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AUTOMATED RECRUITING AND THE HUMAN FACTOR

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It doesn't matter if you're at a conference, reading an article, or hashing it out with a fellow recruiter at the water cooler. Every discussion of recruiting technology inevitably turns to the same questions: Will technology ever replace human recruiters completely? If so, when?

These are the wrong questions to ask. While there's no arguing that automated recruiting has become increasingly sophisticated, the reality is human beings made it that way. Recruiters and HR professionals are responsible for optimizing the available technology. They must analyze the data and translate it into insights that help organizations make better decisions. In essence, technology is only as good as the people who use it.

Proprietary technology aside, most recruiters have access to the same technological resources. When company X is able to isolate the common denominator among its top performers and recruit for it specifically, company Y will most likely be able to do the same thing. The difference is in how recruiters and employers use the available technology.

There's no doubt that a lot has changed in how recruiting is done. At the start of this millennium, recruiters were hesitant to post roles on job boards—likely because the technology was nascent and hadn't yet been fully adopted by their target audiences. Five years later, online posting was the norm, but it was considered taboo to recruit candidates from social media sites. Today, social sourcing is a requirement.

Among the rapidly changing technology, there's one constant: Automated recruiting is here to stay. That can be great news for recruiters, as long as they know how to leverage the technology to their advantage.

THE MANY FACES OF AUTOMATED RECRUITING

When we talk about automated recruiting, we are typically referring to a passive use of technology to support various aspects of the recruiting function. This includes everything from early resume scanning software to today's subscription services that identify people with targeted keywords in their social media profiles. Web scraping, resume posting, social media content…any of these can be leveraged to automate parts of the recruiting process.

Taken together, automated recruiting seeks to apply a passive assessment of candidates. What used to be a test or a series of tests a candidate underwent (an *active* assessment), is now taking place before we ever meet the candidate. In many cases, it happens without the candidate's knowledge.

Automated recruiting presents a world of opportunity, but technology will never replace people. It is the human involvement in the recruiting process that makes the difference. High-touch (people-driven) and high-tech (technology-driven) recruiting work best when they work together. Knowing that, the questions we should be asking are: What unique roles do people fill in recruiting? What skills do recruiters need to sharpen to make the most of the existing technology?

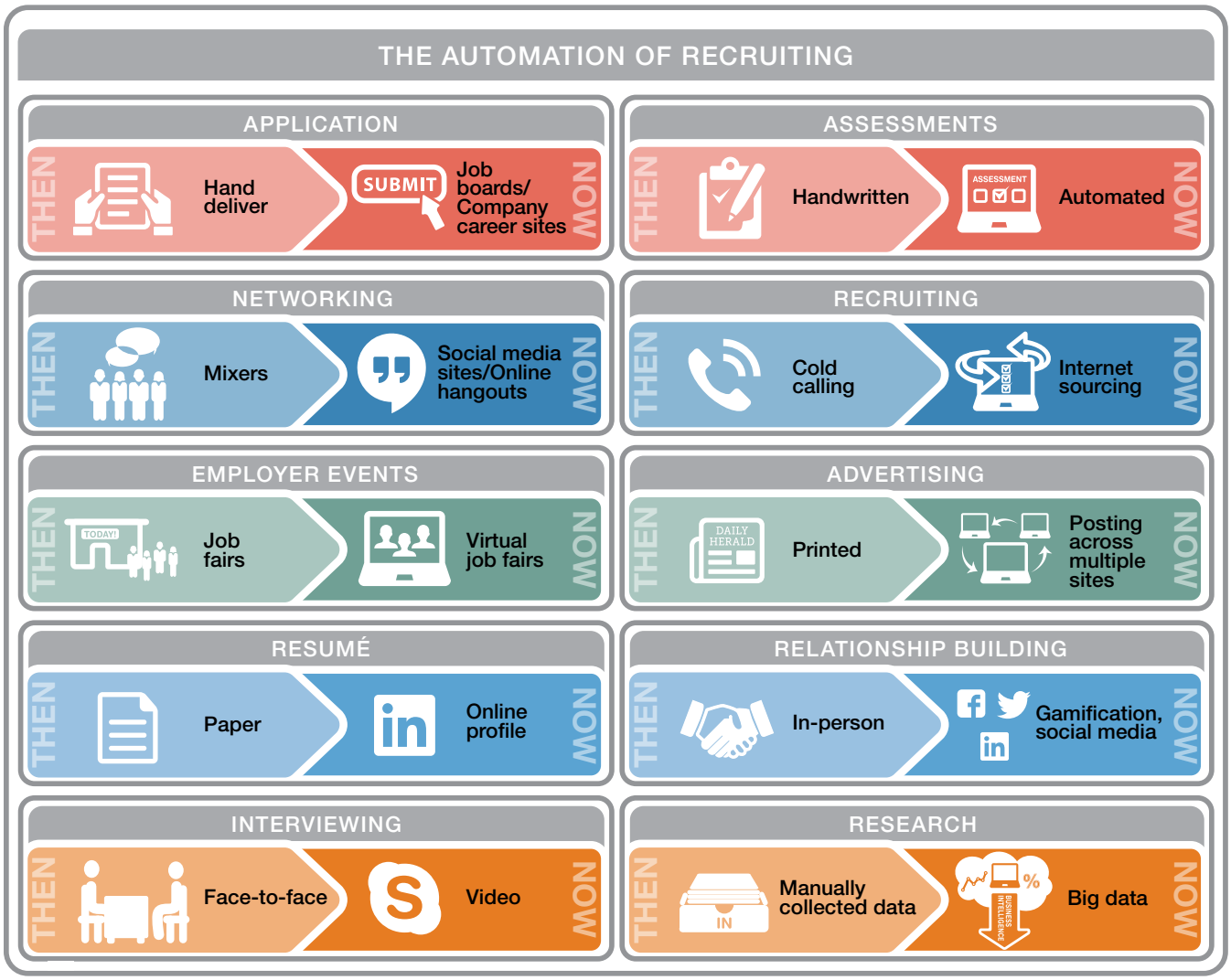
RECRUITERS NEED SOPHISTICATED SKILL SETS TO MAKE THE MOST OF AVAILABLE TECHNOLOGY

