



NEW RESEARCH from CareerBuilder and Inavero shows that today's job search experience is much more complex than in the past — and that candidates are an integral reason why. This CareerBuilder report explores the behavior and mindset of the modern-day candidate as he or she moves through the job search experience much like they would a consumer purchase, and shares ways for you to be strategically involved at every step. Realize it or not, the experience you provide candidates throughout the job search process is something they will consider, evaluate, engage with, and accept or reject, ultimately deciding whether or not to “buy” from you.

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YOUR COMPANY'S OPEN POSITION AS A CONSUMER PRODUCT:

How and Why Candidates Consider You and Buy



CARS AND RECRUITMENT

Think back to the last time you went through the process of purchasing a vehicle. Did you consider how it related to the process candidates go through to search for, apply, interview and get hired at your business? Probably not — but if you look more closely, the two experiences are more similar than you may realize. We have specific reasons for deciding to go through with a car purchase — or walk away from it — and the same is true for candidates considering your company as a future employer in their job search process.

When you made the decision to begin searching for a car to purchase, you likely had a few brands or specific car types in mind, and evaluated both the market and what you wanted in a new car. As your search continued, you may have called car dealerships anonymously to find out general information, or searched online and in the Kelley Blue Book for prices and consumer reviews, and added more car types to your consideration set as a result. You may have then augmented the quotes you received with your own research, posting comments or questions on auto forums and getting feedback from trusted friends about their personal experiences with particular cars or dealerships. Based on these results, you likely narrowed your results down to a small, select group. Finally, you may have scheduled appointments with various dealers, taken those cars in the final running for test drives, decided which car you wanted, and negotiated pricing and package options to determine who you would ultimately purchase from — and who you would reject.

This process is very similar to the process a candidate goes through in a typical job search. Whether you realize it or not, the experience you provide candidates through your recruitment process is something they will evaluate, engage with, and accept or reject, ultimately deciding whether or not to “make a purchase.” That decision can happen at any point in the job search process — from the time they first start thinking about searching for a new job to the moment they have your offer letter in front of them, and everywhere in between.

It's important to start evaluating whether you have the right strategy in place for candidates to consider you and make a purchase; in other words, to say "yes" to both your open position and your organization. How can you effectively make candidates consider your brand during their search process, pursue your opportunity further, and ultimately decide to "buy" what you are selling?

THE CANDIDATE/EMPLOYER RELATIONSHIP: IT'S COMPLICATED

Today's job search experience looks drastically different from several years or even several months ago, and it continues to evolve. Now, although job boards still have a prominent place in the job search, the job search experience has become much more complex, fragmented, and, well, interesting.

FIGURE I: Complexity of the job search has increased for the majority of candidates, especially for those who are older.



*CareerBuilder research study facilitated by Inavero from Mar. 16-21, 2011

Now, when candidates embark on a job search, they are using five specific methods to ultimately find their next job:

1. **Search engines:** They are using search engines to find company, industry and job-specific information.
2. **Vertical sites (Job boards and aggregators):** They are searching on job boards like CareerBuilder.com or on aggregator sites for jobs that fit their qualifications and have a great company behind them.
3. **Social media:** They are posting and sharing content on social media sites like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.
4. **Corporate and career sites:** They are seeking relevant company news and information through a company's own website or careers section.
5. **User-generated content sites:** They are engaging with content on user-generated content sites like Glassdoor.com to get a better sense of what it's really like to work for a company.

Candidates are actively using the five platforms above during their job search. To effectively build and manage your company's employment brand, reach a large segment of the many candidates you are currently missing out on, and continue to position yourself as a visible and desirable place to work in today's rapidly changing recruitment environment, you must have a diversified recruitment strategy that incorporates these platforms.

In the following pages, we will take you through a candidate's typical job search experience as it occurs in today's environment, an environment in which candidates are hungry for information and have a wealth of online resources at their fingertips. Long gone are the days of faxing or mailing a resume and simply waiting passively to hear back from an employer — today's candidate is much more hands-on and engaged in the process.

