

Design Your Virtual Recruiting Strategy for Long-Term Success

By Suzanne Lambert

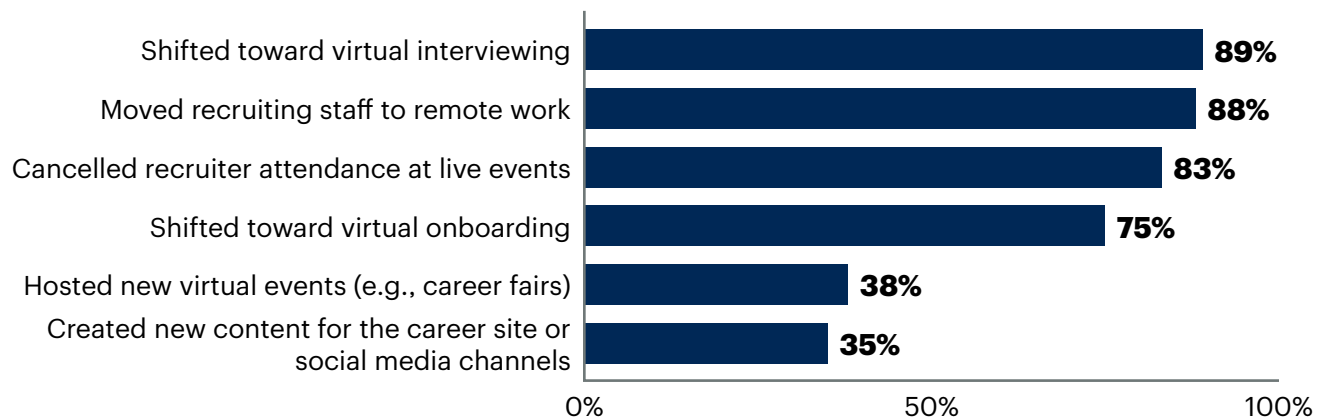
Most organizations have shifted to virtual recruiting during the COVID-19 pandemic. As they prepare for a postpandemic business environment, HR leaders should develop sustainable strategies for continuing to recruit and onboard employees virtually in the long term.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has restricted their ability to recruit in person, HR leaders have been pressed to adapt their preset strategies to recruit virtually. Our research shows that recruiting functions adapted quickly to the

changing landscape, with 89% shifting toward more virtual interviews by late March (see Figure 1). This required a great deal of change in a short time, and most organizations rose to the challenge.

Figure 1: Changes to the Hiring Process Due to COVID-19

Percentage of Recruiting Leaders



n = 65

Q: "Which of the following changes have you made in response to the coronavirus or the changing economic environment?"

Source: March 2020 Gartner Coronavirus Polling on Recruiting

The recruiting environment continues to evolve, however, and HR leaders should consider how to shift from immediate responses to scalable strategies for long-term success. Some of the short-term solutions implemented this year will become permanent features of the future workplace as the long-term impact of COVID-19 continues to accelerate the digitalization of business processes. Virtual hiring and onboarding are among the processes that are likely to endure, even once organizations can resume in-person recruiting. This article explores three key areas in which HR leaders can adapt their recruiting processes, strategies and messaging for a virtual environment.

Candidate Attraction

In today's digital labor market, organizations can no longer simply broadcast branding messages about themselves; they must listen and respond to what individual candidates value. During a crisis, the need to be responsive to candidate preferences is heightened. Candidate expectations are shifting, and HR finds it even harder to connect with them and provide a compelling candidate experience than it was in the past. HR leaders can take several actions to better attract candidates in this new reality:

Adapt Messaging to Candidates' Changing Expectations

The employment value proposition talking points that were successful with candidates before the pandemic may need to be altered quickly to fit candidates' preferences during and after COVID-19, particularly as social distancing practices continue and more employees shift to remote work. Create new content for your website and social media to account for these new expectations. New branding messages should also contextualize any negative information such as layoffs or other employment decisions that could cause candidate uncertainty. Additionally, consider how employee voice can aid in generating authentic messages for your organization.

DSM did this by inviting employees from a target talent segment to participate in a

one-day messaging hackathon.¹ The recruiting team helped top employees in their target role create candidate-centric messaging to appeal to the desired talent. When the hackathon was complete, DSM's recruiting team had drafts of the marketing collateral, taglines, ad copy and videos to recruit that particular talent segment.

