Our patients should feel confident that the NHS is recruiting the very best staff. NHS Jobs gets 250,000 visitors every month. How can trusts ensure that more of these potential applicants are the type of people they are looking to employ?

Traditionally, recruitment has attracted applicants through adverts in local newspapers and trade journals and by word of mouth. In the past ten years, there has been a growth in online recruitment through websites such as Guardian Jobs, Monster.com and NHS Jobs.

However, the increasing use of social media raises the question of whether platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook can help attract a higher percentage of quality applicants than a ‘passive’ online advert.

Key points

— Social media can and should be used to help advertise jobs.

— Social media platforms aren’t just used by young people, older applicants can also be reached through them.

— There are different levels of social media use. All take time and resources.

— You can use information from an applicant’s online profile(s) during shortlisting and interview as long as you do not discriminate on the grounds of age, sex, disability, race, marriage, religion and belief or sexual orientation.
Background

This briefing is for NHS human resources (HR) directors and managers. It is also relevant for chief executives and directors. It looks at:

— how NHS organisations can use social media platforms to increase the number of relevant job applications

— how a permissive approach to staff using social media can improve an organisation’s recruitment success.

Social media platforms

There are hundreds of social media platforms. We will consider the following three:

Facebook

Facebook is the UK’s most popular social media platform, with two thirds of the UK’s 40 million internet users¹ having accessed it.² In March 2012 Facebook had a unique audience of 25.7 million people in the UK.³

Twitter

Twitter has 10 million active users in the UK⁴ and in March 2012 had 6.2 million unique visitors.⁵ Healthcare professionals are fast finding niches on Twitter to help, support and learn from their peers. Nurses, through communities such as #wenurses, epitomise this approach to networking.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn has 10 million members in the UK.⁶ Unlike Facebook and Twitter, LinkedIn markets itself as the platform for professionals to join and network on,⁷ and is perhaps the most obvious of the three platforms to use for recruitment.

Across all of these platforms, groups of healthcare professionals are connecting and talking to each other, independent of shifts, geography and hierarchy. They offer peer support, humour, videos, podcasts and, importantly, job recommendations. Healthcare professionals can stay in daily contact with people they trained with and have met during their careers. This opens up a range of possibilities to improve and complement your current recruitment practices.

So, in theory, this sounds good. But what about in practice? What could you do to bring elements of social media recruitment to your organisation?
Organisations recruiting through social media

This section outlines how you can use social media platforms to enrich your recruitment processes. It looks at whether recruitment through social media can lead to a greater percentage of quality applications or just a greater number of applications.

Targeted recruitment and social media

Using social media, you can help prospective, quality employees find job opportunities that suit them, by:

— increasing awareness of the NHS Jobs website and the jobs available at your organisation by broadcasting them on social media platforms

— targeting individuals and groups of people with relevant information based on your organisation’s workforce plan

— making sure your organisation is social media friendly – it’s no use attracting candidates via social media then preventing them from using it when they join your organisation.

For example, your workforce plan might indicate that your organisation will require more mid-level (Band 7) cardiology nurses over the next 12 months. Current recruitment for the nurses is behind where it needs to be and is rated ‘amber’ on your risk register. You need to increase the volume of applications and, ideally, the percentage of quality applicants.

Figure 1 outlines what work your organisation could do on social media platforms to increase the number of applications. The table shows the ‘basic’, ‘middle’ and ‘top’ options that are available to you. Note that different approaches can be used with different audiences in the same time period and that the required resources (time and skills) increase as you move towards the top category.

Your organisation can broadcast job opportunities (see page 4) or target relevant audiences (see page 5).

**Figure 1. Organisations – the sliding scale of using social media for recruitment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>Top</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>— Broadcast job adverts</td>
<td>— Map local online recruitment stakeholders</td>
<td>— Strategically target individuals and groups who can help you achieve your workforce plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Provide links to NHS Jobs on your corporate website</td>
<td>— Build relationships with other relevant organisations in your online recruitment network</td>
<td>— Set out your communications plan to consistently promote your EVP and jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Signpost applicants with queries to NHS Jobs help pages</td>
<td>— Build your employee value proposition (EVP)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Required resources
Broadcasting job opportunities

The more people who see a job opportunity, the more likely it is you will receive a greater number of applications. For example, broadcasting (by using LinkedIn updates, Facebook updates or tweeting) your mid-level cardiology nurse opportunities gives them a greater audience than just visitors to the NHS Jobs website or recipients of an NHS Jobs email alert (see Figure 2).

