
I hate social media

This article was featured on RecruitingBlogs.com in November 2011

Let me start by making a retraction.

I don't hate social media. I hate the term 'social media' particularly when it is used in the context of recruitment.

The word 'social' in the Australian vernacular immediately conjures thoughts of "let's have a beer" or "what are you doing on the weekend?" Most importantly, the word doesn't align with the professional and typically conservative company brands that are carefully controlled....and for very good reason.

You ask any in-house recruitment or communications professional in the Australian Resource Sector if they use social media to communicate to their respective markets and the response is typically related to Facebook and how it is not allowed, with some few exceptions. Organisations generally fear Facebook because it means engaging with anyone who may elect to 'befriend' the organisation page or post random comments. It all seems a bit too.....well, social.

The other two tools most notably considered social media is Twitter and LinkedIn. My view on both is that the 'social' label applied in the context of recruitment is liberal at best, inaccurate at worst. Again, most recruiters using either tool will direct content outwards to a specific market, and very rarely will they engage in lengthy online social discussions with a candidate. For this reason, Twitter and LinkedIn are seen as safer sourcing options than Facebook but are perhaps unfairly labelled in the 'social' category.

The second problem associated with the 'social' moniker is the argument that the return on investment cannot be justified. To this I say rubbish, but more on this later.

What I do love however is DIGITAL media. As a recruiter, I'm interested to know where my target audiences 'live' on line, from which locations they access information, how often they access that information and the type of information. For our sector, this most often directs me to industry or job related websites as a start, but there are many, many more to consider. Again, these sites generally attract solid numbers in niche areas who actively consume the content provided.

My point then is this. Stop thinking about the entire online world as 'social media'. It's not. Aside from the top three sites most often spruiked, there is a significant digital world waiting to be accessed to great sourcing and branding effect.

Consider your audience too. Research indicates that 93% of engineers do not actively participate in 'social' media. They do however regularly consume content on industry and job specific websites. In this way, digital channels are proven to be highly effective in reaching this audience base. You won't see too many engineers for example posting their views or participating in active commentary on sites like LinkedIn, even though so many are registered on the site and actively consuming the content posted within specific groups.

Most organisations have their general branding advertising well covered. The gap consistently overlooked is the *story*.

Let's say the elements of your Employee Value Proposition are:

- Career development and global opportunities
- Diversity
- Leading edge technology and processes

These components make up your employer brand and your employer brand is your promise to those that matter. It's who you are, what you deliver, how you achieve it, what makes you different from others promising the same thing. How you communicate those ideas — the defined audiences, the messages you project, the channels and tools you use, and the desired results — are the way that you build that brand image.

How are you communicating these elements? More banner, newspaper or airport advertising? These are important branding tools but how are you telling me, as a potential candidate, what these elements specifically mean to me as an employee? What do you mean when you say you offer outstanding career development and global opportunities? What exactly does diversity mean? What sort of leading edge technology and processes?

Organisations need to punch through the clutter of predictable, industry language and tell us something real, something different. The truth will always differentiate your brand from the competition because you *are* different; it's just the advertising language that sounds so much like the competition.

And this is why I love digital media. I can write a blog once a month that tells a much broader story than a one-line EVP statement and post this out across multiple channels. I post it on my career website, send it to my talent pools or to the entire candidate database, or to my alumni. I can even do it as a video and send it virally via YouTube. Links to the blog can then be posted on a range of LinkedIn and Facebook groups, and shared on other industry specific websites. And the upside is that I don't have to necessarily engage in online dialogue because I'm providing potential candidates with the information they are seeking and intentionally providing them with a call to action.

There is a raft of 'safe' options for organisations to utilise to great effect online that don't necessarily fall into the 'social' category. You need to quickly find what they are because this is also where your target markets are likely to be.

I have a mantra in recruitment; 'stop telling me, and start showing me'. A job advert that cites 'career development', 'values based organisation', 'zero harm aspirations' and 'supportive of women in the workforce' no longer cuts it. Every organisation says exactly the same thing! Instead, I want to see how you actually demonstrate what you say - how do you develop careers, how are your values demonstrated and rewarded in the workplace, what is your level of indigenous or female participation and who might be role models I can aspire to, how you achieve your zero harm aspirations.

There are too many advantages to this approach to be ignored. Firstly, you can create followership by communicating regularly, which is really important when trying to engage the passive market. Secondly, the level of transparency creates trust; I have a far better idea of what it would be like to work for you. Thirdly, you are assisting candidates to better assess their own suitability for your job vacancy and organisation. Finally, you are providing easy access to the information online, 24/7, where I am.

This nicely brings me back to the argument about return on investment. This morning as I dropped my husband off at the airport, I noted a large billboard by a well known Australian resource employer proclaiming the Australian Resource Sector was growing and so were they. This is good branding and very well placed to capture traffic as it exited the airport. I'm sure the airport sales team was able to provide impressive details of the numbers of cars and potential eyes that would see that very billboard. But the question is - how do you know exactly? And how do you know how many went home that day or in subsequent days, weeks or months and took action based on seeing that billboard advertisement? You don't. But organisations are still more than comfortable in spending thousands of dollars on this type of advertising because it makes good branding sense, even though you can't specifically measure a return on investment.

The same goes for a newspaper advertisement. The newspaper sales team can tell you the number of papers sold each week and for each day. This is as close as you'll get, but we're satisfied to know that is the potential audience.

It's the same then for digital media. A banner advertisement is measured by the number of impressions and click throughs for example. Whilst the number of impressions can be impressive, how do you still know how many people actually took note of it, or even better, took action as a result of seeing it? You don't. But still it is the most popular form of online advertising, and for good reason.

So, given we know how many people use a particular website (whether that be LinkedIn with 120m users, Facebook with 750m users or an industry specific website), why is it so hard to conceptualise that either advertising or posting stories/blogs on sites like these would not return on investment? I can tell you, through Google analytics, how many 'reads' of a blog there is, how many people visited a particular website, how many click throughs from other websites from the blog link to my careers page. How is this any different to airport traffic or newspaper purchases?

Australian resource sector employers have an opportunity to significantly improve the level of engagement and transparency to the job market in order to attract talent using online media. Just don't call it social. At least not just yet.

<http://www.youtube.com/user/Socialnomics09#p/a/u/1/auczd40Ums>

ENDS

For further details please contact:

Media enquiries to:

Jody Elliott, Director
The Resource Channel
T: +61 8 9477 3300 / 0419 168 250.
E: info@theresourcechannel.com.au

Colin Hay / Belinda Newman
Professional Public Relations
T: +61 8 9388 0944
E: colin.hay@ppr.com.au
belinda.newman@ppr.com.au

About The Resource Channel The Resource Channel provides the Australian Resource Sector job market with a credible and accurate source of information on current and upcoming job opportunities in oil and gas, mining and mining construction. Employers and industry experts post employment, project and contract news, tips and information for the industry. The Resource Channel is a registered subsidiary of Industry Blogger Pty Ltd, ACN: 133 397 136.

The Resource Channel received the national award for the 'Best Blog Website' at the Australian Web Awards in Perth on 6 November 2010 and was awarded 'Best Industry Job Website' 2011 by Reuters International. The website attracts more than 300,000 visitors per annum.

Jody Elliott is Director and Founder of The Resource Channel, an award winning website dedicated to employment news and jobs for the Australian Resource Sector. A regular contributor to media and industry events, Jody is at the forefront of industry news and information relating to employment in the sector and has held senior roles at Santos, BHP Billiton, Australian Rail Track Corporation, amongst others.