In this report, we identify and detail the four key phases of a candidate's search. Within each phase, we share with you the behavior and mindset of the candidate, as well as how and when candidates are engaging with the five platforms listed already (search engines, vertical sites, social media, corporate and career sites, and user-generated content), and your recommended strategy at that particular point. By learning what candidates are thinking and doing as they move through the job search process, crafting your strategy to align with those thoughts and behaviors, and remembering to take a step back to view your recruitment strategy in a holistic sense, you will be effectively equipped to reach the best candidates for your open jobs, position yourself as a strong and desirable brand, and ensure your approach is consistent from phase to phase.

A CANDIDATE'S FOUR KEY JOB SEARCH PHASES

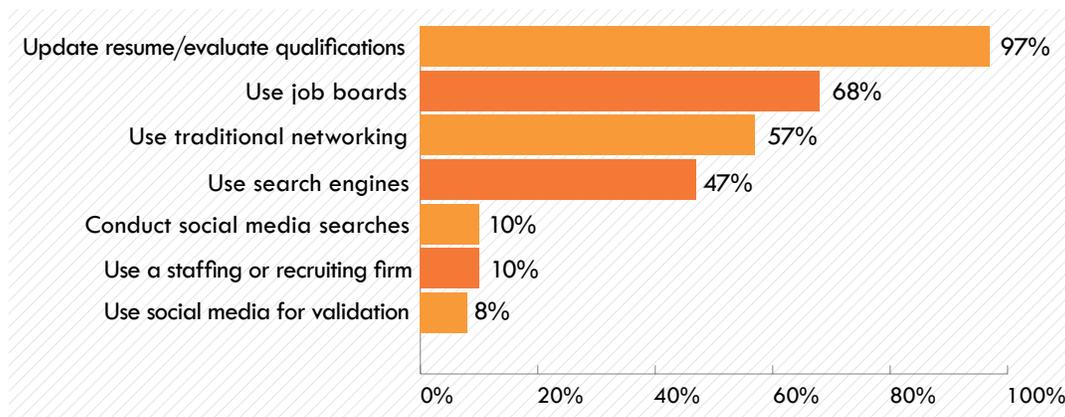
Phase I: Orientation

Definition: This phase consists of a candidate's self-evaluation and evaluation of the market. Ninety-seven percent of candidates reported self-evaluation as one of the first five things they did when starting a search.

What Are Candidates Doing? Candidates are examining their own qualifications and drawing conclusions about their job options. Many are visiting job boards to determine who is hiring and what kind of jobs are available, and they are on search engines looking for the correct salary range to fit their qualifications based on market value. They are taking actions like updating a resume, evaluating the market, considering additional training in preparation for a new job, and examining other opportunities at their current organization in this evaluation stage.

What Are Candidates Thinking? Candidates at this point are lost, trying to get their bearings. They lack focus or clear direction as far as what exactly they want job- or company-wise. They are sizing themselves up, searching, and wondering, "Is the grass greener elsewhere?"

FIGURE III: In the early phases of the job search, candidates usually take the following actions:



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What is Your Strategy At This Point? The majority of candidates begin their search by evaluating their qualifications, and many candidates use job boards, networking, and search engines in the initial steps of a search for external research purposes. Similar to a consumer buying experience like Amazon, these places are where candidates go to form an initial consideration set and begin to explore the wide number of options available to them.

Fifty-nine percent of candidates reported expanding their search as they learned about other job opportunities — and in this stage, gaining visibility to candidates early is vital. At this point, you should be making your company apparent to candidates, as they are in the critical early evaluation stage. Gaining a brand presence and making it possible for candidates to consider your brand as they evaluate the market is vital.

As candidates are also searching for salary and job information on major search engines and conducting searches on job boards to see which jobs exist, a focus on SEO optimization of your business and jobs is key in this Orientation Phase. Your open positions should be on job boards with effective descriptions of necessary skills and qualifications, salary information, and fleshed out information about your company culture, benefits and growth opportunities.

