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Key Strategies to Help the Government Market Recruit and Retain Talent

❖ For the government market, recruiting and retaining top talent is more than an ambitious goal: it's essential to our nation's security and economic prosperity. The public sector is facing skills gaps in critical areas — everything from cybersecurity to public health — and there is fierce competition for this specialized talent across both government and industry. Meeting the mission in today's rapidly-changing environment will require new workforce strategies.

PRESENTED BY



Market Connections, Inc.

11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800
Fairfax, VA 22030
TEL 703.378.2025
marketconnectionsinc.com

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Monster Government Solutions

8280 Greensboro Drive, Suite 900
McLean, VA 22102
monster governmentsolutions.com

To gain a better understanding of the current talent challenges facing government agencies and contractors, government research firm Market Connections teamed with Monster Government Solutions on a study examining how hiring managers see the current state of recruiting and retention in the market.

This paper aims to analyze these findings and offer perspective on how agencies and contractors can maximize their brand in proactive recruiting efforts, expand the channels they use to find and engage the right talent, deliver the best possible hiring experience for candidates, and create a culture that fosters retention.



Branding Your Mission

The fight for top talent is on the rise, and the government sector typically cannot compete with the commercial sector on salary alone. However, the advantage government does offer can be summed up in one word: mission. Government and its contracting partners are tackling some of society's most important problems, and the purpose of making a difference and impacting people's lives is incredibly attractive, particularly among younger talent.

"Candidates don't set out to work for government, they set out to work for the FBI, NASA, USDA, or the City of San Francisco," says Susan Fallon Brown, Monster Government Solutions, Vice President, Global Strategy and Business Development. "These are organizations with important missions from national security to food safety, and they have a unique opportunity to brand their goals and values in their recruiting efforts."



More than half of the respondents (54 percent) agree that their employer brand stands out among competitors, yet there is a significant difference on this issue between contractors and government agencies. Nearly three quarters of contractors feel they have a strong brand compared to slightly less than half of government agencies. As younger talent forge their paths in mission-oriented, meaningful career fields, Fallon Brown says government agencies have an opportunity to establish and showcase their service-oriented brands to aggressively attract, recruit, and retain these individuals.

"The best way to see how your organization compares with other employers is through brand perception research," says Laurie Morrow, Vice President of Research Strategy at Market Connections. "This research lets you know where you stand in the market relative to your competition and how your brand resonates with both potential customers and employees."

After establishing a strong brand, the next step is to strategically feature your messaging across the communications channels that reach and influence top talent — from websites, review sites, job boards, and social media. For this, message testing ensures you are, in fact, leading with the experience that will engage the talent you want to attract.

For example, how you speak to IT or STEM candidates is different than how you speak to communications managers. Similarly, how you talk to recent college graduates searching for their first job is different than a senior manager. An effective brand should tell a compelling story about a specific agency or company to candidates, employees, and the market as a whole. With a clear understanding of how job seekers perceive their brand, agencies and contractors can move forward on building the right recruiting message to accurately capture their culture, vision, and purpose.

Meeting Candidates Where They Are

According to data from the Monster post-apply survey of approximately 11,000 job seekers in April 2016¹, nearly 80 percent of job seekers conduct career searches on social media, 50 percent use review sites, and 43 percent use commercial job boards. Fallon Brown says that reactive "post and pray" recruiting measures are no longer sufficient in today's competitive job market. To compete with the private sector, government employers need to reach job seekers where they are: online. By distributing the right mission message across the right digital channels, agencies can drive the most relevant talent to postings on USAJOBS.

¹ Source: 60 Hiring statistics you need to know for 2017, Employment Background Investigations



Attracting Talent

USAJOBS Top Resource Among Public Sector, While Other Tools & Channels Used Significantly Less Than Contractors



75% of Public Sector Uses USAJOBS



PUBLIC SECTOR	OTHER TOOLS & CHANNELS	CONTRACTOR
57%	Organization Site	74%
46%	Referrals	88%
42%	Job Boards (Monster, CareerBuilder, etc.)	80%
34%	Social Media Sites	66%
23%	Digital Advertising	46%
11%	Online Ratings/Reviews	50%

Government contractors are focused on diversifying their recruiting channel mix — four out of five use referrals and job board postings, including Monster.com, Indeed, and Career Builder, to attract the right talent. However, across all resources, government contractors cite the use of a variety of recruitment resources at higher rates compared to public sector respondents.

What this shows, says Fallon Brown, is that contractors have customized recruitment tactics to the age of information, taking a “be where the people are” approach that engages candidates on the platforms they utilize most. To keep pace, particularly with younger job seekers, public sector employers need to embrace technologies that will streamline their search process and engage the right talent, where it lives.

Morrow says that usability testing helps all organizations improve their targeting by determining where the candidates are facing challenges with the technology. By running tests within key audiences, organizations can find weak points in their user experience and help make the necessary improvements. This research can also uncover which platforms and digital channels an organization’s ideal candidates are using.

Leveraging a variety of platforms has the added benefit of reaching passive job seekers — talented people who may not be actively looking for new opportunities. Passive seekers aren’t visiting USAJOBS, says Fallon Brown, but they are active in social media and interacting online. While they are not specifically looking for a new job, they may be open to new, interesting professional opportunities in support of a great mission. Through highly tailored branding, social media and talent search engines, government HR professionals can seamlessly reach and engage hard-to-find, highly skilled talent, such as veterans, that can drive mission success.

