

Advantages and Disadvantages of Internet Recruitment: A UK Study into Employers' Perceptions

Helen Verhoeven* and Sue Williams**

This paper reports on a study into Internet recruitment and selection in the United Kingdom. It discusses the advantages and disadvantages of Internet recruitment and selection as identified in literature and considers those against the views of employers in the United Kingdom. The results provide clear evidence that the majority of advantages and disadvantages identified in literature are also experienced by UK employers and help to lay foundations for future research.

Field of Research: Human Resource Management

1. Introduction

A review of current literature indicates that the use of the Internet and thus Internet technology is changing (Kinder 2000), transforming (Piturro 2000; Searle 2003; Veger 2006) some would say revolutionising (Hansen 1998) the way in which human resource departments recruit job candidates. Nevertheless, very limited research has been carried out in this area to date. Young and Weinroth (2003, p.11) refer in this respect to "the currently minimal field of Internet recruitment literature, while Lievens et al. (2002, p.586) describe it as "very scarce". Furthermore, existent literature in the areas focuses mainly on the United States of America (USA) rather than on European countries. Reasons for this might be the relative newness of the topic, the rapid pace of change which makes information quickly out of date (Bartram 2000) and the advancement of the practice in the USA. This paper seeks to identify advantages and disadvantages of the use of Internet recruitment and selection and, furthermore, aims to consider those against the views of employers in the United Kingdom. The results help to describe the phenomenon and thus aid in a process which is perceived essential for theory building (Christensen and Sundahl 2001).

2. Literature review

In using the Internet rather than more traditional recruitment channels, employers and applicants will experience certain advantages and disadvantages (Bartram 2006; Tong and Sivanand 2004). Table 1 and table 2, which show the advantages and disadvantages of the general use of Internet recruitment and selection for both employers and employees, are based on a large review of academic and practitioner literature.

*Helen Verhoeven, Middlesex University Dubai

Email: h.verhoeven@mdx.ac

**Dr. Sue Williams, Gloucestershire Business School, University of Gloucestershire

Email: scwilliams@glos.ac.uk

Table 1: General advantages and disadvantages of Internet recruitment and selection for employers

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographical spread (CIPD 2005; McDougall 2001; Mohamed et al. 2002) • larger audience (Alfus 2001; Bartram 2006; Burke 1998, JWT research 1998; Laabs 1998, Pin et al. 2001; Zusman and Landis 2002) • Greater chance to find right candidate quicker/greater effectiveness (Galanaki 2002) • 24/7, no waiting for issue dates (CIPD 2005; Pin et al. 2001) • Quicker turn-around time/cost saving (Galanaki 2002; Pin et al. 2001; Zusman and Landis 2002) • Relatively cheap (Baillie 1996, Burke 1998, Fister 1999, Galanaki 2002, Kuhn 2003; Mohamed et al. 2002; Schreyer and McCarter 1998; Van den Broek et al. 1999) • Higher quality of applicants (Bartram 2000) • Better match workers/vacancies (Freeman 2002) • Shift from manual screening to using 'HRM expertise' (Bingham et al. 2002, Pin et al. 2001) • Positive effect on corporate image/up-to-date image (Galanaki, 2002, Pin et al. 2001) • Efficiency gains • Cost saving/saving personnel costs (Pin et al. 2001) • Inform in more creative ways (Frost 1997, Cober et al. 2000) • Access passive jobseekers (Galanaki 2002) • Target candidates/address niche markets (Galanaki 2002; Pin et al. 2001) • Reduction of unqualified candidates (Pin et al. 2001) • More opportunities for smaller companies (Pin et al. 2001) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher expectations regarding relocation costs (Brooke 1998) • Development fees for small companies • Name recognition required (buy banner space etc.) (Baillie 1996, Galanaki 2002) • Outdated résumés (Sullivan 1998: cited by Hays 1998) • Discrimination/privacy (Bartram 2000; Dash 1999, Feldman and Klaas 2002; Pin et al. 2001; Pitturo 2000, Smith 1999) • Internet not the first option for applicants (Feldman and Klaas 2002; Galanaki 2002) • Overwhelming number of candidates (Brooke 1998; Galanaki 2002, Haley 2000; Lawrence 1999 cited by Bartram 2000) • Number of unqualified candidates (Kaydo and Cohen 1999; Greenberg 1998; IRS Employment review 2005) • Time consuming sifting of application forms (Mitchel 1998) • Poor segmentation of the market (Pin et al. 2001) • Transparency of data (Pin et al. 2001)

Source: Literature review

As can be seen, the literature presents some contradictory findings and identifies certain issues both as an advantage and a disadvantage at the same time. For example, research by Pin et al. (2001) suggests that the Internet provides smaller companies with a showcase of how larger companies work and suggests that, due to

a lack of barriers, small companies can use E-recruitment tools in much the same way as larger firms do. However, this point is contrary to other findings in the literature review which suggested that smaller companies are disadvantaged as these small companies are relatively unknown amongst jobseekers and thus be visited less automatically as those of well-known companies (Baillie 1996). Lower company attractiveness and lower search engine ranking imply that, *ceteris paribus*, Internet recruitment is more effective for companies already known to jobseekers (Galanaki 2002).

Table 2 provides an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of Internet recruitment and selection for jobseekers. Even though this paper aims to focus on the employers' side of the process it is important to reflect on jobseekers' perceived advantages and disadvantages of the tool as these are interlinked with those of the employers'. Issues presented as advantages for one group, might be disadvantageous to the other group, and vice versa.