Much like the search for a new car, candidates compile a list of employment brands to consider as they continue the job search process. Initially, they have only a small set of brands they are considering (only 4 percent of candidates reported starting their search with a specific company in mind), but this grows quickly as they conduct research and draw conclusions about various brands. Eleven percent begin the search with a group of companies in mind, though the majority (59 percent) have targeted an industry, but not a specific company, and 24 percent of candidates do not target either a specific company or industry when they start their job search. As mentioned above, candidates are unfocused at this point but starting to grow their consideration set in this first phase and prepare to validate the brands they like. Once candidates validate brands in Phase II, the Consideration Phase, they become very engaged and committed to the job search process, so by gaining visibility in the Orientation Phase, you have a much better chance of being included in this consideration set as it grows.

Phase II: Consideration

Definition: During this phase, the job search moves from a solitary to an interactive, social experience. Candidates are seeking to validate the brands in their consideration set by posting on social media platforms and user-generated content sites to obtain as much information as possible. They're also collecting opinions from members of their online social and professional networks in order to narrow their focus to a handful of jobs.

What Are Candidates Doing? At this point, candidates are attempting to narrow down the many brands in their consideration set by posting questions on social networks, exploring feedback that companies' employees have posted on user-generated content sites or posting questions themselves, and getting the opinions of their trusted peers and mentors. Candidates have identified attractive opportunities through company websites, search engine results, and job boards, and now they are testing companies to determine whether what companies have said about themselves match what others say about them.

What Are Candidates Thinking? Candidates are open but contemplative, and focus is becoming clearer as they begin to get answers to some of their initial questions. They are like a sponge, absorbing all the information they can get their hands on, then squeezing out the information to rein in the focus of their search and prepare for Phase III, the Action Phase.

What Is Your Strategy At This Point? While candidates lacked focus in the Orientation Phase, they quickly zero in on a handful of companies to which they would consider submitting an application in this Consideration Phase. For 58 percent of candidates, the majority of research on companies they are courting is completed before candidates even apply to jobs — which means employers are considered or not considered long before they likely even make contact with the candidate. Consequently, having a strong employment brand that effectively connects with your target talent is extremely important. A 2009 Employer Branding Institute study showed that nearly half (49 percent) of employees cited an employer's reputation as a major influencer in deciding where to work.

Michael Burchell, Ed. D., VP for global business development at Great Place to Work Institute, found, in his more than 20 years of research on the topic of what makes a great place to work, the one thing all winning companies have in common is trust. These companies are all places where employees “trust the people they work for, have pride in what they do, and enjoy the people they work with.”

In this phase, whether or not you have built up a strong employment brand becomes very apparent — and very important. Engaging your employees both at work and through your extensions of work (your online presence on various sites) is vital. The more points of connection employees have to your company, the more loyalty you are likely to build, which in turn leads to more employee referrals and higher quality employees. If employees trust you, see your culture as special and unique, and see themselves having a place in that culture, they will want to come to work, contribute, and spread the message of your brand — and candidates will be sure to follow. Candidates are on sites like Facebook, Twitter and Glassdoor, researching what others are saying on your company's social media pages, posting content through their networks, and gathering opinions from which to make decisions about where to apply. Consequently, your presence as a listener and participant on these types of sites becomes much more powerful when your employees are willing to spread positive messages about your company. As Burchell points out, trust begins well before an employee starts working for you. Being involved in multi-faceted platforms early and often during the job search process enables you to build trust with candidates and sell them on your company culture much more quickly.

Candidates are poised to take action on brands in this phase, and you must remain active on the five platforms. This phase includes a flurry of activity; candidates are visiting company websites, posting content on social sites, reading employee reviews, and finding recent company press releases. As candidates continue to move through the job search phases and their search becomes longer, their behaviors multiply and intensify — and the more employers they're likely to consider. So, if you're visible through multiple mediums like social media, search engines, job boards, and user-generated content sites, candidates are more likely to find you in this engaged phase of their search and consider taking action on a position with your company.

Phase III: Action

Definition: In this phase, a candidate is going through the action of applying to jobs.

