



# A Conversation with Hiring Pros

A White Paper from the St. Louis Chapter of the  
American Marketing Association

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this Roundtable was to better understand what college recruiters look for in first-time employees; how the recruiting process has evolved as a result of new technology; what colleges can do better in preparing students; and what companies are doing to enhance the ability of new hires to succeed.

We are taking a different approach with this Roundtable. Previous Roundtables have focused on topics of the day of interest to corporate side, agency and supplier side marketers. However, about 20 percent of our chapter membership consists of college professors and students. In an effort to address the needs of this important AMA-STL constituency, we recently conducted a roundtable discussion with three local human resources executives who do extensive recruiting of new and recent college graduates to sales and marketing positions. This discussion was the 22<sup>nd</sup> in a series sponsored by the St. Louis Chapter of the AMA.

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The participants in this roundtable were:

Jan Bryzeal  
Vice President, Human Resources  
GROUP360

Larry Thomas  
General Partner and Director of Internships and University Recruiting  
Edward Jones

Matt Schumacher  
Global Employment Branding Manager  
Monsanto

The AMA Roundtable was held February 9, 2015, at L&E Research, located in Frontenac, Mo. The session was moderated by Dan McGrath, Board Member, St. Louis AMA. A special thanks goes to L&E for use of their great facilities.

## **The Recruiting Process**

During the Roundtable, the hiring pros were questioned about the hiring process. Among the key findings are the following:

### **1) LinkedIn plays a key role in recruiting today**

LinkedIn is the dominant vehicle for recruiting college educated employees. It's used to identify potential candidates, place job ads and create interest in the company via posted content. As LinkedIn evolves, it's becoming more and more important to recruiting managers.

"LinkedIn is by far the tool of choice for us."

"I think that LinkedIn is absolutely a great way to proactively find candidates as opposed to just waiting for people to find us."

"We use LinkedIn's recruiter tool to search the entire database. We place a good deal of our jobs on LinkedIn too. A lot of people that come to our LinkedIn page, come to look for jobs so we are making sure that all of our career sites are written appropriately for the right key words. We do a little bit of social media, Facebook and Twitter, but I wouldn't say those have been fruitful for us."

"I think LinkedIn is trying to provide content thru LinkedIn Pulse and some of the other things that have launched recently such as the LinkedIn influencers."

"I've noticed that when people update their LinkedIn profile, there's a good chance they're looking for a job. That's an opportunity for us."

### **2) Hiring pros have unique relationships with some schools**

All of the hiring pros admit to having special relationships with certain schools. They tend to focus more on these schools because they produce individuals with the types of majors and experience they seek.

"We certainly have relationships with universities. One of the great schools is Mizzou. The reason is that they have an agency setup on campus that does real work – real budget responsibilities and real deadlines. When people have that experience as part of their academic career, it's as good as agency experience. It

gives them a step up. We have relationships with other colleges of course and we recruit at other fairs. We do recruit strategically based upon our business location.”

“We as a company have our core schools that we focus on. Most of those are schools in the Midwest and have strong agricultural programs.”

### **3) Retention is the biggest recruiting challenge**

When asked what was the thing that most kept them up at night, all mentioned employee retention. Hiring and developing personnel is expensive, and the recruiters want to select candidates that will remain at the company for a significant period.

“The biggest recruiting challenge is retention; having that person still in the chair two to three years from now. I worry about attracting the right people. I want people that are really interested in the career. I don’t want to train the people and have them walk away.”

“I sense a shift in the economy. It seems as if we are getting more toward a seller’s market rather than the buyer’s market, and that leads to greater problems with retention. When people are getting out of school, their interest is in maximizing their income and one of the ways to do that faster is to move jobs or positions.”

“If you still have somebody at the five-year mark, they are probably going to be with you for some time. So making sure that during that first five years they feel stimulated, feel opportunities to grow, feel connected is a big area for us. We tend to lose people around that four year or five year mark if they don’t feel they are fully valued and they don’t feel the company is helping them as much as they can.”

### **What Hiring Pros Look for in New Hires**

During the Roundtable, participants also identified what they look for in potential job candidates. Among the most important characteristics were:

#### **1) An understanding that extended beyond their college major**

The hiring pros indicated that they are looking for candidates that have a broader understanding of the business and know how to use their specialty to bring value to the company.

