Chapter 47
Recruitment and Selection Using Social Network Sites

Ralf Caers
Hogeschool-Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

Claudia Vigna
Hogeschool-Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

Tim De Feyter
Hogeschool-Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at how social network sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter can be used for recruiting staff members within or outside the organization and during selection procedures. The authors present the opportunities and review scientific literature to analyze whether these opportunities are already used by organizations and what effects their use may have. It thereby becomes clear that although much work has already been done in this field, there is still a critical need for a more profound understanding of matters and for more international research worldwide.

INTRODUCTION

The introduction and rise of online social network sites (SNSs) has been one of the most important trends of the years 2000. Boyd and Ellison (2007) define SNSs as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system". SNSs are thus classified as a part of social media, a broader concept also including for example YouTube, Wikipedia and virtual game worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Today, there are hundreds of these SNSs all over the world. Although it is difficult to find accurate and trustworthy data on the number of users (i.e. counting numbers of accounts being opened versus active accounts) for every platform, few will disagree that Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are the largest ones. Facebook reports having reached 750 million active users in 2011, 70% of which do not reside in the US, and hav-

ing a broad worldwide reach (Facebook, 2011). LinkedIn and Twitter each report to have attained 100 million users worldwide in 2011. When so many users gather at only so few websites and disclose personal information, these websites are bound to attract attention from the business sector, looking for new ways to increase sales and brand awareness or to communicate with stakeholders. In this regard, organizations have started to create Facebook fan pages, LinkedIn profiles and Twitter accounts named after them, that can be liked or followed by individual users. But SNSs provide more than only marketing opportunities and selling products. Organizations also need to find new employees to fill their vacancies and, as individuals disclose personal information and visualize their networks, SNSs may provide opportunities for organizations to enlarge, diversify and optimize their recruitment and selection efforts. This chapter will present an overview of how Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter can be used in a recruitment and selection context and review scientific literature in this domain. As we do not pretend all readers should be familiar with these SNSs and the services available to their users, we first provide a short overview based on the SNSs' current form.

A Theoretical Positioning of SNSs

Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter still co-exist today and there are multiple explanations why there is not a single platform yet. One explanation may be that the standards war has not been decided yet and there will be only one platform sometime in the future. Another is that SNSs are satisfying different needs and are sufficiently heterogeneous to co-exist. Leaving the debate aside on whether all users will once be willing to satisfy varying needs using one and the same platform, it is clear that Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter do indeed appear to be used today for different reasons.

There seem to be three main reasons why individuals long for an online representation of themselves. First, individuals want to broadcast information about their private life on the internet, creating an online profile that records and reflects what their lives are about. They want to share this information with friends and acquaintances, not with strangers. For them, Facebook provides an easy, standardized profile page to users that allows to post status updates and pictures and that is by standard shielded from anyone who is not accepted as a friend by the user.

Secondly, besides their private life, however, many users also have a professional life and wish to show themselves in a professional manner on the internet. They need an online CV, showing the labor market who they are and to interact professionally with business contacts (Dutta & Fraser, 2009). There is thus a demand for a platform, or a separate section of the same platform, which is different from the place where one posts personal information like holiday pictures and status updates revealing what one did in the weekend. Today, LinkedIn appears to be preferred to satisfy this need.

Thirdly, individuals want to broadcast their opinions and experiences to the world. They need to make their ideas more broadly known than only by those they hang out with in the pub, or allow the world to see their music recordings or their performances on sport events. They do not wish to broadcast their holiday pictures for everyone to see, but some information they want to spread even to people they do not really know. Twitter is satisfying this need today, as it allows users to send short text messages (tweets) to 'followers'. The latter are individuals who registered as willing to receive these tweets and may be complete strangers to the user.

We therefore suggest that there is a triangle of needs regarding online broadcasting of oneself, as presented in figure 1, and at least today, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter can be positioned at the three corners.

In the next section, we elaborate on how each of these three SNSs can be used for the recruit-

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