



RECRUITMENT AND HIRING

Agenda

Turn Up the Radio Recruiting

When a local access and long-distance phone company needed to fill 10 sales positions in 30 days, it didn't chum out the same old ad for the Sunday paper. Instead, its HR department turned to radio.

"For not much more than the cost of a Sunday display ad, we ran a 60second commercial 73 times over three days," recalls David Nash, vice president of human resources at NEXTLINK in Commission, Pa. The result: The company filled all 10 positions.

"We've been very happy using this kind of alternative recruiting," says Nash, who adds that "in some markets, we'll move away from print ads altogether." Similarly, when a Dow Coming Corp. facility in Saginaw, Mich., needed to fill 100 chemical plant operator jobs earlier this year, recruiters added radio to their recruiting efforts and ran 117 radio spots on nine Michigan stations. The campaign was their best ever and netted nearly 500 phone calls a day and more than 500 qualified applicants.

RADIO VERSUS PRINT

Although radio recruitment ads have been around for nearly a decade, radio stations report-at least anecdotally-a huge increase in their use over the past year.

Why the surge in popularity?

Better exposure. Ninety-five percent of Americans listen to the radio sometime during the week, and the average person listens for four hours a day, according to the Radio

Advertising Bureau (RAB). By comparison, the average person spends only 45 minutes a day reading the daily paper, reports the Newspaper Association of America. But the differences don't end there.

In radio, the size of your ad doesn't matter as much as it does in newspapers, says Michael Malpiedi, vice president of sales at Rambaldo Communications in Erie, Pa. "In a paper's want-ad section, the biggest ad wins," he says.

" But on radio, your 30-60-second spot is just as big as anyone else's." Perhaps most important, radio ads may be a better vehicle in today's tight labor market because they reach candidates who are already employed and may not, therefore, be looking through help wanted ads. Edison Media Research of Somerset, N J., reports that 65 percent of the labor force prefers to listen to the radio at work rather than

read a newspaper, watch television or surf the Internet.

What's more, 33 percent of workers listen in their cars while commuting to and from work, according to the RAB.

TARGETED MARKETING AND URGENCY

Most companies that place job listings in newspapers are trying to reach the largest possible audience at the lowest possible cost. But they end up reaching everyone in the city, from teenagers to retirees. Radio, on the other hand, allows businesses to target ads for a specific audience and add more detail to their copy.

Malpiedi cites the example of a plastics company that needed to recruit 25- to 44-year-old males.

"They did this by playing ads over a four-day period at a classic rock station and got the kind of candidate they had targeted," he says.

Radio also can convey a greater sense of urgency. Spots that repeat a company's need several times a day with a "call now" command from the DJ usually generate immediate responses. When Farm Bureau Insurance in Lansing, Mich., used this approach to recruit agents, its HR department got voice mail responses within minutes after the ad aired.

"Sometimes people may feel that newspaper ads-especially blind ads are just a way for companies to fill their coffers with resumes," explains Elizabeth Kohout, president of AmericanJob Link, an employment radio show in Cleveland. "In radio, you get a feeling that the company needs you right now."

Finally, radio allows companies to be more personable. "On a commercial, you can talk about the things that would make people want to work for you, like your new weight room and the cafeteria that serves such great food," says Kohout. "This type of information typically doesn't get out, but if people heard about it, they might say, 'I'd love to work for that company.'"

Daniel Bordeaux, a recruitment specialist at McDonald Broadcasting Co. in Saginaw, Mich., adds that radio spots need to give listeners a reason to change companies. "If you're offering minimum wage to people who are already working at minimum wage, why should they come to work for you?" he asks.

Bordeaux points out that companies can dig a little deeper and find legitimate reasons for workers to make the switch, but they can't assume radio will work magic for them.

THE DRAWBACKS

Experts say companies should be careful about selecting which job openings they broadcast over the radio. "You certainly don't want to say, 'I'm looking for a CEO' or other high level management," says Nash, though most people agree that middle management positions are fine to advertise. Similarly, Kohout warns that a hospital might scare off potential patients if it runs a long list of medical and health care vacancies.

Limited ad space is another draw-back of radio recruiting. "A newspaper or magazine will just add another page if it needs to," says Chris Stonick, president of Stonick Recruitment, Inc., a Cooper City, Fla.-based production agency specializing in radio recruiting. "Radio only plays a certain number of commercials per hour-once they're sold out, they're sold out."

Radio also is limited to the local area it serves. In a tight labor market, recruiters may need to reach people in other markets.

Newspapers like The Washington Post and The New York Times can be accessed all over the country, either in a local library or on the Internet.