“Obviously I think it makes any individual stronger the more they understand the entire business as opposed to just their silo.”

“We ideally look for people that have kind of a foot in two different places where they have a technical background or they know the IT type thing but also can understand how to use that practically in other aspects.”

“The big thing is they understand their particular area of education, be it biology or IT or something else. And not only understanding what it is but how it can be applied. That has really been the benefit they bring to the business by doing that. You know you can be a programmer but if you don’t understand the impact you are having and how what you’re programming extends down the line to our customer, that is a miss right there. We need people that really understand that broad breadth of the value that they bring to our company.”

## **2) Have a history of results**

Another key factor sought is a pattern of results and accomplishments. Not only are they looking for involvement in campus activities, they are looking to see what the student accomplished through their participation. For example, did they provide leadership?

“I think being able to show results is the big area of a resume. Saying you’ve done coursework and have this skill is a small part of the story. But if as a college student you led the blood drive for your sorority and you increased participation by X percent, that is a huge thing for us.”

“We are looking for people with accomplishments/results. Were you are involved on the campus or in some not-for-profit space. And we also look to see if you are involved in those spaces; what have you done with them? Are you leading them? We are looking for the ability to take the things you are doing and become a leader. It's not just signing up for them.”

## **3) Military service is a clear plus**

This is not just flag waving. The hiring pros indicate that candidates with military service have greater maturity, more life experience and additional skillsets than those who go directly from high school to college to starting their careers.

“We would love to hire more military people who have done their service and gone back to school. The background they get in the military, I think they are more prepared when they come into work for us.”

“We really like hiring people from the military. They’ve received some experience. They’ve got some skillsets. The thing that amazes me is how good some of these young men and women are at ages 17 to 22. Some are just so ready.”

#### **4) Exposure to other cultures**

Similarly, hiring managers are impressed by those who have some exposure to other cultures, either through travel or spending time studying abroad. This will become even more important as business becomes more global.

“We are a company with operations all over the world, and having a broad appreciation of the world at large and the diversity of people and thought and experiences is going to be tremendously important for our employees.”

#### **5) Coding skills**

A February 5, 2015 article in the WSJ, titled “Should Harvard Business School Hit Refresh,” covered how some of the top business schools in the country are being perceived as lackluster in training the next generation of CIOs and CTOs, which led to this discussion. While knowing how to code may not be that critical today, the hiring managers believe it is likely to be more important in the future as everything becomes more digital.

“Everything is going much more digitally, online. So being able to have that aspect of skill on your resume would be huge. Probably not as impactful now, but I can see ten years down the road, any big company, if you know how to code, you know how to talk to coders, you may not be able to do it specifically but if you can go to the IT department and here is what you are going to need to do to get it, it makes you that much more valuable.”

### **Best Advice for Future Grads**

During the Roundtable, the hiring pros were asked what advice they would give to a student in their second or later year of college or even someone who had recently graduated. Among their recommendations: 1) work on communication skills; 2) network; 3) become involved in internship programs; 4) present yourself in a serious manner; and 5) be open to change.

“I would say network. Hone your communications skills so you can have conversations with anybody, your parents, friends, etc.”

“Internships are the best in terms of giving an individual a look under the hood so to speak. Look at companies that do internships well. All companies don’t. Look for the companies that really do them well and they give the individual responsibility, projects, a way to get results. It really moves that person steps ahead of others.”

“Positioning themselves whereby others will take them seriously. What I mean by that is some 22 or 23 year-olds don’t look serious. So we tend to pass on them because they are not serious enough. If you are going to work for a big company, they want serious people that are going to hit the ground with results. Position yourself in a way that people will take you seriously”.

“If you don’t have it figured out right now, be open to any experience. You never know where that is going to go. The first job you take is not the dream job but there is still plenty you can learn in that job. And you never know where it’s going to lead or what it’s going to do. Your career can go many different ways and it will. Don’t feel like the decision you make right out of college is the one that you will do forever. Be open to taking new opportunities and new experiences. Nothing is going to be forever. You are better off making mistakes now and learning from them, than feeling like you have to make the right decision right now.”

### **Onboarding/Developing New Employees**

During the Roundtable, the hiring pros were also asked what they do to “onboard” and then further develop new employees. In terms of onboarding new employees,

companies tend to provide much more orientation for those in intern programs than for direct hires who are expected to hit the ground running.