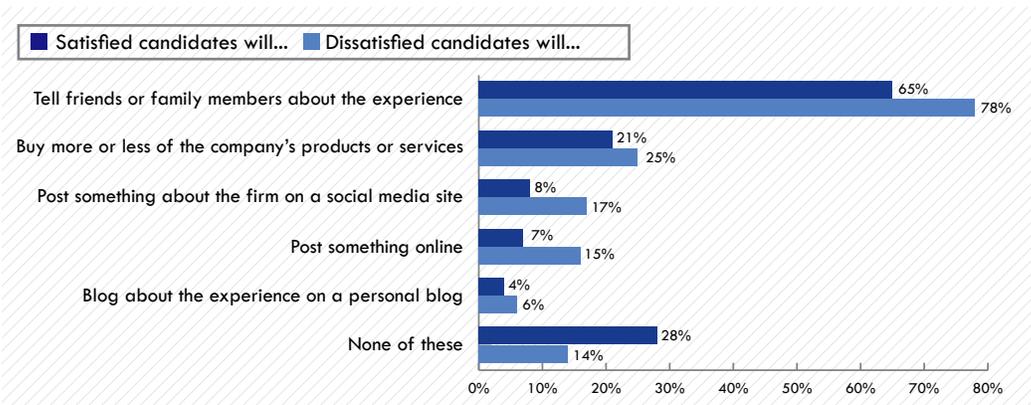
What Are Candidates Doing? Candidates are applying to jobs, researching companies in preparation for potential interviews, and exploring options through staffing and recruiting firms. It's important to reiterate that the majority of candidates complete their research on a potential employer before the interview even takes place; this is the stage in which the last round of research occurs.

What Are Candidates Thinking? They are focused, selective and ambitious.

What Is Your Strategy At This Point? Candidates today are largely dissatisfied with the current hiring process offered by companies. Only 10 percent of respondents said companies they have reached out to have been responsive. The impact of this is immense: Nearly half (40 percent) of candidates strongly agree that a poor application experience impacts their job decision. In fact, it might surprise you to find out that more than one in 10 people turn down a job at least once a month.

The Action phase is the key employer responsiveness and communication phase; if you're ignoring candidates, you will likely lose them at this point. Candidates need to know what they're up against and where the hiring process stands — and while you're not responding, they're moving on to other opportunities (with a bad taste in their mouths).

FIGURE III: Employers beware: A good or bad experience for applicants can impact your brand and bottom line.



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Bad experiences during and after the application process can easily negate the work and strategic investment in media you've made to acquire the best talent. Begin to create a more candidate-centric recruitment process by adding a human touch. Communicate with candidates when at all possible, and let them know where they stand as the process moves from phase to phase. Unplug cumbersome technology and flawed screening filters, and provide feedback and coaching. View all candidates as a customer or potential future customer, client or employee. Get the most out of the resources you're investing by being responsive — in the long run, you will

get better quality talent, protect your employment brand, and maintain a better reputation with clients (who once may have been your candidates).

Phase IV: Engagement

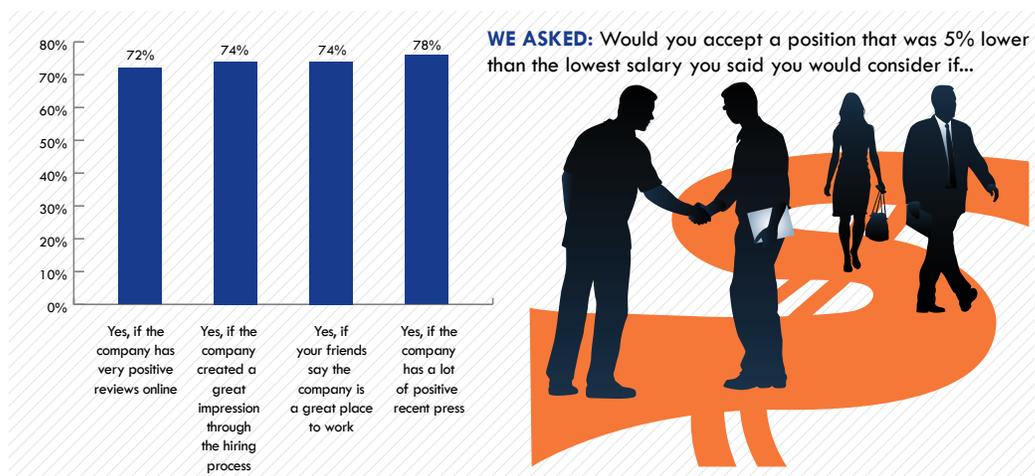
Definition: In this last phase, candidates are interacting with employers and actively interviewing. Although the majority of research on a company is completed pre-interview, candidates are conducting social research in this last phase by having personal conversations with employees of your company or close family and friends.

