The Top Ten Things to Consider When Selecting a Recruitment Software Solution

As the recruitment software space becomes more and more competitive and the variety of options becomes overwhelming, how do you know which solution is right for you?

It is a fact that the number of software companies offering 'powerful' solutions to the recruitment industry has increased exponentially over the last few years. With that increase however, presents an overwhelming variety of options and just a quick look on LinkedIn shows how much confusion there is about which is the best.

Without wanting to seem flippant, the answer is quite an easy one, and that is "the one that is right for your business," but therein lies the rub. Many companies are not aware of just what functions are available and how certain features may benefit their businesses but also are understandably confused by why they might need to automate the recruitment process at all? Indeed for some, doing things the 'old-fashioned' way is what sets them apart from their competition and to take this away from their agency could well destroy the very soul of the business; something no discerning supplier would ever want.

So what are the key features, what types of company are they best suited to and how do you decide which one would suit you best? Let's try and address the questions in that order and look at some of the issues.

What are the key features of Recruitment Software Solutions?

1. **CRM/ATS** - Many of the current offerings in the marketplace offer similar features. These are often grouped together under the acronyms CRM and/or ATS, standing for Customer Relationship Management and Applicant Tracking Systems respectively.

   Essentially these provide a central location for all of your client and candidate records and give you the ability to see at a glance what activity your company is currently involved in. They can track vacancies, candidate activity i.e. interviews/availability, placement and contacts and are essentially a central repository for your data.

   Most recruitment companies would undoubtedly benefit from centralising their data so there is no real argument here as to whom they are most appropriate for - so far so good.

2. **CV Parsing** – CV Parsing however is quiet a controversial subject and it has to be said is not for everyone.

   Parsing is a term given to the process of extracting data from a candidate CV and generating candidate records in your CRM. The mere fact of being able to upload this data - which incidentally can be done directly through postings on job-boards, submissions through your own website and as email attachment submissions in most cases - directly without having to input them manually does indeed save time and the more candidates you are dealing with at once, the more benefit you

would seem to be able to obtain from this. However, buyers beware. CV parsing software varies enormously and whilst the cream of the crop will extract core competencies and skills (and importantly show them in context) some of the lesser examples will either just extract the basics such as name, address and qualifications or be easily tricked by keywords and savvy candidates who have 'SEO'd' their CV's to ensure they appear superior to other candidates.

It is all a bit of a minefield, when you move to the natural stage two of the process and try to identify the best candidate for a role. If the data you are using is insufficient, unreliable or has been 'doctored' nothing but old fashioned hard work and the human eye is going to help you to complete the task effectively.

Having said that; really powerful systems that extract relevant data from CV's and assign ranking scores against key disciplines really will help you quickly identify the most promising prospects and at a speed impossible to beat by doing it manually – more on this later.

3. **Workflows** – Workflows are incredibly powerful in the right hands and essentially allow you to run a set sequence of activities automatically. For example, a candidate CV is uploaded to your website via a job-board posting. The CV is run through the parsing system, an acknowledgement email is sent out and, depending perhaps on the key skills identified, the CV is assigned to a consultant to look into. These can save a large amount of time but the skill is in identifying what processes are suitable for creating a workflow and being able to customise these to suit your own business.

4. **Reporting** – One of the things most ATS/CRM recruitment solutions will have in common is the ability to run reports for pretty much anything in your system right down to a granular level. From a management perspective and even at a team level this can aid visibility and is a good feature that few would not benefit from.

5. **Extended Features** – Many companies will offer ad-ons to their core products such as job-board postings, text messaging services, search and selection, sales and marketing capabilities etc. Whilst these are not essential, used in the right way they can create a really rich experience for those making the most of the main functions. Used independently though, they will not bring you success, and watch out here for extra charges.

What Sort of Companies are they Best Suited too?

The basic process of placing the right candidate in the right role might seem to some to be an easy task, but any recruitment agency will tell you it is full of complexities.

For some organisations hiring a new employee is a major milestone, for others it is almost a daily event. Clients are different, candidates are different and even different verticals need to be handled in a different manner. Subsequently, recruiters need to be different in the way they deal with their contacts and the processes they use.

Technological advances for some agencies make it possible to fulfil and frequently exceed clients and candidates expectations but If one-to-one attention from start to finish, establishing in-depth relationships with your candidates and having little in the way of time pressures is the nature of your business, this may not be for you. Don't assume that automation is the key, nor dismiss it as a waste of time and money. Do your research, if you know your business you will instinctively know if it's right for you.

Which Recruitment Solution Will Suit My Company the Best?

So we have established the basic functions and looked at which type of companies they may be appropriate for, now let's delve into the detail and see if we can help you make some serious decisions based on fact, not industry hype, or salesmanship.

You may claim it is not possible for someone from within the industry to remain impartial but I hope the following list will at least help you to identify the most pertinent questions to ask, even if you don't believe our own product fulfils every criteria or the guidelines to their maximum, few will, if we are honest and this paper is not trying to bias your opinions.

THE Top Ten Things to consider… (In no particular order)

1. Data Security

All company data is important. Data that includes third party addresses, phone numbers, sometimes even bank details means you have a legal responsibility to keep it safe. As such, you need evidence from your supplier that their system is secure, stable and heavily protected.

