

# Social Networking Meets the Talent Hunt

How recruiters are finding quality candidates using Twitter, LinkedIn, and other social networking tools.

by Dan Haugen

When Best Buy started to search for a pair of marketing managers this spring, recruiter Joshua Kahn, senior pipeline generation expert at Accenture, a firm that provides human resources services for the electronics giant, turned to Twitter.com, a free social networking Web site, to spread the word.

“I’m looking for 2 great brand/consumer/loyalty marketing people for Best Buy,” Kahn typed into Twitter’s 140-character message box. It was received by 800 people who “follow” his posts on the site.

About 10 of those followers then shared, or “retweeted,” Kahn’s message with their followers, bringing the potential audience to more than 10,000 Twitter users.

Within a few days, the posting had generated more than 350 clicks on a Best Buy jobs Web page and more than 15 applications the company might not have otherwise seen.

“And it was free, which is the beauty of it,” Kahn says.

## Getting Social

Kahn is part of a small but growing community of Twin Cities recruiters who are experimenting with social networking as a tool for identifying talent, soliciting résumés and referrals, and screening candidates. Even these early adopters don’t believe Facebook, a popular site that allows users to create a personal profile and connect with friends, will ever replace face-to-face interactions. And Twitter won’t take away the need for the telephone.

However, understanding how to use social networks will become increasingly important for recruiters as the services become more ubiquitous among job seekers.

As is the case with most recruiters using social networking, Kahn got started on Twitter as a result of his own initiative, not a company policy. He’s used Twitter to keep in touch with friends and co-workers since the spring of 2008, but he’s only used it as a recruiting tool for less than a year. For him, Twitter has proven a great place to find tech-savvy job candidates.

LinkedIn is by far the most commonly used social network among recruiters because of the sheer volume of professionals who use the service. According to its Web site, LinkedIn.com has more than 40 million members, many of whom join specifically so they can be contacted about new business-related opportunities. Users can also create an online résumé and profile that allows recruiters to learn about past employment and recent accomplishments. Twitter, meanwhile, has just over 6 million users according to a recent report.

“LinkedIn has become, in a sense, the new yellow pages,” says Rick Deare, owner of Deare Recruiting Solutions



in Bloomington. “It is the most important resource out there.”

Some recruiters are using Facebook, which boasts more than 200 million users, to research job candidates. However, many Facebook members use the service only for staying in touch with friends, not with professional development in mind, so it’s not as helpful to recruiters as some of the other tools. Also, unlike LinkedIn and Twitter, most of the information on members’ profile pages is not publicly searchable.

A search within a particular social networking site is usually the best way to determine whether a social network will offer any value, says Paul DeBettignies, managing partner at Nerd Search, LLC, a recruiting firm in Minneapolis and author of the MN Headhunter blog ([mnheadhunter.com](http://mnheadhunter.com)). He recommends searching for industry acronyms and keywords to show you what types of conversations people are having so you can “start figuring out if people are talking in that area.”

On LinkedIn, this search can be done using the site’s search function. For Twitter, users can search messages using [search.twitter.com](http://search.twitter.com) or other Twitter search services, such as [tweetzi.com](http://tweetzi.com), [twazzup.com](http://twazzup.com), and [tweefind.com](http://tweefind.com), some of which include the option of limiting results to users in a geographic region.

Whether a recruiter finds a relevant community to tap into will depend in part on the industry or type of job opening, DeBettignies says. A recruiter searching for Web developers or marketers, for example, is more likely to find potential connections on Twitter than someone looking to hire pipe fitters or physicians. The type of connections a recruiter maintains matters, too. “If you’re posting marketing jobs to a bunch of underwater basket weavers, that’s not very relevant,” Kahn says.

That’s why recruiters, and all professionals seeking to benefit from social networking, need to invest time in building a network long before they need to call on it. DeBettignies says social networking isn’t headhunting; it’s farming. “It will grow and turn into something someday,” he says.

### **Unwritten Rules of Social Networks**

Social networking is a great tool for keeping track of existing contacts, but it shouldn’t be viewed as a shortcut for creating new ones. One unproductive practice, and one of Deare’s pet peeves, is LinkedIn users who send cold, impersonal connection requests using a form letter to simply collect connections.

“Connecting is not networking,” Deare says. “If you’re looking at your social network, and if those people you’re connected with aren’t answering your phone calls and don’t know who you are, you aren’t really networking. You’re just connecting.”

Instead, recruiters should approach social networks much as they would a real-world networking gathering. “You can’t just walk into a cocktail party where you don’t know anybody and start asking people if they want to go home with you,” Kahn says. Make conversation. Ask for introductions. Share what you know.

The experiments underway by recruiters include varying approaches to developing networks. “You want to bring something to the table,” says Robert Arnold, a senior recruiter at Celarity, a marketing and creative staffing firm in Bloomington. For instance, sharing links to articles on topics such as interview skills and making presentations on Twitter helps users build rapport.

KeyStone Search, a Minneapolis recruiting firm that focuses on C-level executives, launched a private LinkedIn group in April aimed at executives in transition. The group is a way to keep in touch with leaders who could be future clients or future job candidates. “It’s an easy way for us to stay top of mind with potential clients,” says Marcia Ballinger, a principal with KeyStone.

A well-maintained social network brings value the same way a network of sources in a desktop Rolodex does. One difference is that for some tasks an online social network can be tapped much more efficiently than individual sources. A Twitter message or LinkedIn status update can quickly alert all of your connections at once to open positions and calls for referrals.

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