However, broadcasting might not raise the percentage of quality applicants and can increase your shortlisting workload by attracting more inappropriate applications (see box below for how to reduce inappropriate applications).

Figure 2. An example of a broadcasting tweet

LCH NHS Trust @LCHNHSTrust
Are you looking for a new exciting role? Have a look at our new opportunities here ow.ly/ikriG

Reducing the number of inappropriate applications

Using social media increases the risk of you receiving a greater number of inappropriate applications. You can mitigate this risk by:

— making sure your advert clearly states applicants without the required qualifications and experience will not be shortlisted
— including a warning on the advert that it may close early if you have received enough quality applications
— ensuring the person specification correctly identifies all essential qualifications and experience.
Targeting relevant audiences with job opportunities

Just as the NHS doesn’t operate independently from other organisations in the ‘offline world’, the same is true online. All NHS organisations are part of an inter-connected network of employers, trainers and advertisers, shown in Figure 3.

NHS organisations and their recruitment processes interact with and rely on various public, third and private sector organisations.

Many of these will have online profiles and will be talking to individuals who are potential quality applicants.

Just think how much more effective you could be if these organisations were supporting your recruitment.

---

Figure 3. The organisations which an NHS organisation connects to

*DWP: Department for Work and Pensions*
Identifying the key organisations that interact with your organisation’s recruitment strategy

Step 1: Using an example from your trust (for example, a mid-level cardiology nurse) sketch out who your organisation could talk to online to promote the job to relevant people.

Step 2: Identify which social media platforms these organisations are using, and ask your recruitment team to start networking with them.

For cardiology nurses, relevant organisations might include the British Heart Foundation; the local university which runs a masters course for cardiology nurses; the Nursing and Midwifery Council; and the online nurse community, #wenurses. By asking these organisations for their help in promoting your job advert, you help them provide relevant content to their own audiences and build up ‘social capital’ with them.

Fast forward a month and you find the job advert that has been targeted to nurse communities online has resulted in an increased number of applicants, and an increase in the percentage of quality applicants.

The social media platforms have enabled you to get your job advert in front of relevant individuals. Some of them will have applied, others will have told their friends about it. Social media has complemented your recruitment strategy and the recruitment risk is now ‘green rated’.

Getting personal – using social media to tell your recruitment narrative

While broadcasting and targeting relevant audiences online enables you to increase the number and quality of applications, the information provided to the applicant remains only that which is given in the job advert.

Social media gives you the chance to move on from this one-dimensional description and build a recruitment narrative around a job advert.
Social media gives you the opportunity to show your organisation’s personality and promote your employee value proposition. But, just as writing for a website needs a different style to writing a report, social media platforms also have their own styles.

Specific functionalities like ‘hashtags’ or ‘likes’ affect the vocabulary and syntax used on different platforms. Acronyms are created to get over the character limits and increase the speed of typing and reading. The format of a tweet or a Facebook update is scrutinised to get more ‘click throughs’ and more people reading. Here are a few of the best ‘link bait’ tactics.

— People love lists – change “Here are some jobs at NHS Employers” to “Here are the top five jobs at NHS Employers this week”.

— Use personal pronouns to inject some personality and opinion – “Here are the top five jobs at NHS Employers” becomes “I love working at NHS Employers, come and join me with one of these five great job opportunities”.

— Pose a question to the reader – “Looking for a great new job helping people get better? Check out this week’s jobs”.

— Build content around the job opportunities – “Want to know what it’s like to work here as a paediatric nurse? Check out Jill’s blog post”.

To attract the best quality candidates, you need to show prospective candidates how good a place to work your organisation is. Pay and terms and conditions are an important factor for applicants, but the environment and the people they will work with are also key. Social media offers an enriching addition to the regular “If you’d like to know more about the job call John/Jill on ...” option.

