

# Recruiting in a NEW ECONOMY

*When finding new talent is a priority, recruiting efforts take center stage. And when Millennials are the target, that means cultivating a culture where this new generation feels right at home.*

by Jan Niehaus



**“IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME,” WE LEARNED IN THE MOVIE “FIELD OF DREAMS.” IT’S TRUE IN THE FIELD OF RECRUITING, TOO.**

**W**hen business is booming, companies accelerate their recruiting efforts to keep pace with the growth. Unfortunately, rampant business expansion is not the norm in today’s tough economy.

Recruiting is also critical when turnover is high, but as we all know, that isn’t the case either. “Because of the

market, good employees tend to stay where they are,” said Heather Bradley, HR manager for Electric Supply Inc. (ESI) in Tampa Bay, Fla. “We haven’t done a lot of recruiting.”

The third situation that often fuels recruiting campaigns involves senior managers retiring, taking decades of industry and company knowledge with

them and leaving leadership vacancies.

Bradley is familiar with this situation as well. “Within a year, a couple of our executives are leaving, but in the next three years, there will be a larger hit,” she noted. “We want to attract younger employees so we can start grooming them and succession planning.”

Keenly aware that a serious manage-



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an article published by *Chief Learning Officer* magazine (clomedia.com), identified five qualities that correlate positively with spurring business growth:

- Aspirational mindset
- Customer bias
- Willingness to take risks
- Collaborative spirit
- Intense curiosity

While no generation has a lock on specific character traits, many would argue that these qualities align closely with the profile of Millennials—those born between 1981 and 1999. This generation is 75 million strong in the United States—and will dominate the workforce for the next 50 years.

So how does a company attract these upbeat, creative, adventuresome, and customer-focused team players?

Werner Electric Supply in Cottage Grove, Minn., tackled the question directly. “We talked to professors who work with generational differences and trends, made online inquiries, and interviewed classes of technical college students,” said Deb Ricci, director of marketing. “We asked them, ‘As future workers, what do you like in a workplace? What don’t you like?’”

For starters, Werner’s research revealed that collaboration is important to Millennials.

“This generation grew up in the most collaborative home environment of any generation,” explained Mary Kausch, president of HR Etc. (hretc.com). “Their parents actually asked their opinions and listened to their ideas. Therefore, many young people entering the workforce expect to be rewarded for their thoughts. They believe that their ideas will matter.”

With this in mind, Werner then accommodated Millennials’ preferences in its new 40,000-square-foot headquarters and 84,000-square-foot warehouse by creating a work environment that is very open.

“Instead of traditional cubicles, we went with a pod system that employees can customize,” said Ricci. “Some employees have standing workstations, some use a Stairmaster at their stations, and some sit on exercise balls instead of conventional desk chairs. In our lunch

room, we have high-back booths in case people want privacy for an informal lunch meeting.

“We are making a name for ourselves as a company that looks at what’s important to our employees,” she added.

Another thing that is important to this generation: technology.

“First Digitals,” which is another name for Millennials, refers to this generation’s complete mastery of digital media: They produce their own videos, publish their audio-visual productions on YouTube and Flickr, text at blurred-finger pace, and communicate through interactive social media.

“Millennials require up-to-date technology,” Kausch noted.

To be optimally productive, they require wireless technologies campus-wide and remote access to data and systems. In fact, Kausch noted how one corporate HR representative was reportedly taken aback when an applicant asked about iPod training. “In the Millennial world, using a tiny digital device as a just-in-time training and development center and an exhaustive resource library chock-full of tools and job aids is simply efficient,” she said.

#### **FIND THEM ONLINE**

Mark Berger, owner of Swat Recruiting (swatrecruiting.com), trains and consults HR professionals on designing and implementing social media strategies for branding, marketing, and recruiting.

He described some of the more familiar social media sites and services and how they relate to recruiting:

• **Monster.** “With its user-friendly interface, Monster makes it easy for recruiters,” he noted, “but you pay for it.”

• **LinkedIn.** “While LinkedIn is very popular for business—it has 70 to 80 million users—and be can used for recruiting, it doesn’t have a recruiting interface,” he said.

• **Facebook.** Initially, Facebook users were mostly family contacts with business contacts mixed in. The creation of privacy settings for separate business pages and personal pages has changed the way the site is used. “Facebook now has 400 to 500 million users and is definitely used for recruiting,” he said.

ment vacuum could devastate fiscal performance, corporate leaders need to recruit and develop leaders for the next half-century. Knowing that their companies must be poised to jump the second the economy revives, corporate execs also need go-getters who can seize immediate opportunities, nurture them, and cultivate lasting business relationships.

So what qualifications should those doing the hiring be looking for in today’s labor market?

Andrew Sobel and Guido Quelle, in

Berger encourages HR departments to build their own business pages. Many HR departments handle their own branding and use Facebook for recruiting. It has default tabs at the top ("Information," "Wall," and "Discussion"), but users can create custom tabs, such as "Careers," "Testimonials," "Positions," and "People."

"We haven't needed to use it yet, but I am starting to look at LinkedIn for recruiting," Bradley reported. "We don't use different recruiting techniques for different age groups, but I respond to applicants differently. There's a certain age group that prefers face-to-face communication, so I talk with them when they come in to drop off their applications. The younger applicants are comfortable with email."

In addition to announcing employment opportunities, companies also can use the Internet and social media more subtly to create favorable impressions among prospective employees. GE demonstrated this approach when it teamed up with mtvU, MTV's 24-hour college network, in 2006 to host the GE Ecomagination Challenge. GE encouraged college students to submit groundbreaking ideas for making their schools more environmentally responsible, offering a \$25,000 grant to the winner.