Just as it is with every other industry, technology is changing recruiting. For example, it used to be that sourcers had one job and recruiters had another. But since technology has enabled high-volume sourcing, the lines between sourcers and recruiters have become blurred.

Technology is changing the makeup of recruiting teams, or at least the time spent on particular functions within the recruiting process. But the most significant shift relates to the evolving skill sets that recruiters need in order to make the most of the technology available. Among them:

Technical Skills

- Data Analytics: For today's recruiters, the ability to analyze data is a must. For example, while all recruiters are expected to be able to cite statistics on the source of hire, it is equally important that they are able to identify common denominators—e.g., experience, education, skills and advancement interests—that predict top performers.



The Undercover Recruiter: Are You an Old School or a New Skool Recruiter
The Undercover Recruiter: The Evolution of Recruitment Technology
Jobvite: Recruiting Technology: A Social History

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- Technology Expertise: With technology constantly evolving, recruiters must know what tools and information will enable them to develop the right technology strategy (and what the most effective mix of technology is) to meet recruiting needs. ManpowerGroup Solutions' white paper, "A Technology Roadmap for Smarter Sourcing" provides a useful framework for developing the right technology strategy.

Soft Skills:

- Communication: Data can tell recruiters a lot, but certainly not everything about candidates. They "pull back the curtain," so to speak, to better understand the candidate's story.
- Candidate Engagement: Whether or not a candidate is ultimately hired, there's little doubt that the experience and perceptions the candidate has throughout the process can have a significant influence on their view of the employer and the employer's brand. The recruiting team must understand how candidates feel about the overall experience and continuously improve the process. See the "Voice of the Candidate" sidebar on page 5 for more information on the latest insights from candidates.

Technology is ubiquitous and it is widely accepted and expected that digital tools will be leveraged in recruiting. Consequently, technology raises the bar for everyone, including recruiters. That means they need to be increasingly more strategic and creative in the way they use technology to reach and assess candidates.

AUTOMATED RECRUITING TECHNOLOGY GIVES US EVERYTHING WE EVER WANTED (ALMOST)

To understand how to make the most of technology and the people who manage it, we have to look at what recruitment professionals are actually getting from their technology. Here's what they can get:

With Technology, Recruiting is Potentially Better, Faster and Cheaper

Hiring managers are just like anyone else. They want to find the best talent in ways that are better, faster and cheaper. Automated recruiting technology can certainly provide some of that. At its most basic level, it can be an efficient way to collect vast amounts of candidate data at an accelerated pace. As it gets increasingly sophisticated, it helps recruiters do an even better job isolating the most promising candidates—e.g., reducing the number from 100 possible candidates to just a few.