What Are Candidates Doing? At this point, candidates are seeking specific information and getting ready to put your recruiters and hiring managers on the spot in the interview. Even if they have bought in to the extent that they are willing to apply to a job with your company, they will take note of patterns in negative employee reviews they read, and in an interview situation, they will likely ask for a candid response from the person/s interviewing them. Whether they noticed the damaging press release that came out the week before their interview or the botched handling of a business deal, beware that they will be itching to ask about it. Your recruiters and hiring managers must be prepared to speak openly and candidly about challenging issues; the majority of candidates have done their homework when it comes to a company with which they're interviewing, and anything your recruiters or hiring managers say has the potential to swing candidates' decision to accept a job one way or the other.

What Are Candidates Thinking? They are feeling extremely selective and contemplative as they determine how particular employers will fit into their future.

What Is Your Strategy At This Point? Contrary to some employers' beliefs, it's not all about the money. Seventy percent of candidates said they would accept less salary to work for a company with a strong employment brand. Today's candidate wants a job that fulfills them in other areas and provides a solid career path – not one that simply gives them a fat paycheck.

FIGURE IV: Roughly 70 percent of candidates will accept a lower salary to work for a company with a strong employment brand.



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This is a vulnerable time for candidates, and by providing a great interview experience, you will stand apart from your competition. During this time, it's vital that you share as much information about your company as possible, in order for both you and candidates to make the best decision. You want the right person on your team just as much as they want the right job, so be sure to reiterate your expectations for the role, give them a full picture of a typical day at the workplace and a sense of your culture, and answer questions completely and honestly.

During this phase, your recruiters and hiring managers must have the knowledge necessary to interact with the modern candidate: a person who is curious, inquisitive, and extremely knowledgeable about your company. It's your responsibility to effectively communicate necessary information about your brand, the open position you are trying to fill, and any company news or answers to relevant questions that may come up during the hiring process. In addition to knowledge, your recruiters and hiring managers should be enthusiastic about your company and the process. Do they maintain a professional rapport with a candidate who may be in a position to be a part of your company in the future?

Obviously, this is also a great opportunity to once again promote all the things that make working for your company unique and special — but you must be honest and candid, and ensure that your recruiters and hiring managers are as well. Candidates will see right through your attempts to exaggerate, and they want to know both the best and worst parts of the job. If you both go into the hire with equal expectations, no one will be surprised or disappointed later on.

WHAT'S A STRONG EMPLOYMENT BRAND WORTH?

What's the first thing that comes to mind when you think about working for a company like Google? It's likely that company perks like “on-site chef,” “nap pods” or “bringing dogs to work” come to mind. While at the surface, these are just that, “perks”; what you're really describing are pieces of Google's culture — values like flexibility, employee wellness, and freedom. How is it that attributes of a company like Google's employment brand and culture come to occupy a small space in our brains? Those tidbits got there by Google embodying the culture they wanted to have and giving their employees reasons to love coming to work every day. More quickly than not, those tidbits then spread beyond the Google environment and into the minds of candidates and the general public.

The goal of building a strong employment brand is to be able to occupy a sliver of space in the minds of the people you're trying to reach, in order to impact a candidate's consideration set and, ultimately, his or her decision about where to apply and which job to accept.

Furthermore, one of the determining factors in your ability to retain talent is the strength of your employment brand. As leadership expert and author Simon Sinek has said, “People who don't believe what you believe work for your money — and their time with your company likely won't last long. People who believe what you believe, however, will work for you with their blood, sweat and tears.”

Do your employees believe what you believe — and want to share it with others? By building and maintaining a strong employment brand, your organization will be better able to attract and retain your best employees.

