



WestJet Lands Top Talent by Outsourcing Recruiting Software

By Beth Ellyn Rosenthal, Editor



As Canada's largest low-cost airline, WestJet has really taken off since it started flight operations in 1996. Since then, the airline has continued to expand, bringing more cities from across North America into WestJet's world. The company has grown between 30-50 percent each year it has been in business.

But WestJet's growth has created a challenge for its human resource team. Finding hundreds of new people with the right attitude and skills in a timely manner unavoidably places pressure on WestJet's recruiting practices.

Last year WestJet hired 1,406 people and received more than 52,000 resumes. The airline had 4,996 employees at the end of May and was recently named one of Canada's top 100 employers. "We have built our business as a low-cost carrier, but we have also built a reputation as a great place to work. Our people are essential to WestJet's success," says Brian Paisley, Manager of the Talent Management team, which is responsible for recruiting across Canada.



Since August 2004, WestJet added five new planes to its fleet. Every time WestJet purchases a new plane, it has to find qualified, trained staff to fly it. "Every plane requires a new head count; we have to respond," says Paisley. In addition to staffing the new planes, the recruiting team also has to respond to periods of peak travel demand. Christmas, Thanksgiving, spring break, and summers "are crunch times for us," explains Maria Brant-McMahon, a recruiter on the Talent Management team.

"To keep up with our growth and to ensure we have the necessary people available for peak travel times, we evaluated our department and realized there were areas where outsourcing made sense for us," Paisley adds.

How Outsourcing Kept Up with the Demand for Talent

Outsourcing was the only way the airline, which has landing rights in Canadian cities in every province and several cities in the US and flies to eight countries through its charter service, could keep up with its human resources (HR) load. WestJet outsources its recruiting software to help streamline the hiring process.

WestJet first outsourced its recruiting software in 2001, but its first provider could not keep up with soaring demand. When searching for a new solution, the Talent Management team first created service level requirements to determine which providers would qualify, according to Scott Willis, a Senior Recruiter. "We wanted a Web-based product," says Willis. WestJet short-listed three companies. Last year, the Calgary-based company switched to Cytiva's SonicRecruit, an application service provider (ASP) that provides recruiting software.

ASPs are a way for companies to outsource some or almost all aspects of their information technology needs. As an ASP, SonicRecruit is able to distribute its recruiting software to WestJet from a central data center and the airline requires no internal IT personnel to service the software. In addition to being an ASP, SonicRecruit met all the other requirements, but WestJet was concerned about the ASP's ability to handle its burgeoning volumes of incoming resumes and job openings. "At that time they were a small operation. We were leery of what they could bring to the table," recalls Paisley. He reports his concerns were unfounded. "The technology worked great the first week and was customized within 90 days," he notes.



Customization was another requirement. "That was a big thing for us," says Willis. SonicRecruit had no qualms about customizing the system for WestJet. "Most of the customization they wanted was beneficial to many of our other clients," says Jason Moreau, President and CEO of Cytiva Software, makers of SonicRecruit. He says each enhancement has an on/off box so the other users can decide if they need it or not.

Sifting to Find the Qualified Applicants

Each time the WestJet Talent Management team posts a job to its Web site, the applicants pour in. WestJet's online job application form is powered by SonicRecruit. "Applicants never know the job application form they are filling out is on our servers unless they look at the URL," says Moreau. "Our software provides clients with the ability to brand their online career center."

To ensure the Talent Management team is reviewing only the most qualified candidates, they use SonicRecruit to set up prescreening questions. Applicants have to answer a few custom prescreening questions before their application is submitted. Based on the answers, SonicRecruit ranks each application from 1-100. "The program lets us filter the resumes using more data points than we could do manually," says Willis.

SonicRecruit has an automatic knockout provision. For example, the airline receives resumes from candidates worldwide because they advertise their jobs on the Web. But only those who can legally work in Canada make the first cut. "The recruiters can now concentrate only on the screened candidates," adds Moreau. "That's when the real hiring begins."

Another WestJet requirement was to become a totally paperless process. Paisley says the recruiters used to be buried in paper. In addition, they had to manually send out postcards to each applicant, thanking them for applying. Now SonicRecruit sends an automated email thank-you note. To further minimize paper, WestJet now requires all current employees to apply online when seeking another position within the company.

SonicRecruit stores all the resumes received for as long as the buyer wants. If another, similar opening occurs, the airline can go back and review the candidates who received a high rank but were not chosen.

Outsourcing's Benefits

WestJet outsourced because it needed help to support its growth. As an additional benefit, the company saved money in the process. Based on information from other SonicRecruit customers, Moreau estimates that SonicRecruit helps reduce the average cost per hire from \$7,500 to \$5,000. Additional costs can be recovered because customers are able to eliminate some of their administrative costs.

WestJet considers SonicRecruit a permanent part of its flight plan. "We rely on SonicRecruit 100 percent," reports Paisley. "Choosing an outsourced software solution has proven to be a positive experience for WestJet."



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