Social Media Offers New Candidate Sources

Automated recruiting technology takes recruiters' needs and matches them to potential candidates through dozens, if not hundreds, of social media sources. Technology providers are well-positioned to provide support as it relates to the most up-to-date sources for candidates. For example, an emerging social network for health care workers (that is ostensibly unrelated to recruiting) would be built into automated recruiting technology.

Niche Communities Enable Hyper-Specific Recruiting

Some of the most effective technology targets specific industries or skill sets. This built-in, enhanced expertise enables the most targeted search terms and sources. For example, one popular resource is considered one of the most effective sources of passive technical talent largely because its focus is solely on technology candidates. They maintain a database of passive candidates coupled with aggregated content on each individual's interests and experience. The company concentrates efforts on what they know best, making its technology hyper-targeted.

The Holy Grail—Access to the Passive Candidate—is Somewhere Online

Passive candidates are often who recruiters want most to identify. But finding the person who's not looking for us is one of the most time-consuming tasks for recruiters. Recruiters covet technology that can limit the time they spend on sourcing while increasing the number of passive candidates in their pipeline. Yet, current technology does not provide the level of access to high-quality, passive candidates that recruiters need—possibly because passive candidates are not online looking for new opportunities.

With the Right Tech in Place, Recruiters Spend Less Time Sourcing and More Time Engaging Candidates

The most effective technology enables recruiters to spend more time on candidate engagement and on creating a better experience for the candidate while reducing the time spent on talent sourcing.

TECHNOLOGY IS GREAT, BUT THERE ARE THINGS IT CAN'T DO

While technology is necessary, it would be a mistake to think it can solve every recruiting challenge. Here's a look at what technology can't provide.

Without People, We May Be Missing Out on a Good Candidate Experience

There is no question that recruiting impacts people's lives. This is sometimes easy to overlook in our quest for the latest and greatest technology. While technology can play an important role in improving the candidate experience, it is up to the people using the technology to understand what contributes to a good candidate experience.

For example: How do candidates feel about the way employers are reaching them? What parts of the process do they feel good about? What aspects do they react negatively to? What is the reputational or financial cost of a bad candidate experience? How does the experience make them feel about the employer?

While recruiting technology cannot necessarily answer these questions, it is critical that recruiters understand candidates' preferences for and perceptions of the sourcing and recruiting process, especially as it becomes increasingly automated.

The best recruiters will be able to use data to understand where more information needs to be drawn out.

Voice of Candidate

In 2013, the Talent Board released findings from its annual survey[ii] of job candidates regarding their experience. In general, employers receiving the most favorable marks have application processes that set expectations about application time, provide details on privacy policies, include customized screening questions and ask candidates for feedback. While these may seem obvious, many companies do not yet have these types of feedback loops built into their processes.

At the same time, there are a number of questions employers should be asking candidates, but to date, it seems few (if any) actually do. For example:

- How do candidates want to be found?
- What do candidates feel is the most useful online tool in their job search (online job boards, social media, company websites)?
- What type of online profiles should employers create? For example: do candidates visit employers' social media pages, follow them on Twitter, or seek information about them on RateMyEmployer or Glassdoor?
- Do candidates know (or care) what employers think of their public profiles? How do they manage them?
- What do candidates think about recruiter profiling? How might this impact their behavior (if at all)?
- How might a company's practices in this regard impact its employer brand?
- Does the candidate feel that profiling is an accurate reflection of potential performance?

ManpowerGroup Solutions' recent survey findings[iii] on candidate preferences underscore the importance of better understanding candidates' needs. For example, more than 35 percent of prospective employees wished organizations provided more information about jobs and more frequent interactions during the hiring process. Another 25 percent prefer to receive more company information. Technology can certainly meet these needs, but only if people set it up to do so.

The survey also sheds light on the value candidates place on in-person contact. While prospective employees utilize technology to learn about employers and positions—9 of 10 rely on corporate websites for example—a strong preference for human interaction remains. For example, 72 percent of candidates prefer in-person interviews as compared to only 2 percent of candidates who cite video interviews and 0.5 percent who indicate a preference for video resumes.

The implication here is that today's candidates are not getting the level of information and interaction they want. Understanding these issues and adjusting strategies accordingly will go a long way toward creating the optimal candidate experience.