For example, the matron and lead consultant of a cardiology ward both write blog posts about why they love working at the trust and on the ward. You publish these on your corporate website and promote them in your social media updates and NHS Jobs job advert. In the same area on your website you also have posts from the director of nursing and the chief executive which set out their vision for the organisation and its staff.

By using these tactics you can begin to build your employee value proposition and promote it online to prospective employees. The content of the posts will put off some and attract others. This approach will help increase the number of good quality applicants who fit with your organisation’s vision and narrative.

Writing for social media platforms

“The content of the posts will put off some and attract others. This approach will help increase the number of good quality applicants who fit with your organisation’s vision and narrative”
Online staff advocates

Social media thrives when people talk to people. Of course, there is a person behind every corporate account, but often that person isn’t allowed to inject much personality into the account. NHS Leeds (@nhsleeds) and Manchester (@nhsmanchester) are refreshing exceptions to the rule. It is always nicer to communicate with a face in the avatar, rather than an organisation’s logo.

Figure 4 gives an overview of the options that are available to an individual when recruiting through social media. Note that different approaches can be used with different audiences in the same time period and that the required resources (time and skills) increase as you move towards the ‘top’ category.

As you reach the top category, the individual comes into their own, because they are able to set out their personality more clearly than an organisation.

Experience suggests that as you move into the top category of Figures 1 and 4, the tone of the organisation’s voice changes. This is because in the top category you are often working one-to-one with other people and not talking to large numbers or groups of individuals. In this situation, an individual staff member’s social media account(s) is much more effective than the organisation’s (see Figure 5 on page 9 and the case study on page 10). After all, wouldn’t you like a friend to say they think you’d be perfect for a job you’ve always looked for?

Figure 5 shows that the ability of an organisation to effectively perform at the top end of recruiting through social media can be hampered by an anonymous, corporate tone.

As you move up the levels of recruiting through social media, so resource requirements go up. The percentage of quality applicants can be increased if strategic and targeted social media plans are used.

Organisations which follow the permissive approach to staff use of social media (outlined in our briefing HR and social media in the NHS, will benefit from the strength of an individual’s voice when using social media to target high-quality applicants.

Paid-for advertising on social media

Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter offer the option of buying advertising space on their websites. Importantly, the space you buy can be focused on things your target audience likes and talks about, for example, nursing.

In particularly competitive areas, such as London with its many NHS organisations across a relatively small geographic area, the option to advertise your job opportunity on these platforms may be the difference between getting the best candidate and not. As always, the costs must be weighed up against the benefits.

You can find out more about each platform’s advertising offers at the following links:

- www.facebook.com/advertising
- http://talent.linkedin.com/Recruiter
- https://business.twitter.com
Figure 4. Individuals – the sliding scale of using social media for recruitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>Top</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast job adverts that are specific to your profession</td>
<td>Target individuals you know with relevant jobs</td>
<td>Regularly engage with key online stakeholders and opinion formers to promote your organisation’s EVP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Begin to build your view of your organisation’s EVP</td>
<td>Become an online advocate for your organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Helping people with the recruitment process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Required resources

Figure 5.

- Organisation’s voice
- Individual’s voice
- Resource required
- Percentage of quality applicants
A case study in excellence: The NHS Graduate Management Training Scheme

The scheme has traditionally been promoted on university campuses across the UK. From feedback received, it was clear there was a need to carry on the conversation started between students and NHS reps at various careers fairs and campuses. Regular social media use by the target audience offered a chance to continue these conversations independent of location.

Rob Farace, Senior Programme Lead for Resourcing, describes their approach to social media:

“We use social media to help build engagement with candidates for the scheme. It is an invaluable tool in giving candidates an insight into the culture of our scheme and the type of people we are looking for. Social media requires us to be flexible in how we communicate with candidates – it certainly can’t be Monday to Friday, nine to five. And it also requires us to adopt a different tone of voice. "Judging by the positive feedback we’ve received, and the use candidates make of our social media channels, the investment of our time has certainly been worthwhile. Candidates appreciate the time we invest with them and the opportunity they have to talk to us in an environment and context they find helpful.”

