"Just Text Me" Job Interviews By Today's Preferred Communication Tool

Insights

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We live in a technological world—this is not news. We now communicate more through our electronic devices than we do in person—this is also not news. Yet, one interpersonal mechanism necessary for securing a job has remained largely sacrosanct—interviews. While you may be reading this thinking, "Well, what about Skype or video interviews? I've had at least one of those," you have acutely identified the growing trend of "interview by anywhere."

Recently, employers are taking this trend one step further by eliminating visibility in favor of efficiency and near limitless candidate accessibility through interviews by text. In the constantly evolving hiring market, employers can gain a significant competitive advantage by understanding how this new age process works, the benefits it can afford, and implementation strategies that simultaneously reduce potential risks.

How Does it Work?

Nearly every person who would be applying for a job with your company knows how to text. In most cases, all one needs is a cellular phone, a service plan, and some sort of typing capability (either manual controls or a "voice-to-text" feature). Internet access is not necessary as long as SMS messages can be sent and received.

Given that text is currently the most utilized data service worldwide, with approximately 23 billion texts sent every day, it seems readily apparent that it can be used in hiring. Surprisingly, many employers have not yet capitalized on the practice. At the forefront of this innovative movement are employers in industries spanning from manual labor, engineering, and sales, to medical, aviation, and tech, who have added text messaging platforms of several types to reach potential hires.

More akin to traditional interviews, some employers still prefer a "live" method, where the interviewer and interviewee block off time to chat in person or talk over the phone. Generally, this style mirrors a question and answer format, *i.e.* the interviewer does not provide the next question until the interviewee provides the answer to the previous question. While this method maintains formal questioning, it promotes focused interactivity between the participants and allows each person to mindfully craft their question or answer without extraneous pressures.

Meanwhile, questionnaire formats entail sending all questions to the interviewee at once, who then returns all of the answers in one message once completed. At the same time it facilitates reasoned

responses, this approach also allows the candidate greater opportunity to research or obtain other help on the answers, which may not be a desired or intended result.

The asynchronous process provides the most flexibility by eliminating time constraints. Interviewers can conduct multiple interviews simultaneously and take as much time as needed to review answers and send the next questions. Similarly, interviewees can enjoy little to no disruption of their daily lives. They can take mere minutes to innocently send texts throughout the work day rather than take an inconspicuous extended phone call in the middle of it. Interviewers have a greater likelihood of reaching on-the-go, busy professionals given the text message read rate is generally around 98% compared to a 20% read rate for emails.

Why Should Employers Do it?

In theory, technology often aims to streamline processes. In practice, results often vary. Interview by text, however, nearly promises a multitude of benefits for employers on a global basis. Whether a small business or an international corporation, an employer can contact potential candidates that were previously unreachable.

Rather than pursuing a candidate through laborious email and telephone correspondence and working to accommodate the individual's current work schedule, personal life, and concerns of discretion, employers can cut approximately half of that time spent by communicating through text message. Interviewing by text allows you to operate outside of the confines of a normal workday and geographical time differences, and the response time is often less than one minute. In so doing, you prioritize efficiency by reducing: (a) the amount of time spent on disinterested candidates and for hiring decisions overall; (b) the travel costs and environmental impact not spent on travel; and (c) and the likelihood of losing a valuable candidate due to lack of engagement.

Not only can interview by text facilitate progress through internal processes, but it can also promote external growth by perpetuating a contemporary brand image. Instant gratification is ensured by satisfying candidate desire for the hiring process to be convenient and easy. By accommodating those primary concerns, you can make a memorable impact on that one hire, and consequently attract other potential hires through word of mouth on other technological platforms such as social media. Employers have boundless potential to reinvent their image and desirability merely by doing something they likely already do—pick up the phone.

How To Make It Happen

In most cases, interview by text can likely be implemented with limited changes to an existing hiring practice. Hiring managers who use company-provided cell phones can continue doing so with increased focus on using text messaging for initial contact, preliminary interviews, or subsequent interviews, depending on your preference. Mass text messaging may be the most efficient means to secure seasonal workers, but may not be appropriate for a single high-level position. Therefore, it is important for you to first consider what goals you seek to achieve.

First, consider creating a policy outlining text message etiquette. If you specify how and when to initiate contact through text, whether short-form communication or use of slang is appropriate format, and the frequency with which texts should be sent, then expectations remain clear, privacy boundaries are set, and control over public image is maintained.

Second, further ensure quality control by choosing how communications are preserved. You can manage text messaging in one central location through recruitment marketing software, which keeps all communications in one place—including candidate applications, email communications, file notes, and any text messages.

Comprehensive and diligent recordkeeping also limits legal exposure. Take for example, a candidate who was ultimately not hired and later threatens a failure-to-hire claim on the basis of race discrimination. In its defense, the employer has the protections that text messaging intuitively affords, including that the employee conducting the interview did not see the candidate's face, body language, or mannerisms. Eliminating many identifiers, along with maintaining a permanent record of the interview, can deflate the candidate's argument that racial bias was involved. Whereas with in-person interviews, employers involved in similar legal issues had to rely primarily on interviewer notes that often documented only snippets of an interview.

Conclusion

Speed, efficiency, and innovation allow employers to attract a modern workforce. Undoubtedly, participating in popular technological movements such as text messaging can make employers relevant. Nonetheless, each employer must determine whether adapting its hiring practices to this new forum is feasible and prudent.

The story does not end there. Following initial implementation, each employer should heed any effects, make concerted efforts to identify issues, and continually adapt through consistent oversight of its processes, as well as industry and legal standards. One thing is certain: hiring practices are no longer stale. Make high-speed communications work for your business, and candidates of higher quality, talent, and diversity can follow.

For more information, contact the author at EPrice@fisherphillips.com or 916.210.0382.

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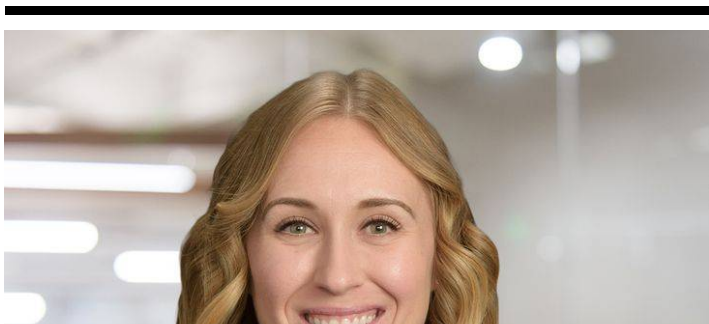
Erin Price
Partner
916.210.0382
Email