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To underscore the importance of positive candidate experience, consider this: A global food and beverage retailer calculated that a loyal consumer spends on average $15,000 on its products over the span of 20 years. The company determined that if 20 percent of "customer candidates" for every 1,000 of their job openings had a negative experience and were lost as consumers, it would result in an $8.7 million loss in future sales.[i]

Automated Recruiting is Not Global

Automated recruiting relies on technology's ability to access specific places, platforms or situations where talent can be found. It also depends heavily on keywords in identifying specific qualifications, skills or roles. These are typically provided in the native language of the person managing the recruiting technology. Consequently, automating elements of the recruiting process across multiple geographies, without closely involving in-country recruiting specialists, is extremely difficult for multinational organizations.

Today's Tech Doesn't Offer A Start-to-Finish Experience

Recruiting used to be a dynamic process during which candidates had multiple interactions with recruiters and potential employers. All of these interactions created the complete candidate experience which could be monitored, evaluated, adjusted and measured. However, technology has led to a fairly disjointed system, where each element is detached and separated from the other. This separation comes at a significant cost in terms of providing a positive candidate experience, elevating employer brands and having reliable metrics.

For example, one study found that companies with separate systems for applicant tracking, performance, compensation and learning management, and HR systems face challenges in producing unified metrics that advance their interests.[iv] Since it is unlikely that these distinct systems will be eliminated any time soon, it is essential that recruiters work to integrate key systems and tie them into an overall strategy.

HOW DO WE KNOW IT'S WORKING?

Once recruiters have put their technology strategy in place, it's essential to understand what's working and where improvements are needed.

Measuring Effectiveness, Not Efficiency

Recruiters are well-known for having data on time to hire, source of hire, cost of hire, retention costs, conversion rates, etc. Today's technology can easily provide these metrics. And while they are helpful, what recruiters should be seeking, but are not getting at the moment, are insights into a candidate's potential success. One researcher referred to this as "…a focus on measuring efficiency rather than effectiveness" citing shortage of these insights as one of "the primary reasons for the lack of talent intelligence among many businesses."[v] This same study found that the following metrics matter most to employers:

- Quality of hire
- Competency/skills gap analysis
- Ability/skills to execute strategy
- Professional development

Clearly, there is a disconnect between what technology can provide and what employers want. It is up to recruiters to bridge this gap and to help address employers' talent needs.

THERE'S A FINE LINE BETWEEN CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY: WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Technology has lifted barriers like timely access to information and at the same time has raised concerns about privacy and confidentiality. Might a recruiter overlook candidates based on their public profiles or altogether miss others who are qualified? Might a less qualified candidate with a "better" public profile get recruiters' attention? As you develop your recruiting technology strategy, here are a few key considerations to help you cut through the recruiting clutter:

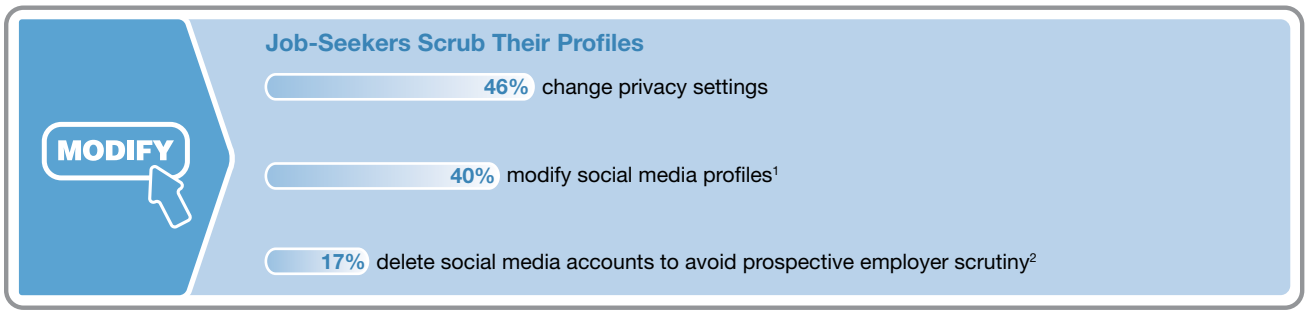
Profiles Are Scrubbed Clean; Keywords Are Updated Daily

Candidates have access to information and technology too. There's no shortage of advice out there for the active and passive job seeker. And for every technological development, there's a candidate figuring out how to outwit the system. At the most basic level that means polishing one's online profile. In fact, as many as 46 percent of job seekers have modified their privacy settings and 40 percent have modified their social media presence because they are searching for a job. According to one survey, 17 percent of job seekers have actually deleted their social media accounts to avoid the scrutiny of prospective employers.[vii]

Not surprisingly, there is an emerging industry consisting of companies that help job seekers clean up or scrub their public profiles. These include paid services that review social media accounts for potentially objectionable photos, tags, posts and comments, allowing the subscribers to permanently delete any material that could impact a job search.