But Stonick and Bordeaux argue that radio is a good networking tool because people are more likely to tell their friends about a job opportunity they heard on the radio. They found that more than half of those who responded to radio ads didn't hear them firsthand.

And in the future, radio may not be as geographically limited. Case in point: AmericanJob Link allows employers to purchase infomercial segments where they can discuss job openings, brag about their companies and discuss intangibles that might attract applicants. The show has been so successful that producers are considering taking it national. ~

MAKING RADIO WORK FOR YOU

Analyzing your target audience is an important first step to your campaign because it will influence many other decisions. "The only time radio doesn't work is when it's totally wrong, demographically," says Stonick. "You won't get anywhere trying to reach teenagers on a station that plays [Frank] Sinatra and [Bing] Crosby."

Intangibles like catchy music and voice nuance are valuable components of an ad, but adding detail to the message is equally important. "It's one thing to say, 'We have hundreds of job opportunities,'" says Gordon Bingham, senior vice president of marketing at Long Island-based Olsten Staffing Services. "It's better to say, 'We need 35 telemarketers,' and it's even better to say, 'We need 35 telemarketers at AT&T.'"

Listing salary and responsibilities, advancement and educational opportunities, child care facilities, flexible hours, and other aspects of the job can help make the job more attractive to listeners. Nash suggests omitting names and addresses, though.

"Listeners probably won't remember the information," he explains. "It may take more up-front planning and expense, but you need to give out an easy phone number instead, like 1-800-CALLNOW."

Stonick discourages employers from asking for resumes. "If you ask for resumes, you'll end up getting people who have resumes-the unemployed," he says. "If you're trying to reach employed people, give them a phone number, hotline or web site to contact."

Kohout says companies can personalize ads and boost worker morale by incorporating employees into them. "If you have sales positions open, let one of your top salespeople talk about the position and brag a little about the company," she advises. "Even current employees get a little excited when they see that it's not just senior management getting all the glory."

Most listeners have strong station loyalty, so having a popular DJ announce the ad can create instant credibility, says RAB.

Bingham agrees. "If it can be done, give the station a script you designed and let the personality read it," he advises. "That gives more impact than a canned performance."

Timing is another important consideration. Malpiedi points out obvious mistakes like advertising for accounts in April or forgetting that shift workers may need to hear your message at midnight. "January is generally a good time to recruit," he says, "since people have just made their New Year's resolution to get a better job. For teachers, though, the summer may be better."

Repetition is a key aspect of radio recruiting, but getting the frequency right may be difficult for HR staff, says Kathryn Biddy Maguire, president of Revenue Development Systems, a Boston consulting firm that advises radio stations of non-traditional revenue sources. "For example, people listen to music stations all day, or they'll listen to a news station for a short time but check in more frequently," she says. "You need to rely on radio professional as to how many spots to buy in these situations."

Those professionals are available either through the radio stations themselves or through outside agencies. "If you call a radio station about airing a recruitment ad, believe me, they will call you back within one hour," says Maguire. She tells HR professionals not to be intimidated by the medium because radio people are trained to make it easy for them. "There are teams at the radio station who will write copy and produce the ad for you as part of their charge for airing the spot."

Other recruiters feel that an outside production team brings broader experience and a higher level of technical and creative expertise to the table. They feel that their message may get lost in all the on-air patter and that an ad created by outsiders will be fresher and more memorable.

Another option may be an agency like Stonick's, which provides the services of a production company to clients free of charge. "We do things like research markets, negotiate rates with the stations, and write and place commercials," he explains. "But we're paid by the radio station."

WEIGHING THE COSTS

"We use several methods of recruiting and we measure our cost per applicant," says Olsten's Bingham. "With radio, it's \$25 to \$32 per applicant, while TV [and local magazines] runs twice that amount. Radio is much more cost-effective than TV or display ads in local magazines, and on a par with newspapers."

Comparing the costs of radio and newspaper ads can be difficult because the formats are different. A typical radio campaign in San Antonio, Texas, runs from \$1,200 to \$2,500, whereas, a 3-inch by 5-inch display ad in the city's Sunday paper costs \$1,630. The cost of a 60-second ad can vary greatly, from \$20 in Lincoln, Neb., to \$1,000 in Boston. And the campaign may need as few as four spots or as many as a hundred.

Because radio recruiting is on the upswing, prices are in a state of flux. AmericanJob Link recently changed its format to accept 15-minute spots instead of 30-minute ones; it also cut prices in half to roughly \$600. Maguire says demand is soaring, which may set off an uptick in prices in some areas. "What we're hearing is that print just isn't working for many companies," she explains.

Maguire recently polled her clients and found that half cited recruitment ads as the trailblazing source of nontraditional revenue. "No one said that a year ago," she observes.