Using its Facebook page the scheme organises live Q&A sessions with current trainees and managers. This allows prospective applicants to engage with those already in the NHS and get a feel for what life is like as a graduate trainee, and builds the scheme’s online employee value proposition. Applicants engage far more with information posted by real people than by the organisation. This approach has enabled applicants to break through the usual ‘application talk’ and get a true insight into the NHS.

Through this approach, the scheme has developed an online talent pool of students and graduates who have helped improve the quality of applicants.

In January 2013 the scheme won the 'Best use of social media in the public sector' award at the National Graduate Recruitment Social Media Awards. In April 2013 it won the 'Target Jobs Award for Most Popular Graduate Recruiter in the Public Sector'.

Of the future, Rob says: “It would be hard for us to move away from using these communication channels, as candidates have made it abundantly clear this is their preferred method of talking to us.”

The NHS Graduate Management Training Scheme is run by the NHS Leadership Academy

Follow the NHS Graduate Management Training Scheme on Twitter: @NHSGradScheme

“Applicants engage far more with information posted by real people than by the organisation. This approach has enabled applicants to a true insight into the NHS”

Referral recruitment without the downside?

‘Referral recruitment’ is the recruitment of new employees by existing employees nominating their colleagues and contacts for a job.

As the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills details, there are some disadvantages to this approach. It is, however, a useful way of attracting staff who are a good fit with the organisation. Many of the disadvantages lie in referred candidates gaining preferential treatment to those who have not been referred. The NHS Jobs website reduces this risk.

By leveraging your own workforce to help advertise job adverts to their friends and colleagues through their social media accounts, you increase the likelihood of a greater number of quality candidates applying for the job, without giving those people an undue advantage.
Conclusion

Can social media have a place in your recruitment process? Yes. How integral a part this is depends on whether the staff you are targeting are using social media platforms and how much capacity you and your team have to resource recruitment through social media.

You can help your organisation’s recruitment processes and policies keep up. Good luck!

To find out more about how NHS Employers can support your workforce planning, visit our workforce planning section or contact enquiries@nhsemployers.org

References

4. Twitter now has 10m users in UK
6. LinkedIn reaches 10 million members in the UK
7. LinkedIn press release (September 2012)

Further reading

NHS Employers has produced a number of briefings on social media, all available at www.nhsemployers.org/publications

— HR and social media in the NHS
— Increasing staff engagement with social media
— Social media for chief executives: the essential guide
— Supporting staff wellbeing with digital tools
NHS Employers

The NHS Employers organisation is the voice of employers in the NHS, supporting them to put patients first. Our vision is to be the authoritative voice of workforce leaders, experts in HR, negotiating fairly to get the best deal for patients.

We help employers make sense of current and emerging healthcare issues to ensure that their voice is front and centre of health policy and practice. We keep them up to date with the latest workforce thinking and expert opinion, providing practical advice and information, and generating opportunities to network and share knowledge and best practice.

We work with employers in the NHS to reflect their views and act on their behalf in four priority areas:
• pay and negotiations
• recruitment and planning the workforce
• healthy and productive workplaces
• employment policy and practice.

The NHS Employers organisation is part of the NHS Confederation.

Acknowledgements

This briefing was written by Alex Talbott, www.attdigital.co.uk

Contact us

For more information on how to become involved in our work, email getinvolved@nhsemployers.org
www.nhsemployers.org
enquiries@nhsemployers.org
@nhsemployers
NHS Employers
www.youtube.com/nhsemployers

NHS Employers
50 Broadway
London
SW1H 0DB

2 Brewery Wharf
Kendell Street
Leeds LS10 1JR

This publication was produced by the NHS Confederation publications team:
publications@nhsconfed.org

This document is available in pdf format at www.nhsemployers.org/publications
This document may not be reproduced in whole or in part without permission.
The NHS Confederation (Employers) Company Ltd. Registered in England.
Company limited by guarantee: number 5252407
Ref: EBR109201