



Recruiting the Candidate: Now Playing at a Theater Near You

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Recently, I found myself in a movie theater in the Silicon Hills of Austin, Texas. Before the previews, along with the usual "movie trivia" frames and dancing popcorn, a full-screen advertisement for local high tech jobs appeared. This recruiting effort, however, paled in comparison to a recent article I read on "drive-by" recruiting whereby billboard trucks purportedly cruise through town and occasionally park in front of competitors' offices.

The game industry is, indeed, a competitive one, and quality talent is vital to success. So, how do you appeal to the quality candidates? Rather than hustle HR to the local theater or send them rollerblading down the street with a bullhorn and a sandwich board, in this article we will address consistent means of attracting ideal candidates to your company via advertising, company branding, unique hiring ideas, and professional search firms.

Advertising

In Game Industry Media. Placing job want ads remains a popular recruiting method. With the advent of the Internet and the growth of the game industry media, game companies can get their ads in front of their target market quickly and effectively. Business-oriented game industry publications like Gamasutra and GIGnews.com cater to the business end of the game industry versus just the game enthusiast. Job ads in these sorts of online magazines, paired with their subscription email updates, can produce immediate results in terms of getting the word out about your job openings. Moreover, posting your job ads online makes it easy for friends to email job opening information to their other job seeking friends.

Another means of advertising in game industry media is via articles and tutorials. Contact game industry publications and volunteer yourself or someone from your company to write an article. Don't bother about how much you'll get paid for it; that's not the point. Your payment will be the free exposure your company receives. Publications are always looking for content. Technical articles, in particular, are a sure-fire way of getting your company name and contact info in front of thousands of potential recruits.

On Your Website. To paraphrase an old Hormel chili ad "How long has it been since you've updated your website's job page? Well, that's too long." You should be using your company website to advertise job openings, as well. But don't expect results by simply throwing a job description on your "job opportunities" page. Your jobs page should be designed with an eye toward bringing qualified people -- even those not actively seeking a job -- to visit your site on a regular basis. For example, your job page should provide information on your corporate culture with features such as current employee profiles, company news, tips, and resources. You can keep them coming back by offering a "subscription" email for notification of new job postings, tips and resource additions, code releases, company news, etc. Another device for getting potential recruits to your site is to do something on the your site that has "the dancing baby" effect. We all remember receiving "the dancing baby" email. And off we clicked to the Burning Pixel Productions site. Lure potential recruits to your site by creating the game industry's "dancing baby." But be sure you don't weigh down your entire site with slow loading graphics and script. Don't make it a challenge to get to your jobs page. Save the real challenges for the code test.



Company Branding

Why do certain companies receive a constant influx of qualified candidates? In short, they give good PR. The best recruiting tool is to become a talked about place to work. If you're looking for new hires, your company should be marketing its corporate culture as much as your latest game. Does your company offer unique employee benefits? I recall seeing a news story recently on a company in Silicon Valley that allows employees to sleep on the job – even providing designated sleeping areas (including tents!). The company reported markedly increased productivity by allowing these afternoon naps. Every employee interviewed for this news piece positively beamed about his job and employer. The media is always looking for interesting stories to break the monotony of stock prices and mergers. Does your company offer unique benefits? If so, let the media know. A consistent PR and marketing strategy to develop an employment "brand" is one of the most effective ways to recruit.

And, keep in mind, even if your story isn't picked up by the media, just like a good movie or a restaurant, a company's image can be built through word-of-mouth advertising. Things like allowing dogs at work, offering flextime hours, and charitable endeavors help generate good buzz about your company. Give your current employees something to brag about.

Unique Hiring Ideas

Games are made by teams and genuine team loyalty frequently results from time spent together in "crunch mode." In a tight market like the game industry, particularly when searching for qualified programmers, companies should consider hiring "package deals." Package deals can range from two people to an entire team. One recruiter recently worked with a team considering a move from a major game developer. The team appointed one person to speak for them and he made it clear they would only leave as a team. A new game developer who had just received funding retained the recruiter to help put their new team together. She presented the team looking for a new gig with the newly funded developer. Based on the team's past work, the new developer hired the team intact. Not only was recruiting time shortened considerably, but the company also lost no down time while the team established a working rapport.

Variations on the team theme, of course, are hiring the boss, the mentor, the sibling, spouse or significant other. This could be particularly valuable recruiting tool if you are recruiting in an area that is a growing, versus established, game community, such as Utah or Nevada game companies trying to recruit California talent. Of course, I am not advocating simply making up previously non-existent positions. "Why, yes. Your spouse would be perfect as our new West Coast Children's Media Para-Liason." But if a programmer you really want has a wife with sales and marketing background, keep the wife's potential as an employee in mind as well. Many deals have fallen through simply because a candidate's spouse didn't want to move to a new town and try to find a new job.

Professional Search Firms

Headhunter. Executive search consultant. Job placement specialist. Demon seed. Along with lawyers and used car salesmen, recruiters are often the people that people just love to hate. Admittedly, there are unprofessional recruiters in almost every industry, including the game industry, just as there are unprofessional members in every profession. But an experienced, ethical, and competent recruiter can mean the difference between your dream candidate and no candidate at all.



Your HR department may receive hundreds, if not thousands, of resumes for every position from secretary to CFO. A qualified resume for that PSX programmer you've been seeking for months on end probably landed somewhere in that pile where it remained until the busy HR staff had the time to sort and distribute to the appropriate hiring manager. These folks get tons of calls and inquiries and there is just so much time in a day. Search firms can help your HR departments and hiring managers cut to the chase with immediate access to a database of resumes and contacts to quickly focus in on qualified candidates for your particular search. A good recruiting firm should be able to provide the best candidates in the shortest amount of time.

So, how do you find a good recruiting firm? The best way is by word of mouth. Generally speaking, the good ones should have established a reputation in the game industry. If you're thinking of looking for a new job, ask industry colleagues. Well-established recruiters frequently appear as contributors in game industry publications such as *Gamasutra*, *GIGnews.com*, etc. You can also do a web search for recruiters. A Yahoo! Search for "game jobs" or "game recruiters" would be a good start. Visit the recruiters' website. Is it professional? Does it give you information about the firm? You can also find recruiters at conferences such as GDC.

Ongoing Process

Don't make a strategically parked truck or a movie theater ad the sum total of your recruiting program. Thoughtful recruiting should be an ongoing process. Even if you're not looking for an animator today, doesn't mean the best animator on your team won't walk into your office tomorrow and announce his intentions to leave for a Tibetan journey to find his true soul's path. Maintaining an updated and informative website, keeping your name circulating via game industry articles and PR, and establishing a relationship with an external recruiting firm can help prevent future down time.