For 'on premise' solutions, i.e. those that are installed on your own servers/desktops within your offices, the responsibility it essentially yours; your provider cannot be held accountable for offices which are broken into, fire, flood, laptops left on buses or other similar 'accidents,' so be aware. For those cloud-based or SaaS (Software as a Service) solutions it is absolutely essential you ask not only for an SLA but that you check the security at the location which hosts your data and make sure it meets Level 4 security standards as mandatory.

2. Reliability/Trust

Having faith in your recruitment system is perhaps the most important but the most difficult thing to achieve in the short term. We are all nervous of new systems. Even when you have confidence in the theory, until you see it in practice over and over again you will sometimes not believe what's happening, this is especially true with good CV parsing! The belief in your system will come with time and this process can only be helped by your faith in the people you are dealing with and perhaps talking to some of their customers.

For a short while, you may find yourself using a combination of the old way you use to do things and the new system. That's perfectly normal, but bear in mind at some point you are going to have to take a leap of faith otherwise there is no point in making the investment. If your supplier is good, they will 'hold your hand' whilst you gain that confidence. Trust your instincts, don't go with a company who don't make you feel warm and fuzzy and who don't seem to understand why you might be a bit nervous.

Also worth bearing in mind is of course the stability of the platform itself. Is the system built on a recognised and stable platform i.e. .Net, Oracle, Microsoft Dynamics? Having this as the backbone of your recruitment solution should help not only in making it robust but will ensure it constantly receives updates as the base product evolves – most of the time at no cost to yourself.

3. Scalability

Ask your supplier, how quickly and at what cost they can add a new user? If they have to come to your office or they ask you to shut down all your systems, take a disc and put it in your DVD reader or download a file, think again. If they can respond within minutes with just a phone call, you know you are on to a

winner. When you have new staff, new opportunities or new requirements you need to be able to respond immediately, anything else is too slow.

4. Cost

Simple question, what will it cost? That's not just the monthly or annual fee per person (the way that most of these solutions are billed), that's what are the set-up costs? Upgrade costs? Customisation costs? Training, support and data migration costs? Beware of anyone saying they are offering the system free. There is no such thing. Free Trials are OK but be prepared to be pulled into a conditional offer and if you don't like it be prepared to buy yourself out of the offer or contract. The best in class will offer their solutions on a pay as you go basis, with no tie-in periods. That shows real confidence in their solution and means if it doesn't work for you, you are not stuck with it for months or even years on end. Incidentally, check how you get your data back if you cancel in this scenario as some companies will charge you for the reverse migration.

5. Accessibility

Requirements differ; think about how, when and where you want your system to be available to you and your team. If you spend much of your time at client and candidate meetings and need to access all your data in those situations can the solution offer you this? Can you access it from your mobile, your iPad, your home PC? Perhaps you specifically do not want to be tempted to continue to work outside of your office, a cloud-based solution may be your worst nightmare come true – how many of us have fallen victim to our Blackberry's and wished we have never gone down that route!

6. Integration

If you have in-house systems already that your recruitment solutions will need to integrate with, make sure they can! It sounds simple, but many companies will claim to integrate with other databases, payment systems, time-sheeting etc. Look for a guarantee or the ability to cancel if this proves impossible or too much hassle.

7. Support & Training

Some companies will offer you 24x7, 365 day support, but providing this level of support costs money. Those costs have to be recuperated somehow so be careful they are not bumping the base price up. Consider also what that says about the reliability of the product (especially if the company doesn't have international coverage that would justify long hours?) check also they don't charge for support – many do. Also be careful what counts as support and what counts as training; there is a very fine line here!

Look at how easy it is going to be to learn the new system. Is it intuitive, complex, frightening? Whilst you may find new software easy to adapt, some will be filled with fear at the sight of a new interface. Make sure that all staff that are going to be using a new system either feel comfortable in tackling it or are happy to undergo training. (Caution: Most companies will charge for one to one training sessions)

8. Features

Compare features. Most companies will have a features or benefits list. Spend a reasonable amount of time looking at things like the CV parsing, dashboards, workflows, searching, business processes and management reports.

9. Development

What is the product development roadmap like? If the company says they don't have one, walk away. If the company have one and moreover are happy to take your recommendations in to consideration when planning future features, shake their hands and sign up. That's just how it should be, a two-way relationship at every stage.

Note of caution – watch out for extra charges/costs being imposed with the introduction of new or extra features. Whilst this is acceptable for some enhancements, base upgrades should come as part of your set fees.

10. Customisation

There is absolutely no point in having a solution that prescribes to you the way you work. Challenge your suppliers, try and trip up those showing you a demo. If you cannot add, move, delete and change the system to work the way you want it to, it's not worth having. Not everyone wants the same type of reports, the same workflows, and the same level of access for each user. Make sure you can customise it or drop it from your 'possibles' list, it won't work for you and will cause you endless hours of frustration.

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Summary

The choice out there is massive, so in summary all I would say is ask questions. Even the most basic questions - i.e. "is it cloud-based or on premise"? - will help you to cut down a list of dozens of suppliers to a handful and then get involved. Have some demos, ask some industry acquaintances but give your bit back to the industry too. There are dozens of one-way conversations on social networking sites with people asking for recommendations, but very few people post which one they ended up choosing and why at the end of their selection process. Share your experiences and you will see I am sure there really is something for everyone.

I hope you have found this useful

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