TALENT PIPELINING & CANDIDATE ENGAGEMENT

By **ERIC DYSON**
Trend Writer

As we return to work, resiliency, business continuity and recovery are quickly emerging as critical priorities for business leaders. Fortunately, creating a talent pipeline for vital roles is one way that organizations can build greater resilience, have clear succession plans and ensure talent continuity. However, hiring freezes and uncertainty around when hiring will resume have left many talent teams in limbo.

That said, there has never been a more important time to focus on building your talent pipeline to ensure you have the best possible talent on your team and are well-positioned as things return to normal; you may not have positions to fill now, but by building a robust talent pipeline, you'll place yourself in a better position when we return to business as usual.

Below, we cover how to build a better talent pipeline, and offer engagement strategies and best practices for building stronger relationships with your candidate pool.

WHAT IS A TALENT PIPELINE?

A talent pipeline is a proactive talent acquisition strategy that seeks to identify, engage and recruit talent to build a robust pool of candidates to fill roles as needed. Similar to a sales funnel – in which leads progress through multiple stages of engagement and are eventually converted into clients – a talent pipeline moves potential job candidates through engagement stages that hopefully lead to making a hire. And, like most modern recruitment practices, talent pipelining has been derived from proven sales and marketing strategies.

COST SAVINGS
Make multiple hires for a fixed cost based on recruiter activity

TARGETED SOLUTION
Identify and engage key audiences and engage directly when required

RESEARCH TO INFORM STRATEGY
High-level market insight

RAISE EMPLOYER BRAND AWARENESS
Increased visibility of your employer brand with target audience

AUDIENCE INSIGHT
Develop an understanding of the audience to inform EVP

Target Audience
Sourcing & Social Media

Create Talent Pipeline
Share Relevant Content

Generate Applications
Activate Candidates

BRANDED COMMUNICATIONS
Share content, such as case studies and thought leadership, that develops interest in your employer brand and job opportunities

REPUTATION TO ACTIVATION
Switch from building reputation to a call-to-action when vacancies arise

CONTENT HUB
Dedicated microsite that contains all content, including video and imagery

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN
Target audience and raise awareness across all major platforms

EXTENSIVE REPORTING
In-depth analytics to track ROI

By using a talent pipeline, organizations can pick and choose from a highly qualified group of candidates who are already familiar with the organization. But, the key to a successful talent pipeline lies in candidate engagement because recruiting teams are not focused solely on filling open roles. Rather, they're thinking about how to best meet future talent needs by building better relationships with top talent. In addition to better candidates, talent pipelining also allows you to diversify your talent pool, deliver personalized candidate experiences and improve your overall employer brand.

TALENT PIPELINING ENGAGEMENT BEGINS WITH YOUR EMPLOYER BRAND

Talent pipelining is about influencing candidate behavior. So, the first and most logical place to begin when creating a talent pipeline is by answering the following questions:

- **?** How do you generate interest in your organization?

- **?** What differentiating factors set your organization apart from other employers?

- **?** Why should candidates choose to work for your organization?

To find the answers to these questions, you'll need to turn to your employer brand. That's because, in a talent market that's reeling from the effects of a global pandemic and calls for increasing racial diversity, your reputation as an employer is more important than ever to attract high-quality candidates. What's more, at a time when candidates can quickly look up information about your organization – from compensation and benefits to the work culture and advancement opportunities – building a strong employer brand is paramount. In fact, according to the Harvard Business Review, a negative employer reputation can cost organizations up to 10% more per hire.

So, maintaining and personalizing your candidate-facing content should be a top priority in order to attract and bring top talent to your organization's talent pipeline. You can achieve this by improving your careers page and social media outreach with high-quality resources, guides and videos. But, exactly how do you position yourself as an employer of choice in your industry and fill your talent pipeline with qualified talent? Below are some simple steps that can help you get started:
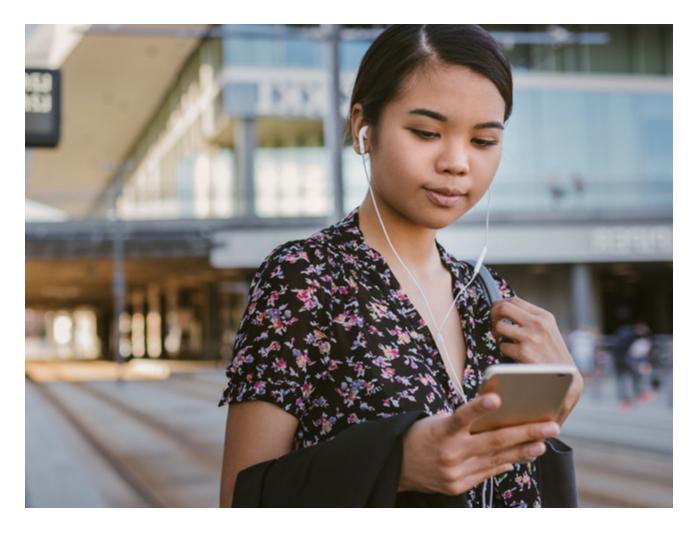
Leverage Your Career Site

