



Breaking Down the Walls: Overcoming the Challenges of Web Recruitment within the Entertainment Industry

Hollywood – 1995

One of the premiere Hollywood highlights of 1995 occurred when Tom Hanks accepted the Best Actor Oscar for his endearing title performance in “Forrest Gump”. As Forrest had so adeptly observed, “There’s an awful lot you can tell ’bout a person---where they’re goin’---where they been”. Unfortunately, the history of online recruiting within the very business that produced this character has not been so cut and dry or easy to assimilate.

In 1995, the entertainment industry was only just beginning to embrace the new technology associated with the World Wide Web. Entertainment companies were no different than other corporations when it came to cutting their teeth on the Internet. Gingerly testing the waters, they produced flashy, image-heavy web sites that predominantly focused on films and television shows. Human resource divisions were still gradually incorporating personal computers, local area networking, digital resume imaging and of course, email, into their daily regimens. While the industry invested millions of dollars in web development, the concept of engaging the Internet as a recruitment tool played only a supporting role.

Along Came a Monster

The advent of TMP Worldwide’s Monster.com and other “mega” job portals dramatically altered the fabric of the recruitment industry across the board. Armed with multi-billion dollar advertising budgets, these companies employed the massive reach of the blimp and Superbowl ads to introduce the world to the Internet as a viable recruitment tool. The entertainment industry was quickly made aware that an online alternative existed beyond merely posting jobs on their own sites.

But the significant leap to large-scale recruitment portals from small in-house sites proved to be both expensive and confusing to the job seeker and recruiter alike. The high cost of job postings on Monster (\$295 per job) and the “monstrous” number of classifications, industries, locations and resumes were and are intimidating and overwhelming to the employer and the job candidate.

On the business side, these jobsites are a far cry from Bubba Gump Shrimp companies. Their business models demand enormous amounts of advertising capital to ensure that job seekers locate their sites amid a sea of web choices – i.e. the larger the monster, the larger the appetite. This easily translated into non-economies to the average recruiter.

The benefits were hard to find for the discerning entertainment executive in search of qualified, industry-specific candidates and to the job seeker who cares less about jobs in Des Moines, Iowa and more about job trends on the west side of Los Angeles.

A Star is Born

During this same time in Hollywood, the Entertainment Recruiting Network (ERN) was holding monthly meetings to discuss recruitment issues. Led at the time by an HR executive, Paul Buss, ERN was a consortium of recruitment managers from the leading film, television and recording companies in Southern California. As these industry professionals continued to network, trade cards, and socialize, an amazing thing happened...the walls came down. Consequently, members hungered for even more meetings and more sharing of information - more often. This was highly unusual in such a competitive industry.

During one of these meetings, Mr. Buss realized a solution. Why not combine the self-created demand for communicating hard-to-fill professional job openings with the hype and cutting-edge technology of the Internet? Develop a web site with a focus on the entertainment and media industry, devoid of all the problems known to be associated with the Monster portal. Voila! Showbizjobs.com was born.

Niche is Nice

Today in the world of recruiting, the economies of the web have enabled smaller recruitment-oriented companies to thrive. In the entertainment and media sectors, Showbizjobs.com has grown an established brand name in the Los Angeles and New York markets and become a key resource for locating quality candidates. The company serves over 350 entertainment companies by delivering candidates from its 90,000 monthly unique visits from regional, national and international web audiences. To the viewer, the site serves as a single location to find professional jobs ranging from receptionists to advertising executives – all in “the biz”. To the employer, the company has earned the reputation as an economical source that attracts strong professionals.

By keeping overhead to a minimum and an industry and geographic focus, savings are translated into lower job ad costs to recruiters while producing superior candidate lists. To industry leaders like Paramount Pictures, this niche service translates into huge recruitment savings. “Last year Paramount Pictures hired more people from the Showbizjobs.com site than from any other online source, including our web site,” says Cassie Thomas, Director of Recruiting.

Hollywood Ending

In the last ten years, Hollywood has embraced prevailing state-of-the-art technology, dot coms have come and gone, and entertainment industry recruiters have increasingly become more Internet-savvy. The future will continue to bring vast improvements in matching, data mining, screening services, employee-based intranets and contract/agency placement services. You can also be sure there will be new services, companies and blimps vying for our attention and money.

But there is no silver bullet – even in Hollywood, home to happy endings. Job seekers must continue to probe multiple job listing services to achieve the widest search. Employers still must perform a risky balancing act between cost and effectiveness when posting their jobs. Luckily, with the steady infiltration of niche sites, entertainment recruiters and candidates are beginning to realize that the monolith job portals can only be so effective, and that those with a concentrated focus toward their industry will provide the most valuable results.