Try to Replicate Aspects of the "Live" Candidate Experience

Social distancing due to COVID-19 has put a damper on less formal parts of the recruiting process, such as office tours and group lunches, that let candidates experience the work environment and meet their potential co-workers. Now that these are not an option for many organizations, think about how you can adapt those experiences to the virtual setting and give remote candidates a window into your culture. For example, if group outings are typically a part of your process, consider a structured group virtual meeting, such as a game or virtual challenge, to foster conversations between candidates and their prospective teams.

Increase Attention to Online Attraction

Set up teams to develop and host virtual hiring events like campus drives or job fairs. Ensure web content is informative and engaging. Consider hosting video events where candidates can submit questions to recruiters or even request a one-on-one video chat. These extra efforts will create a stronger personal connection for candidates. Further, companies can connect with passive candidates by hosting virtual development and networking events.

Intuit did this by creating target talent networks for specific roles, then connecting them with value-add activities.² Intuit identified an ideal profile, including desirable organizational alumni. By sponsoring skills development training, guest speakers and networking events, the company developed an engaged passive pipeline. This emphasis on providing value to candidates is even more effective now, when much of the workforce is looking to build new skills.



Interviews and Assessments

The new environment adds urgency to many of the challenges employers already faced in conducting interviews and candidate assessments. Hiring managers may be skeptical of hiring a candidate without meeting them face-to-face, which may prolong the process. A virtual recruiting landscape may also amplify candidates' uncertainty about adjusting to a new organization and make it harder for recruiters to design inclusive hiring processes. To address these obstacles, HR leaders should:

Ensure Hiring Manager Comfort With Virtual Hiring Processes

Gaining buy-in and driving hiring manager decisions has long been a challenge for recruiters. Now, for the first time, many hiring managers are having to make decisions without having ever met candidates in person. To make hiring managers more comfortable with making decisions in a virtual environment, provide training on virtual interview best practices. Build hiring managers' confidence that they have adequate information to assess the needed competencies. Supplement uncertainty with current data, such as trends in the labor market and in candidate behaviors and interests, to avoid delays in the hiring process.

Increase Transparency Into The Recruiting Process

News of layoffs, hiring freezes, rescinded offers and other disruptions over the past few months may leave candidates wary of participating in the recruiting process at all. When possible, increase transparency into the process by providing clear communication and added insight into the organization. You might expand the number of people they meet virtually or have them sit in on a meeting or virtual gathering to gain a stronger sense of the team's culture. Candidates are

having to make hiring decisions virtually as well, so ensuring they have the information they need can enable the two-way evaluation process.

Be Aware of Barriers to Accessibility and Inclusion

Some candidates may not have access to technology that will support virtual interviewing, or their current home lives may not be conducive to virtual interviews. As such, socioeconomic or personal circumstances may exclude otherwise qualified candidates from engaging in the process. Keep these candidates engaged and offer them flexibility during the process, such as rescheduling interviews when needed. Have a plan to reengage these candidates if they do not remain in contact.

Onboarding

Most organizations have shifted to virtual onboarding in response to the pandemic, which can make integrating new hires even more challenging. When new hires are working remotely, HR must be especially deliberate about keeping them engaged and helping them acclimate to working in a new organization. Here are some tips for designing an effective virtual onboarding strategy:

Map the Virtual Onboarding Journey

Identify what new hires think, feel and do when onboarded virtually. Conduct interviews or group discussions with recently onboarded employees, remote employees and managers to identify specific challenges related to onboarding in a virtual setting. Gather information on what new hires were expecting, doing, feeling and thinking at each stage. Once you have completed these interactions, use those insights to embed the new hires' experience into a journey map (see Table 1).