Hiring Experience Falls Short of Expectations

Ratings Even Lower Among the Public Sector

74%

of total respondents rated the candidate hiring experience as average, below average or poor

32%

of public sector respondents rated it as poor or below average

COMPARED TO

11%

of contractors



Embracing a Consumer Hiring Experience

The Office of Personnel Management’s estimated hiring time for federal personnel is, on average, 106 days. That’s simply not competitive in today’s fast-paced, dynamic talent market. It is asking a great deal for highly skilled candidates with multiple private sector options to navigate inefficient hiring processes, outdated hiring technology, and unreasonable hiring timelines. The digital age has dramatically transformed recruitment expectations, with many job seekers adopting a consumer mindset in which they are “shopping” for the right career. To succeed, public sector employers must close the gap with their private sector counterparts and build recruiting experiences that meet the expectations of today’s top candidates.

Candidates want to know what is happening throughout the application process, and they expect decisions to be made quickly. Respondents agree there is need for improvement: only one third are satisfied with the hiring management technology currently in place. Technology and processes need



to be faster, automated and more flexible to attract, find, hire, and onboard top talent. To help streamline the overall hiring process, public sector recruiters can automate the hiring process and bolster user experience among job seekers by leveraging dynamic tools that enable individuals to access information about an agency and available job positions within the organization. Technology in place should be user-centric and provide an exceptional user experience for applicants as well as recruiters alike.

Building a Culture of Retention

While recruitment is important, employee retention is equally critical. On average, one in five employees leave their jobs annually. Improving employee retention not only saves time; it also saves money, since the cost to fill a new position can exceed \$4K, according to the [Society for Human Resource Management](#). Monitoring

employee experience, engagement and satisfaction through data-driven research, and then structuring organizational initiatives and strategies around the results, can help agencies with retention.

More than one-half of respondents across the board listed creating a more positive work environment and providing flexible schedules as the primary strategies to retain top employees. However, government contractors are more likely than their public sector counterparts to implement diversity and inclusion initiatives, give equitable compensation for performance, and implement creative benefits for their employees, such as flexible scheduling. To keep in touch with employee needs and wants, organizations should consider regular employee satisfaction surveys, focus groups, and in-depth interviews conducted by a neutral third party. These evaluations encourage honest feedback without fear of repercussions, and can help agencies and contractors alike guide their strategy to ensure they do not lose top employees to their competitors. Morrow says these surveys can also provide valuable information on how new hires viewed the onboarding process.

In addition to addressing employee feedback, Fallon Brown says that public sector organizations should prioritize their agency's purpose and mission and show employees viable career opportunities in the long term.

Conclusion

Building a successful workforce has dramatically transformed from a singular transaction to a round-the-clock, dedicated effort, involving branding, engagement with recruits, and employee retention. It requires having real data about employee satisfaction, brand perception, and the use of hiring management technology to develop a great candidate experience. Through the use of the latest recruitment

technologies, organizations can put systems and tools in place that meet the needs of today's job seekers and position their organization to establish an enthusiastic and skilled workforce.

With the strong missions that exist within government, agencies and the contractors who support them can win in today's competitive market by understanding exactly what top talent is looking for and leading with a message that demonstrates how their organization will fulfill those needs.

How Are You Keeping Your Key Staff?

Top Strategies to Retain Talent



MORE THAN

1/2

OF RESPONDENTS LISTED:

Creating a more positive work environment

Providing flexible schedules

— HOWEVER —

Contractors implement strategies at a higher rate than public sector

STRATEGIES	CONTRACTOR	PUBLIC SECTOR
Diversity and inclusion initiatives	54%	37%
Equitable compensation for performance	52%	29%
Career navigation tools	46%	28%
Creative benefits packages	44%	11%



About the Study

Market Connections and Monster teamed to conduct a blind, online study of 200 government HR and hiring managers October — November 2017. Respondents included public sector HR and recruiting professionals and hiring managers in federal, state and local governments, as well as HR and recruiting professionals at government contracting companies. Of the 200 HR and recruiting professionals and hiring managers, 75% are from the public sector and 25% are from government contractors.

To download white paper and infographics

Visit <https://marketconnectionsinc.com/2018recruitstudy/>

About Market Connections, Inc.

Market Connections delivers actionable intelligence and insights that enable improved business performance and positioning for leading businesses, trade associations and the public sector. The custom market research firm is a sought-after authority on preferences, perceptions, and trends among the public sector and the contractors who serve them, offering deep domain expertise in information technology and telecommunications; healthcare; and education.

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About Monster and Monster Government Solutions

Monster is a global leader in connecting people and jobs. Every day, Monster makes meaningful human connections that advance lives and strengthen businesses by helping individuals find better jobs and employers find the best talent. For more than 20 years, Monster has worked to transform the recruiting industry. Monster Government Solutions, a wholly owned subsidiary of Monster Worldwide, Inc., based in McLean, Virginia, has been working with leaders in government and education to help them successfully find, hire and develop their workforces. More than 100 government agencies, including 13 of 15 cabinet-level agencies, and all five branches of the uniformed armed services, rely on Monster Government Solutions products and services every day to run their recruitment efforts. Monster is a digital venture owned by Randstad North America, a subsidiary of Randstad Holding, a \$26 billion (US) global provider of HR services.

For more information, visit: www.monstergovernmentsolutions.com/