Liability and Bias Are Not Going Away

One expert recommends that employers consider not screening candidates' social media profiles at all.[viii] He cites the case of an astronomy professor who recently settled a case with the University of Kentucky based on the assertion that the



[1-2] Jobvite. (2014.) Jobvite Job Seeker Nation Study.

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candidate was not hired due to his religious beliefs. Other experts in the United States warn of issues related to protected classes—those who cannot be discriminated against based on characteristics called out in federal anti-discrimination laws.[ix] Since social media often makes it easy to identify an individual as a member of a protected class, employers using online profiles as part of their screening process are potentially exposing themselves to discrimination complaints.

Technology Will Never Tell Us Who We're Missing

Believe it or not, not everyone uses social media, despite the fact that it is one of the primary methods by which automated recruiting technology sources candidates. According to Pew Research, 27 percent of adults who use the internet do not use any social media at all. Another 22 percent report using social networks, but not Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn.[x]

Despite the overwhelming popularity of social media, the traditional personal networking approach remains the most common way for candidates to find a job. For example, one study found that 40% of job seekers found their favorite or best job through in-person connections—the next top response was online/digital social networks at 21 percent.[xi]

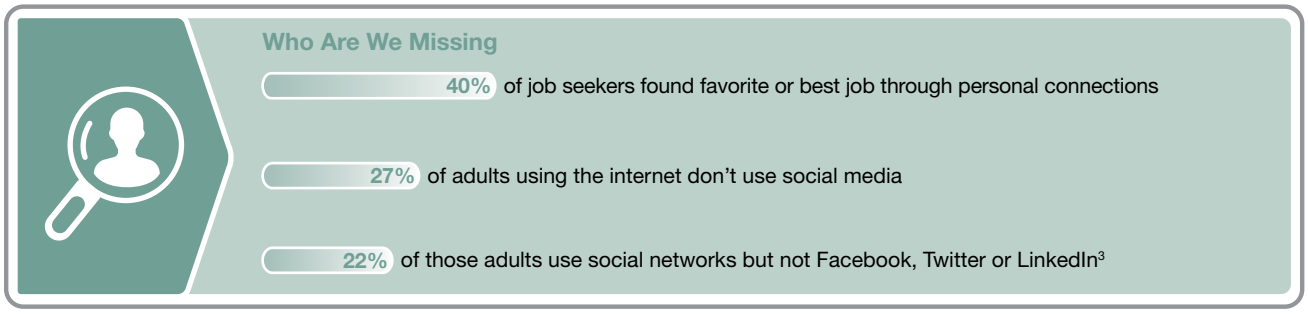
The parameters associated with recruiting technology can be very limiting—often restricted to a set of keywords (albeit a large set), certain types of degrees or training, or years of experience. Recruiters know that this information will deliver a certain candidate profile, but it doesn't tell us who we're missing.

What we do know is that some of the most successful people in modern history are known for thinking and communicating differently, and not having a degree. Ask yourself if the recruiting technology you currently use could bring the next Steve Jobs, Bill Gates or Mark Zuckerberg to your attention. Or would all three go unnoticed, never to rise to the automated surface, due to their lack of a university degree?

While it's very possible that these tech giants' resumes would be discarded by a human screener as well, one could argue that the human touch at least offers the possibility of those resumes being advanced.

