Management in the Developing World: Adopting a Global Perspective: Joel Elegbe 2016

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Making good use of the present.

We've established that volume recruiters face the same challenges as before. But as we said at the beginning, the context of those challenges has changed. With more roles, and more applicants for those roles from around the world, organizations now need to find more sustainable and cost-effective ways of selecting the best.

This is where newer technologies can help. By allowing you to digitally screen out the masses, and only see the top candidates face-face, they dramatically cut down the time needed to sift. Candidates can apply wherever they are in the world. And you get the chance to showcase your brand, while giving all candidates an engaging and consistent experience.

No wonder many organizations are ditching traditional, methods, such as application forms and unstructured interviews, for these online and immersive methods. But what exactly are they – and how do we know if they work?

What are immersive assessments?

- **Video interviewing** streamlines the recruitment process by removing the need for time-consuming telephone interviews.
- **Realistic job previews (RJPs)** immerse potential candidates into the role and organization so they can decide if they're a good fit before they even apply. They're a great way of reducing the number of applicants.
- **Situational judgment tests (SJTs)** use adaptive content to give candidates a real insight into the content of the job using real life scenarios, and sift out unsuitable people early on in the process.
- **Values-based assessments** allow you to sift according to a strategic set of values, before carrying out other assessments further down the line.
- **Gamification tools** immerse candidates in the job environment by presenting them with a series of avatars they can interact with in real time. Gaming principles have shown promise in other parts of HR, and can be created to reflect your culture, brand and the requirements of the role.

Newer technologies clearly have a lot to offer the world of volume recruitment. But it's early days, and some of the more immersive and candidate-focused approaches are still time-consuming and expensive. In '3 ways to make good use of the present', we share our suggestions for getting the balance right.

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3 ways to make good use of the present.

- **Set out your vision and strategy.** Take the time to map out where you want to be in 2020 or even 2030. Use visionary interviewing and other techniques to objectively analyze the jobs and skills you'll need in 2020 or 2030, and measure that against what you have now. By spotting the gaps between vision and reality, you can start looking for the right people – using the right methods.
- **Try out the new kids on the block.** If you're worried about how techniques like gamification work or videoing interviewing, there's plenty of help and guidance out there, including case studies of organizations that have used these technologies effectively. Ask suppliers for a demo of their products, and grill them about what they measure and how to identify which add value and which are 'vapourware'.
- **Don't automatically ditch the old favorites.** Research shows that assessment centers are still the best predictors of future job performance, followed by ability tests[4]. And confidence in psychometric tests is rising globally[5]. Work out which of your more established methods are worth keeping and how you'll integrate them with the newer elements to get the best results.

Do they work?

The jury's still out on some of these methods. But we do know that:

- Video interviewing is popular with time-poor candidates and organizations as a way to 'meet' virtually, and is as valid as some structured face-to-face interviews.
- SJTs are as effective as work sample tests at predicting performance.
- RJPs have been shown to immerse candidates more quickly in to an organization's culture and reduce early attrition.
- Candidates report that immersive techniques, such as day-in-the-life assessment centers and SJTs, give a better insight into the role and organization.

[4] Smith and Robertson 1986, Schmidt and Hunter 1998
[5] Global Assessment Barometer, 2016

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Evolving for the future.

Virtual reality headsets, smart watches and fully digital day-in-the-life assessment centers... You don't need to be a futurologist to predict that digital tools will take on a bigger role in volume recruitment over the next 10 or so years.

On top of the challenges we set out at the beginning, the growing presence of generation Z (and later, generation Alpha) in the workplace will change what candidates expect from employers – from recruitment through to development and benefits. Organizations will need to adapt to reflect the way these generations learn and consume information, while still engaging everyone else. And they'll need to get their brand right, and express it consistently around the world, in order to attract 'perfect' candidates before they're even thinking about applying.

While we don't have a crystal ball, we predict that these changes will make organizations focus on truly immersing candidates into the role and culture from the very start of the recruitment process. And they'll do it in a way that's fast, scalable and gives candidates a consistent, engaging experience.

Exactly how they achieve that remains to be seen, but we expect gamification techniques to become more popular and sophisticated. Virtual and other digitized tools, (e.g. virtual reality, gamification and online assessment centers) are the natural successors to these, and although some are currently unproven (and expensive), we expect them to play a major role in the future. Done well, these tools can give candidates an unbeatable insight into what it's like to do a particular job in your organization. They transcend borders and time zones, so they're great for recruiting globally. And because they're fully immersive, they're extremely engaging to use.

We also think that assessment will become increasingly mobile. Imagine a test you can take on your phone when you're commuting – and get instant results. This kind of technology will suit generation Z's need for speed. And it'll tell you if someone's a good fit for a role in a fraction of the time it takes now.

On top of all this, technology will transform your 'back-end' processes too: we're already seeing a move from paper-based marking frames to online scoring systems that generate feedback reports automatically. Who knows where else these technologies will take us?

3 ways to evolve for the future.

- **Bring your volume recruitment strategy into the digital era.** Embrace the technology of the future to become more efficient, engaging and effective.
- **Get ready to adapt.** Technology changes constantly; part of maintaining your brand will be using it to engage customers and candidates alike.
- **Prepare for the next generation, now.** Trial different social media platforms and any emerging technologies to create a positive impression of your brand among your employees of the future. Trying to attract the best, rather than the most, will help you to avoid the old trap of compromising just to fill the vacancy.

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The Last Word.

We hope that this report has given you some useful ideas on how to overcome the challenges of volume recruitment. But our advice will only work if you start with a thorough understanding of the job you're trying to fill.

Before you do anything else, work out the skills, competencies and behaviors that define your high performers in that role, now and in the future. Then set your measures and design your assessments to reflect that ideal, and make clear links to your strategy and organizational culture. Otherwise, you could end up looking for the wrong needles in the haystack.

About Korn Ferry.

Korn Ferry is the preeminent global people and organizational advisory firm. We help leaders, organizations and societies succeed by releasing the full power and potential of people. Our nearly 7,000 colleagues deliver services through our Executive Search, Hay Group and Futurestep divisions.

Want to know more?

To find out more about winning the numbers game and how the past and present of volume recruitment can prepare you for the future contact us via **infokf.kornferry.com/-PRO-contact-us.html** or visit our website **kornferry.com/haygroup.**

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