Essential Strategies for Making Your Career Site Usable

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How quickly can a job applicant apply for an opening on your company website? How many clicks does it take? Then, once the candidate is busy applying for the opening, how long will that take? How long are the forms? How many questions are asked?

The heart of the concept of a usable job applicant experience is ease of navigation, simplicity, consciousness of the time needed to apply, and the opportunity for an applicant to share relevant information for the hiring team.

When the job application process is easy to navigate, more of the desired applicants will apply. Plus, fewer will lose interest and drop off. And, the time to fill a position may be reduced significantly.

This is a win-win for all involved.

Jennifer Brogee, part of an elite group of Certified Usability Analysts (CUA)™ worldwide, and also the system development manager for myStaffingPro® applicant tracking system, describes the best way to test a career portal's usability. "You really have to watch the applicant apply," she says. "The process needs to work for someone who is relatively new to computer technology, yet not painstakingly slow for people who are more advanced with technology."

Brogee has implemented the concepts of usability on several hundred client websites for myStaffingPro, a company that provides applicant tracking software.

Be Accommodating

Job seekers today rely on a multitude of technologies and platforms. A savvy employer will make sure the company's job site works on a spectrum of devices as well as all of the most popular Web browsers.

A potential employee should be able to apply via a computer, smartphone, and telephone interactive response, in an ideal scenario. Additionally, every job opportunity should be accessible to those with disabilities.

Make It Easy to Apply

When a job seeker lands on your company website, is there an easy way to apply? Or must the job seeker click through many paths? For instance, does he or she start at "about us," then "careers," then "about our jobs," then to "job openings" and then find the actual opening he or she saw? Only to then click on "apply," then "register now," then provide personal information and finally begin to apply?

Brogee maintains that making the job seeker experience friendly and easy will reduce the time to fill a position. The greater the number of relevant applicants, the easier it will be for human resource departments to fill the opening. "We do not want to see five or six clicks to apply for a position that a job seeker finds," says Brogee. "We would like to see one or two clicks to apply."

Begin with a Clear Job Description

A job description needs to say something about the job that helps the candidate discern if he or she should take the time to apply. The title of the job description should give strong clues, and should be optimized for search engines. The actual description should be clear and differentiated from other job openings.

"Have you noticed with many job descriptions that it can be almost impossible to figure out what the job is?" asks Brogee. "We don't like to see too much 'corporate-speak' or the use of acronyms in the job description."

She states that when a company takes time to create a good job description, carefully explaining the qualifications and skills required, and outlining the tasks that the employee will be asked to perform, applicants can better determine positions they are qualified for. The result will be advanced quality of the entire process.

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Set Expectations and Keep in Contact

Applicants like to know what they are getting into. Another measure of usability and friendliness of a job application process involves providing the applicant with a "time to finish" indicator. The indicator provides the applicant with direction and signifies how much longer it will take to complete the process. This simple indicator, or meter, keeps applicants engaged and informed on their progress.

Brogee likes to see clients of myStaffingPro take friendliness and usability to another level. She works with clients to build a self-service functionality into the job portal. "The human resource departments we work with really like this," Brogee says. "They don't get bombarded with phone calls from applicants."

In addition to a self-service portal, Brogee suggests sending communications throughout the hiring process. Potential communication could announce to applicants that they are being considered for a position, then later, update them upon their status as they move to the interview process.

"This really helps the applicant and the hiring managers alike," says Brogee. "It also gives a good impression of the company as being responsive, without taxing the recruiter's and hiring manager's time."

Reduce Clicks, While Maintaining Quality

As a trend emerges for one-click to apply for positions, Brogee explains how this can work and warns about where it might not.

"We're seeing a trend where applicants don't have to do anything. They can start and finish the application process by linking to a social media profile," says Brogee. She cautions that this system may not end up being that friendly or usable for applicants or human resource professionals. "We want qualified applicants to be able to apply, but a good system should meet the needs of both the applicant and the employer. An applicant should be able to explain why he or she is a good fit, and the recruiter should be able to differentiate between candidates," explains Brogee.

When the application process works for both the job seeker and the company, companies can cut down the number of weeks it takes to fill an opening. "We like to see the system be simple, clear, but with enough opportunities for applicants to say why they are a good fit," Brogee says.

When reviewing your application process, remember that there is a fine line between overwhelming the candidate and making the process too brief. The process should be thorough enough to make a decision by the hiring professionals involved, yet, also to respect the time and requirements of the applicant.

Create a Phased Application Process

If a significant amount of information is required, consider splitting the application process into two steps. A two-step application process increases completion rate by 20 percent, according to data gathered by myStaffingPro. This means creating a tiered application process where initially the applicant is asked only a few qualifying questions.

"We don't want to see 30 qualifying questions in the initial step," says Brogee. "A better practice would be four to six qualifying questions, and then qualified applicants can be asked to return at a later time in the process to complete a secondary screening."

The applicant response to simplifying the process is tremendous. myStaffingPro has received the following feedback from applicants:

"I just wanted to let you know that your online job application is one of the best I've ever filled out. Simple and efficient."

"…I was searching for a job on the Midmark website and noticed it is powered by you. It is a great tool. I am very impressed. It is easy to use, it works, and is very aesthetically pleasing."

"I have submitted many online applications over the last several months, but although the experience is never pleasurable, it was pleasurable indeed to have the opportunity to provide the company with all of the information they requested in a highly readable format with as little effort as possible, while also being able to provide additional information I believe will be useful."

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With a two-step process, the first series of questions can be relatively general. However, the next level of questions should provide hiring managers with enough data to determine who should make the next cut.

Each question should be important. If certain information is not needed until an employee gets through an interview, that information should not be collected on the first step of the application process.

Save Often

Can an applicant save periodically? A quality job application process will allow candidates to save the application responses online if they must leave and then allow them to return to complete the process. Ideally, applicants with information left incomplete should be reminded to return to the application process with an email message and a link to return.

About myStaffingPro

myStaffingPro, a full-featured software-as-a-service (SaaS) applicant tracking system, provides HR professionals with the tools they need to recruit, qualify, and track applicants. The scalable myStaffingPro system can be configured to any hiring process or budget.

To learn more about the myStaffingPro applicant tracking system, visit **http://mystaffingpro.com**.

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