“For those in our interning coop program, we spend a couple days acclimating them to the business: who we are as a company, what we do and then also kind of try to talk about working in corporate America. We introduce them to a number of people throughout the company. We try to make them as much a part of the team as we can make them. They get real responsibilities. They get to work on real projects. And that really allows us to see what they are capable of.”

“For full time hires, people that wouldn’t be right out of college, they are thrown a little bit more into the fire. We put together kind of a 30-day, 60-day, 90-day plan that we give the hiring managers for a check list of here are some people they should be meeting with, here is the type of activity, here are all the classes they should be taking. Thirty days later they come to our new hire orientation program where we kind of dive deeper into a lot of the subjects of working here.”

“The agency world does not have the luxury of a comfortably-paced orientation for new FTEs. We actually outline the things that we think are important for new people coming up to speed. Most of our new college graduates we hired after they had been trained with us. So they have had that luxury of a little bit more attention, orientation. Managers want them to hit the ground running.”

For developing employees longer term, the hiring managers focus on career planning and mentoring. Each of the companies represented have systems for helping employees plan their future development.

“Last year we launched a new online tool that allows employees to put together their road map for the next five years. We ask them what is your position now and then have them do a self-assessment on what you are doing well right now and then asking what would be your next jumping off point. Do you see yourself as ready for that now? Do you see yourself needing skills? Then the manager can provide feedback. We have two feedback cycles. One is at the end of the year and the other is at the mid-year.”

“Every year we sit down with our managers and we talk about their goals. ‘Do you want to become partner? So this is the path you are going to take to become partner.’ Then we have what is called PDG and we keep track of what are our professional development goals. ‘So now you want to be a manager; OK you need to take these management classes.’”



The hiring pros we spoke with all believe strongly in the power of mentoring. While the best mentoring often comes from relationships created organically by the employees themselves, several of the companies have systems in-house to help their employees connect with mentors.

“The biggest thing you can do is meet as many people in the company as you can. Find people outside of your discipline and use them as mentors. Mentoring is super important to your career in a big company like Monsanto or Edward Jones.”

“The best mentoring relationships are those that you make on your own, where you meet people, get engaged in various groups. Those are the folks that really take it to the next level.”

“We have an online mentoring tool that is somewhat similar to a Match.com profile where you can go and say ‘here are the types of skills I want to learn. Here are the kinds of things I want to get help with.’ A mentor can go on there and say ‘here are the kinds of things I want to mentor people on.’ Then ideally we connect people. It’s hard sometimes to connect outside of your functional area so this allows people to connect with others in different parts of the company.”

“The other thing that our organization does is we have a mentor. There are three people that have responsibility for your growth within an organization: yourself, your manager and your mentor. A mentor helps them dress up their game a little bit and make sure that they are staying on path.”

### **What Colleges Can Do Better**

When asked what colleges can do to improve their curriculum and better prepare students for life after graduation, the hiring pros focused on 1) helping students make better career choices; 2) better preparing students’ soft skills (e.g., work with teams); and 3) providing realistic work experience.

“I think career service directors need to get away from looking at just pay. They will tell you they don’t, but they do. Sometimes pay is not the best thing for a student. Having to take a job that nine, ten months down the road they took the pay but they didn’t like the job. The other thing is the whole positioning of what is a career – it’s not a job. The colleges have much more influence over that. At age 21, 22, or 23 you are taking a pretty serious step. It’s not an indictment. It’s okay to make a mistake and it’s okay to have two or three jobs by the time you get married. In some cases it makes sense, and

in a lot it really doesn't. That is where I think they could help their students more – by helping them understand what a career is as opposed to a job. It's a serious step."

"I think one of the things that colleges can do is preparing students more with the soft skills. A lot of students have a lot of book knowledge, but they also need to know how to come to a large company and be able to interact with people at all different levels. How to work in meetings, work as teams and be effective."

"I think schools should be equipping students with everyday coping skills for job-related challenges that they might have. That would be wonderful."

"I think giving them a realistic preview of the real world. Again I go back to my example of Mizzou and their real life ad agency."

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For more information about this or future AMA St. Louis Roundtable Discussions, contact:

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