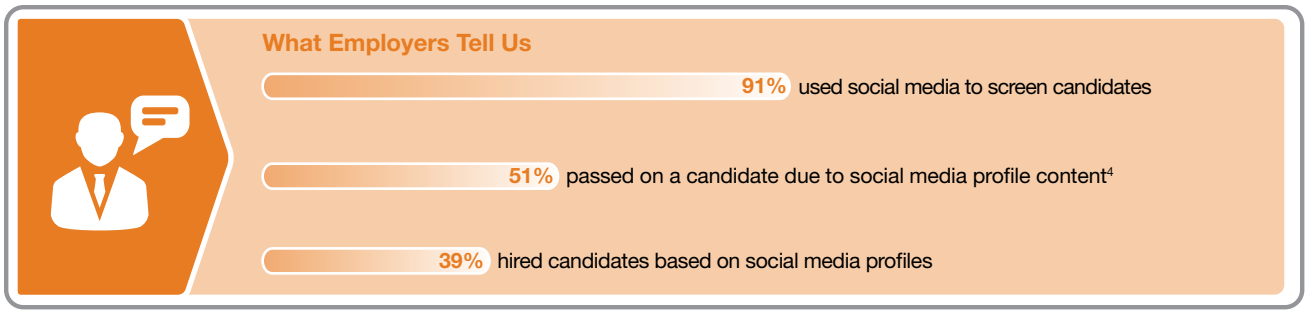
Only People Can Extract the Story From the Data

According to one study, 91 percent of employers report using social media to screen candidates. Among those who report hiring candidates based



[3] Duggan, M. and Smith, A. (2013.) Social Media Update 2013. Pew Research Internet Project. http://pewrsr.ch/1mbxpW0

on their social media profiles, 39 percent did so because the profile "gave a positive impression of their personality and organizational fit."[xii] Alternatively, a recent CareerBuilder survey[xiii] found that 51 percent of employers have passed on a candidate due to content found on their social media profiles. This figure is up from 43 percent in 2013 and 34 percent in 2012, suggesting that employers increasingly rely on the information gleaned on social media.



[4] Hartley, D. "You Did WHAT?! More Employers Eliminate Candidates Based on Social Media Activity." June 30, 2014. CareerBuilder. http://cb.com/TPvs50

It is possible that recruiters are relying too heavily on social media and online profiles and too little on direct candidate engagement. How much we like a candidate's social profile tells us nothing about their potential to succeed in a particular role.

A *Forbes* contributor recently spelled it out succinctly saying, "If you think about the smartest, most switched-on person you've ever worked with, and then think about the biggest slacker and do-nothing person you've ever worked alongside, the contrast between those two people is obvious. Yet no ATS in the world could distinguish between them, as long as the two people worked at the same job in the same company at the same time."[xiv] The writer's point is that a list of keywords and qualifications simply is not enough, no matter how powered the technology. Human interaction during the hiring process provides the opportunity to extract the story—and in this example, identify the switched off candidate.

Technology Doesn't Capture Organizational Culture

In a recent *New York Times* article, Laszlo Block, SVP of People Operations at Google, spoke about his company's use of data to measure potential performance, leadership qualities and hiring effectiveness. While this work has taught Google a lot about the most predictive elements of the recruiting and hiring process, Block also points out that technology can only tell us so much "… there are also things that are specifically true only about your organization, and the people you have and the unique situation you're in at that point in time. I think this will be a constraint to how big the data can get because it will always require an element of human insight."[xv]

Block's observations are relevant to any aspect of automated recruiting. The reality is that no matter how good technology gets at sourcing qualified candidates or even improving the candidate experience, human beings will always be required to identify candidates that are the right organizational fit.

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THE NEXT STEP: ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

The day automated recruiting is fully automated will be the day this discussion truly doesn't matter because the only ones being hired will be robots. Since that is a day that is likely to exist only in movies, recruiters need to make the most of the technology that's available to them. This requires a wide range of technical, strategic, creative and soft skills. There is no doubt that technology will continue to have great implications for recruiters—hopefully drawing us ever closer to those "perfect candidates." However, technology will never be anything more than a tool whose effectiveness depends on and is limited by recruiters' abilities. The bottom line is that successful recruiters will need to find the right balance between high-tech and high-touch interactions. Only those professionals with the broad set of soft and hard skills will be able to leverage the science of recruiting without sacrificing its art. Above all, we know that competitive advantage doesn't come from technology alone. It also comes from the people who manage it.

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ManpowerGroup Solutions prides itself on the ability to analyze and forecast trends impacting the world of work and the marketplace. As skills and available talent change and marketplace priorities shift, it is critical for organizations to have timely, relevant, and accurate insights into the global workforce. With this in mind, we make significant investments to understand and share observations around macro-trends (e.g., demographics, employment, economics) and their likely impact on talent sustainability.

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