

Employers Find More Direct Links to Recruiting College Alumni

By Diane Cadrain, September 2006

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Finding those elusive passive job seekers is tough, and trying to determine which niche markets to target to get to them can be even tougher. While many companies turn to college alumni associations, these too can be hit-or-miss propositions, depending on how active and accessible the group is.

Even when social networking sites are available through these associations, connecting with qualified candidates can still be as frustrating as using larger networking sites, which many recruiters liken to trying to find a needle in a haystack.

But there's a service now being offered that enables recruiters to better target and tap the alumni associations of dozens of colleges and universities—even some fraternities and sororities. Mountain View, Calif.-based Affinity Circles Inc. has taken the concept of social networking and devised a way to enable college and university alumni associations to create private, member-based online communities that can help link job-seeking alumni as well as passive candidates to employers.

How It Works

Say a company is trying to recruit a financial analyst or a certified public accountant—both hot commodities these days—and it knows that a certain university has an excellent business school from which it would like to recruit. The company can access the service inCircle Jobs.com, and for \$100 post the job, noting specifics such as industry, region, salary range and job description, at as many participating college and university alumni associations as it wants. The post will remain active for 30 days.

According to the company's web site, a major benefit to this kind of niche recruitment is that it provides employers with a manageable number of resumes for highly qualified candidates.

"The key value is that, instead of putting a job on Craigslist, Linked In, or one of the other public sites, inCircle Jobs allows you to target the job and get a higher quality applicant," says Steve Loughlin, CEO of Affinity Circles.

"It's pretty powerful when you think of the number of people you're getting in front of," says Mike Otto, SPHR, who is HR manager for FRCH Design Worldwide, an architecture, interior design and graphics communication firm. Otto, a graduate of the University of Cincinnati, which has a highly respected design program, says that the recruitment competition for architects is pretty stiff these days. Using inCircle Jobs, his company has successfully hired several.

"We haven't hired them directly," he adds. "But we did hire people by indirect word of mouth from alumni association members who saw our postings and passed them on to friends. It's a good way to reach that passive audience. It has a huge potential for word of mouth."

"It's a fantastic tool," says Soraya vanDillen, a recruiter for Aerotek Inc., which approached inCircle Jobs via the alumni web site of Santa

Clara University. "I just posted a job last week, and I got responses on the first day."

VanDillen also finds that the service helps her reach out to other alumni of Santa Clara, who are trying to connect with passive job seekers.

High Marks from Higher Ed

Alumni associations also like it. "It's a good tool for employers to use," says Katie Seay, director of membership and marketing for the University of Florida Alumni Association. Employers in industries as varied as advertising, IT and engineering, along with dozens of others, have been using the university's alumni site, Gator Nation Network, since it launched inCircle Jobs last April. "Gators want to hire gators," she adds.

"We're really thrilled with the product," says Jen Heisey, program director for the University of Cincinnati Alumni Association. "Our mission as an alumni organization is engagement. We know that more and more of our graduates are communicating with each other online, and that we need a good online presence. But unlike Facebook, MySpace and LinkedIn, inCircle jobs is private, authenticated and secure."

Heisey says that Coach, the designer and manufacturer of high-end leather goods, has posted jobs on the University of Cincinnati Alumni Association site, no doubt attracted to the university's prestigious design program. So has Toyota, with plants in nearby northern Kentucky, and dozens of others. "We have about a hundred jobs posted there right now," she says.

Alumni like it because not only does it enable them to look for jobs by such variables as location, industry and salary range, it also puts them in touch with other alums who are already working for a particular company. "Employers get incumbent employees as ambassadors into these college communities," explains Loughlin. And, a relationship mapping feature takes it one step further by enabling alums to identify others who are their own friends and acquaintances.

But the relationship mapping feature is one feature that draws some criticism as well as accolades. If there's anything about inCircle Jobs that vanDillen would change, it's the relationship mapping feature. She says would like to see some limits on the reach of the friends of friends of friends networking, which has been cited as a key problem with public social networking sites.

"They need to improve the ability to respect privacy issues there," she says. "But I know they're working on it."

"It's a more trusted encounter," says Loughlin. "There's a general shortage of qualified talent for any position right now, and this is another channel for attracting qualified candidates. If you can get a trusted referral, it cuts down on the hiring cycle" significantly.

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