Assessing Job Candidates

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How Firstmark Credit Union uses avatars for hiring

When contemplating new technology solutions for human recourses, credit unions should inquire about what's involved in getting the technology up and running, the amount of time required, how much training is necessary and what support will be provided.

$1 billion/104,000-member Firstmark Credit Union (*www.firstmarkcu.org*), with 314 employees in San Antonio, took a careful approach when implementing online hiring assessment software provided by Employment Technologies Corporation (*http://employmenttechnologies.com*), Winter Park, Fla., says Mona Hardin, senior talent acquisition specialist for the credit union.

The HR team began using ETC's enhanced pre-employment assessment program in February 2015 to strengthen the overall quality of candidates. The CU contracted with ETC to develop customized assessments for its teller and member service specialist positions. The program uses an avatar, an onscreen visual character, to describe the job to the candidates.

"An assessment is approximately one hour long and includes a view of a day in the life of a teller or MSS using an avatar," Hardin explains. "Once the avatar completes the script, which takes about six minutes, the candidate has an opportunity to answer eight questions, which validate his or her desire to continue through the process. The assessment then moves to a 45-minute online skills review." In the final step, the candidate responds to two questions that have been prerecorded by the hiring manager.

"The pre-recorded questions are accessed by the candidate through a computer microphone or by calling a phone number displayed on the computer monitor," Hardin continues. "When the candidate is connected, he or she responds to the questions, and the response is recorded.

"After the assessment is complete, the hiring manager has access to the entire simulation. The hiring manager or an account administrator can view the initial eight question responses (examples: Do you understand that you may be required to work on Saturdays? Do you understand that you will be required to successfully complete a pre-employment drug test?), the timed assessment, and then hear the candidate's recorded voice. The hiring manager can determine a rating."

Applications, resumes, phone screens and hiring manager interviews are still part of the process, says Hardin. But if a job seeker doesn't pass the assessment, time is saved by recruitment and by the hiring manager as well.

A project team, consisting of Hardin and three branch managers, worked with marketing and branch administration to create the avatar scripts and establish the implementation schedule. The team also reviewed and approved the final interview guide, responding to questions from peers to increase manager buy-in. The HR/recruiter training took two hours; hiring managers received four hours of structured interview and ETC implementation training.

Implementation was challenge-free, says Hardin, crediting the vendor but also Firstmark CU's deliberate approach. This consisted of a request for proposal; a formal implementation plan; directly working with a vendor representative; and preliminary discussions about future product enhancements/upgrades.

"As with any Web-based product, IT should be involved in the initial overview to assess any potential risks," Hardin adds. "And of course, senior-level management endorsement strengthens buy-in and the likelihood of success." For credit unions nationwide, internal fraud represents a significant and growing problem.

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