The first place many candidates will engage with your employer brand will be through your career site. Use this to highlight your corporate values and culture, as well as provide a real glimpse of what life is like for your employees.

Meanwhile, make sure that your employer brand messaging on your career site is consistent with what is on your social media channels, company website and review pages, such as Glassdoor and Indeed. Also, confirm that your career site is optimized for mobile, as many mid-career professionals are more likely to search for opportunities on their mobile devices. To that end, the easier it is to apply and interact with your organization, the more top candidates you will be able to add to your pipeline.

Engage Your Talent Pipeline on Social Channels

Social media has become a top recruitment marketing channel. Plus, according to Glassdoor, 79% of job applicants use social media in their job search, so engaging with candidates and presenting a positive employer brand on social media is essential.

For example, to build a stronger employer brand and engage with your target audience, promote authentic conversations about life within your organization and ask candidates to share what they seek in an employer. Additionally, celebrate

employee achievements and share real-life stories, photos and videos to show potential candidates what it's like to work for you. This will make it more likely that candidates will feel comfortable applying for positions at your organization.

Your Employees Are Your Best Advocates

Building upon your social media strategy, you can also consider employee advocacy as an effective branding and talent pipeline-building tactic. Employee advocacy is the word-of-mouth marketing equivalent for recruitment, so encourage your employees to tap into their networks, refer friends to open roles and bring more candidates into your talent pipeline.

Along the same lines, identify employees who can act as your brand ambassadors and, as such, share with their network the perks of working for your company and build a great referral pipeline for talent. Notably, candidates are three times more likely to trust your employees than recruiters to provide credible information about your work culture.

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR TALENT PIPELINE

Send Confirmation Emails to Candidates

Because 96% of job applicants want confirmation that their application has been received, sending

confirmation emails to candidates who have applied for open positions should be an obvious step. However, just 8% of job-seekers say they always get a confirmation from a potential employer. Fortunately, you can leverage technology and automate your communication to make sure emails are sent on time and reach candidates.

Additionally, in the confirmation, include a "thank you" for taking the time to fill out your application and let candidates know when they can expect to hear back about their application status. And, although you don't have to provide feedback to unsuccessful candidates, do make sure you let them know that they have not progressed and, once again, thank them for taking the time to apply. This reply can be automated, as well.

Keeping your Talent Pipeline Warm During a Hiring Freeze

Perhaps there are talented professionals who are out of work and looking for new opportunities in your talent pipeline, but you're not be in a position to hire right now. If that's the case, it doesn't mean that your recruiting activity should be on hold. In fact, this is the perfect time to work on building and nurturing your talent pipeline.

Keeping candidates "warm" is a balancing act, especially in uncertain times. However, you can keep candidates engaged by sending them updated press releases, and managers can periodically send a personal note or text to keep the lines of communication open. You can also share updates about the conditions at your organization, statements your CEO has made, or other information to give them an understanding of how your organization is dealing with this crisis. The goal is that these efforts might impress candidates and motivate them to want to work with you even if you don't have an opening at the moment.

Consider Using a Chatbot

Undoubtedly, candidates in your talent pipeline will have questions for you – about the role itself, the application process, or the timeline between applying and hiring. So, if you have high-volume hiring needs or your internal recruiting teams are stretched too thin to answer all of the questions, consider deploying a chatbot to answer some of the most common questions; answering immediately can prevent candidates from losing touch with you or becoming frustrated.

And, if you're wondering whether candidates would be satisfied with answers from a chatbot, remember that modern candidates are already interacting with them – whether through online shopping sites or virtual assistants, like Alexa or Siri. Then, your only job is to determine what the most common questions are and craft answers that the chatbot can supply. Just ensure you have a process in place in the event that the candidate's question was not answered satisfactorily. In that situation, the question should then be routed to a human who can provide a more detailed or nuanced answer.

The landscape for candidates today is drastically different from past years. Consequently, empathy, flexibility and understanding will go a long way in building lasting relationships with candidates and successfully adapting to the realities of a post-COVID-19 world.