Table 1: Expectations, Activities and Thoughts of a Virtually Onboarded New Hire

Critical Experience Stages	Employee Expectations	Activities	Thoughts
Prejoining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will be given adequate information about what is expected of me and the first day plan. I will not face technical issues while logging in. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete prejoining formalities. Complete onboarding forms sent by HR. Share information required for the background check. Set up a workspace to work from home. Orientation sessions. Share a zip folder of all required documents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “How will I set up my system?” “I’ve never worked remotely, how will I manage that too in a new organization?” “I don’t even know what my first few days will look like?” “Will I get any work?”
First Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will be received warmly and given enough support to adjust to the new environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up a laptop/mobile device and learn to set up a VPN with the help of IT. Meet the manager virtually. Meet a peer mentor virtually. Attend virtual IT and HR orientation sessions. Share a zip folder of all required documents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “How will I get onboarded virtually?” “How will I create a first impression through virtual interactions?”
First Week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will be given clarity about my role, performance expectations and work responsibilities. I will be able to make friends. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receive onboarding plan from manager. Set up virtual meet-and-greet meetings with each team member. Set up regular biweekly check-ins with manager and peer coach. Complete finance-related documents and enrollment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Is it okay if I directly call my team members if I have questions?” “Is it okay to set up time with my peers for nonwork interaction?”
First Month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will be given adequate resources and training to do my work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn about day-to-day tasks and projects. Conduct discussions with the manager on a work plan and set expectations for working from home. Attend training sessions. Meet other stakeholders. Socialize with other team members virtually. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Who do I approach if I don’t know how to do a task?” “How do I approach other people? Should I message them or schedule meetings?”

Identify Gaps in the New Hire's Experience and Expectations at Each Stage

Prioritize actions you can immediately take to ensure a better experience for the next batch of new hires. Partner with other stakeholders such as HRBPs, recruiters, learning advisors and managers to create an updated onboarding plan. Assign ownership for each activity in the onboarding plan and create new content that is specifically relevant to a virtually onboarded new hire. Having a detailed project plan with clear ownership can help to alleviate confusion in a remote environment.

Cultivate a Peer Support System for New Hires

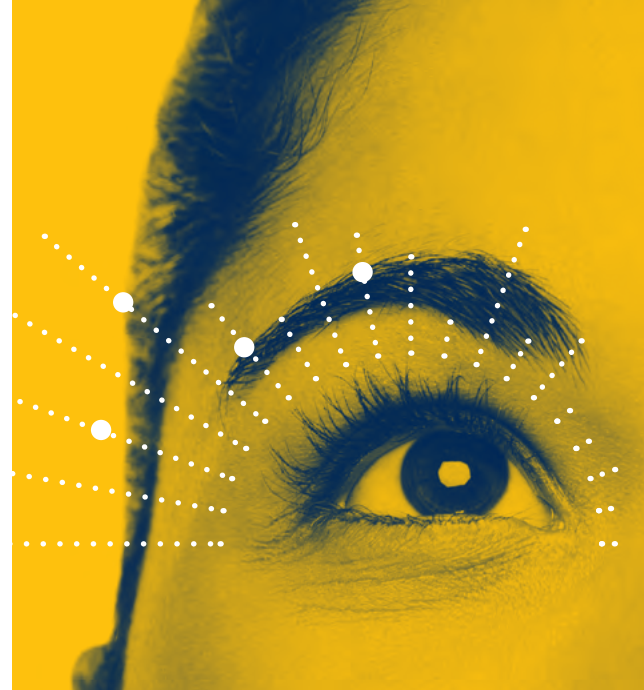
Consider assigning each new hire a team member as their onboarding partner or buddy. This team member can be a peer contact for any questions the new hire may have about navigating the organization, systems, processes and culture. Ask team members to set up virtual coffee breaks to have more casual conversations with their new teammate and build rapport. Encourage team members to use video when possible to create a more personal connection in meetings. Ask each team member to prepare a bio to share with the new hire, including their role and responsibilities, skills, interests and work style.

¹ DSM: Case Study, 2018

² Intuit: Case Study, 2018



Prepare for a new future of work post-COVID-19



HR leaders need to reexamine workforce and employee planning management, performance and experience as the coronavirus pandemic resets key work trends — many irreversibly.

- 1** More employees working remotely
- 2** Increased use of employee data
- 3** Greater role of the employer as a social safety net
- 4** Wider use of contingent workers
- 5** Critical skills no longer synonymous with roles
- 6** Imperative to manage employees as people first and workers second
- 7** Crisis response distinguishes top-tier brands
- 8** Organizations prioritize resilience as much as efficiency
- 9** Crisis adds to organizational complexity, straining design, culture and value proposition

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