How do you do this? First, you must define your employment brand — the message you want to communicate about your company culture, beliefs and values. Invest in your brand: Work to connect with your employees and make them feel appreciated, recognized, and valued on a daily basis. Give them opportunities to grow and the resources to be successful. By being a great company through your actions, you will be more favorably perceived in the eyes of your own employees, and in turn, you will:

1. **Gain access to better-quality candidates** who, from the very beginning of the job search process, understand what you stand for, and recognize things in your company culture that appeal to them. A well-communicated brand also helps candidates understand why they would not be a good fit for your company, enabling you to filter out unqualified candidates sooner than later.
2. **Attract more passive candidates** who are not looking to change jobs but notice what you have to offer and become interested in your opportunity. A study by Corporate Leadership Council found that those with managed employment brands are able to source from more than 60 percent of the labor market, while those with unmanaged brands are able to source from only 40 percent.
3. **Have fewer costs associated with turnover and recruitment.** When you fail to deliver on what you promise during the hiring process, your employees will (understandably) become discouraged or resentful. You must live out your brand in your everyday actions. With a strong brand, candidates are also more likely to be proactive and find you or think of your company when looking for a job, meaning less work, time and resources for you.
4. **Enjoy more happy and productive employees,** as a great place to work equates to employees feeling good and enjoying their job, which in turn leads to quality work and higher productivity — resulting in better business results for your organization. It's a win-win.
5. **Encourage your employees to be brand ambassadors:** If employees love their job with your company, they will be talking about it and spreading the word to family, friends, and new people they meet. Nothing beats word of mouth when it comes to your reputation — and your employees, who know and understand your company the best, are the perfect people to spread your employment message.
6. **Improve your bottom line** with the intangible value of a strong employment brand. In addition to the negative word of mouth that you may receive from candidates unhappy with your brand, 18 percent of dissatisfied candidates said they would be less inclined to purchase from a company that provided a poor application experience, adding bottom line-insult to employment brand injury.

A 2008 CareerBuilder survey on employment branding found that a surprisingly low number of employees believe their employers deliver on their employment promises, prompting 34 percent of employees to rate their company a poor place to work. The good news is that, according to a 2011 CareerBuilder “Applicant Experience” survey, 70 percent of employers said they are taking measures today to strengthen their employment brand. Defining and actively managing your employment brand is important; after all, a positive or negative experience for candidates can impact your brand and bottom line. Are you actively managing your brand with existing employees through social media platforms, search optimization, job boards, forums and discussion groups, and your own website?

YOUR NEW RECRUITMENT ROLE

Candidates have traditionally been dubbed a mix of “active” and “passive” seekers — though as we have seen above, those terms limit the true complexity of the candidate. The candidate of yesterday is not the candidate of today, who expects much more from you as a potential employer — and as recruitment and technology continue to intersect, the candidate of today will not be the candidate of tomorrow. To truly

connect with candidates in today's competitive market, you must fight to get their attention with an integrated recruitment marketing strategy. Candidates are using a wide range of methods to find the right jobs, and by gaining a significant presence to them through these methods, you will deepen your talent pool, engage and create trust with candidates early on, find more diverse candidates for your open positions, and, ultimately, improve your bottom line. Start thinking of your recruitment experience as a consumer product — and start getting more candidates to consider your brand, like what they see, and say “Yes.”

LEARN MORE ABOUT ADDING THE RIGHT PLATFORMS TO YOUR RECRUITMENT MIX:

<http://cb.com/RecruitmentMix>



RESEARCH USED IN THIS CAREERBUILDER REPORT

Unless otherwise noted, the data in this report comes from an online survey conducted during March 16-21, 2011, hosted by Inavero, a Portland, OR-based client satisfaction research firm. The total sample size of the survey was 4,514 respondents; 3,960 of these respondents were reached through CareerBuilder's candidate database. A sample of 554 respondents was provided by an independent online panel to verify results and further explore candidate habits and perceptions. 2,390 respondents were employed full- or part-time, 244 were temporary or contract employees, and 1,774 were not employed.

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