Ostensibly, GE launched the campaign to "spark creativity and innovation among young people." But at the campaign's conclusion, the company reported a bonus: College students' awareness of GE as an environmentally conscious brand rose by 64%.

Millennials, research shows, react favorably to an environmentally friendly setting. According to the OXYGENZ report released by Johnson Controls (johnsoncontrols.com) earlier this year, 96% of 18- to 25-year-olds aspire to work in a green office, and 99% want to see obvious evidence of green policies in the workplace.

"We learned that the younger generation cares about the environment," said Ricci. "So our new facility has a lot of green features. There are occupancy sensors throughout the building and in the warehouse. This group cares a lot

about natural light. We built ceiling-to-floor windows all around the building, we stationed the majority of employees where they can enjoy the natural lighting, and we put all leadership offices on the interior. We also learned that health and fitness are important to this group. Our health and wellness program is very, very active, and we have a workout facility."

Third-party endorsements add weight to Ricci's claims: In October, Werner scored in the top three in the "Healthiest Employers of the Twin Cities" competition, and the company has been honored in Philips Lighting's "Green Leadership" program.

Werner earns a gold star for walking the talk. "We're just trying to foster a culture here that's focused around employees. If we do that, our customers will be well taken care of," Ricci said.

### ENGAGEMENT WANTED

According to the OXYGENZ research, Millennials "choose employers because they are looking for meaningful work and opportunities for learning, because of quality-of-life issues, and because of work colleagues. Generation Y sees the workplace as a place of learning and development."

Kausch agrees: "To attract and recruit the younger generation, what appears to be most important to them is gaining experience," she said. "Not only do they need practical skill development, but they also crave it."

And development needs to start on day one, noted Kausch. "Upon hiring, they need a very good orientation, and I'm not referring to sitting in a room to get indoctrinated. It has to be active. Have them meet and possibly shadow others. Assign them a mentor, coach, or guide—someone who can show them the ropes and be almost a 'grandparent' figure to them," Kausch advised.

It may seem absurd to Veterans and Boomers, but for Millennials, the work experience is just as important as wages and benefits. "They must be learning, active, and engaged," said Kausch. "Work for them is personal and fun. They want to build camaraderie."

### COMMUNITY COUNTS

How do electrical distributors cultivate communities that attract and then hold loyal employees?

"The Adams family has created an awesome culture," said Bradley, referring to George Adams Sr., president and CEO, and other Adams family members at ESI.

"They know all 124 employees by name, and they'll stop employees in the hallways and ask, 'How's your dad doing?' or 'How's that new baby?' because they know what's going on with employees and their families."

This personal touch goes a long way toward enabling employees to establish work-life balance. So does flexibility, which Millennials also value highly.

"Another aspect of ESI's family-friendly atmosphere is the schedule flexibility. A parent can work from home when there is a sick child. We just provide the software needed," Bradley said, adding, "There's high employee satisfaction with how the owners treat them. Even in the warehouse, where turnover tends to be higher, it's not really an issue for us."

The same kind of high-touch culture works for Werner, too. "We have always been a strong family culture. There's a strong sense of belonging and caring about our Werner family," noted Ricci.

One example is the weekly coffee klatch, an optional, casual employee gathering for coffee and conversation. "Every Friday morning at 10 a.m., employees take a little coffee break. There's no real agenda and no one is required to attend. Everyone who's available can join in," Ricci explained.

"Our company is very involved in the community as well," Ricci said. "We try to bring the community into our facility so that people understand what we do. For example, in conjunction with Earth Day, the company invited employees, customers, residents, families, Girl Scouts, and Boy Scouts to participate in the Wood Duck Challenge, a fund-raiser for the nonprofit Ducks Unlimited. Philips Lighting provided the wood duck house kits, which participants built and distributed throughout the community."

Ricci offered two additional exam-

ples: When managers learned that some employees were interested in bicycling, the company sponsored a team in the Twin City Classics Bike Ride, and Werner's annual Customer Appreciation Day brings together employees, customers, and their families for a cookout and entertainment.

"We work hard together, and we play hard together," Ricci said. "The word has gotten out that we're a great place to work, and our people encourage others they know to consider working here."

"Employee referrals have been the most effective recruiting approach for us," said Bradley—so effective that ESI has formalized the approach. "We pay bonuses to employees who bring new people into the company. They are paid in increments: \$100 at time of hire, \$150 after a new hire has been on board 90 days, and \$250 when the new hire hits six months. The last five people we hired have all been employee referrals."

Personal referrals are especially effec-

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tive with Millennials, whose social networks are strong and whose friends already know their preferences.

But it's not only Millennials who are drawn to ESI's and Werner's cultural and physical environments. "Our new hires over the past two years are across the board, in every age category," Ricci said.

Bradley talked about one recent hire: "We picked up a driver who came to us from a competitor that had let him get away." But ESI wasn't about to make the same mistake. "He came to us because he knew one of our employees. He also knew the area and our products. We didn't have a vacancy for a driver, but we created a position for him."

We sometimes joke, "It's hard to find good help," but it's really not hard at all when corporate executives relate one on one to the rank-and-file and encourage work-life balance; when the physical environment facilitates collaboration and communication; and when employers address workers' needs for a healthy workplace, current technology, and flexibility. Positive, innovative, customer-focused team players are the happy consequence—the exact employees that distributors should be seeking. ■

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