Table 2: General advantages and disadvantages of Internet recruitment and selection for jobseekers

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier to apply (Kaydo and Cohen 1999) • Larger geographic area within easy reach • More passive process (Kuczynski 1999) • Less intrusive (Kuczynski 1999) • More specific searches • 24/7, time saving and relatively cheap (Alfus 2001) • Quick turn-around time • One-stop-shopping place • Feel for labour market (Feldman and Klaas 2002) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privacy problems • Lack of personal touch (CIPD 2005, IRS Employment review 2005; Feldman and Klaas 2002; Milman 1998, Pin et al. 2001) • Level and type of job available on-line (Galanaki 2002; Richards 1999) • User-unfriendly tools (Feldman and Klaas 2002) • Discrimination of those who do not have access (Pin et al. 2001)

Source: Literature review

For example: 'feel for the labour market' (Feldman and Klaas 2002), identified as an advantage for jobseekers, implies 'transparency of data', namely awareness of both jobseekers and organisations of what is happening in the market place and in the career progression of the candidates (Pin et al. 2001). This transparency might make current employees more restless to leave the organisation and might lower the attractiveness of the organisation amongst potential jobseekers, hence be disadvantageous for the employer. Furthermore, identified disadvantages of Internet recruitment and selections for jobseekers might negatively impact on the user rate of the tool by jobseekers, which then might become another disadvantage for use of the tool by the employer.

Thus, current literature identifies a large number of possible advantages and disadvantages of the use of the Internet in the Internet recruitment and selection process for both employers and jobseekers.

3. Methodology and Research Design

This study draws its data from a survey (questionnaire) conducted for PhD-research purposes and forms part of a larger study into establishing practices and perceptions of Internet recruitment. The questionnaire contained mainly closed-ended questions and a few open-ended questions which only required short answers (e.g. list services provided or state country of origin). The closed-ended questions are either of the list type or the scale type (Saunders et al. 2003).

The research used a convenience sample, which made it easier to obtain but at the same time also made the research more prone to bias. The original research used a postal questionnaire and was followed by an administered questionnaire. Initially, 385 organisations were selected from the University of Gloucestershire's Development Centre Database for the UK. The first round of questionnaires gave a return of 31 questionnaires in the United Kingdom. As this response was too low, additional questionnaires were administered.

In the UK 3 groups of the University of Gloucestershire's Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development students were surveyed, which resulted in 52 additional questionnaires and thus delivered a total number of 83 responses. The students in these groups are working HR professionals attempting to develop their professional qualifications. As such, surveying these groups gave direct access to a large number of personnel practitioners involved and/or aware of the recruitment and selection practices in their organisation. From the 83 organisation, 69 organisations indicated the use of the Internet in the Recruitment process.

4. Discussion of findings

Employers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a number of statements regarding the advantages and disadvantages of Internet recruitment.

Advantages

The first statement was formulated as "The Internet has led to a quicker turn-around time of the recruitment process", which reflects on one of the most widely perceived advantages. Twenty four percent of employers either strongly or mildly agreed with the statement. However, exactly the same percentage of employers (24 percent) disagreed with the statement (N=66).

The second statement reflected on the number of applications employers received. This number is important for calculating recruitment and selection ratios in the evaluation of recruitment effectiveness. A high number of applicants not only provide a higher chance to find suitable candidates, it also means that employers have a larger task in pre-selecting and selecting candidates. Forty six percent of UK employers agrees that the "Use of the Internet has led to an increase in the number of applicants". The relatively small level of disagreement with the statement (7 percent) implies that almost half of the UK employers surveyed (N=66) neither agreed nor disagreed.

The last statement relating to possible advantages for employers was formulated as: "With the introduction of the Internet, the recruitment process has become easier". The figures suggest that 18 percent of employers find that the recruitment process has become easier while 14 percent of employers (N=66) disagreed with this.

Disadvantages

The literature review also identified a number of potential disadvantages of the use of Internet recruitment and selection for both employers and jobseekers. One of these disadvantages concerns the qualification of applicants. Respectively 25 percent of UK employers (N=65) believe that "The Internet generates a higher level of unqualified applicants in comparison to non-electronic sources". Only 9 percent of employers disagreed with the statement.

A higher level of unqualified candidates has cost implications for the organisations as these applications still need to be dealt with in a proper manner. Unqualified applicants also influence the different ratios used for evaluation purposes.

The higher number of unqualified applicants can result from, amongst other factors, a larger geographic reach of the tool. The statement "Due to the Internet, the organisation now receives applications from a larger geographical area than with the standard recruitment tools" received agreement, either strongly or mildly, from 60 percent of employers while only 3 percent of employers indicating some form of disagreement. Receiving applications from a wider geographic area might, beside practical applications during the recruitment process (e.g. setting of interview/test times), have financial implications.

The larger geographical reach of the tool, which might lead to an increase of suitable candidates, has as a potential drawback that, if suitable candidates need to relocate, they will have expectations regarding relocation expenses hence resulting in higher jobseekers' expectations. However, the findings suggest that only 12 percent of employers agreed with the statement that "Jobseekers' expectations of receiving relocation expenses have increased due to the Internet". Twenty percent of employers disagree with the same statement and therefore this potential disadvantage might not be experienced in practice.

Thus, it seems that Internet recruitment has the ability to draw applicants from a greater geographic area but that this results in a pool of applicants which has a higher level of unqualified applicants in comparison with non-electronic sources.

Type and level of jobs

One of the other issues associated with the use of Internet recruitment is the suitability of the tool for different types and levels of jobs. The image of the Internet being a tool used mainly to recruit for IT-related jobs is associated with this. Employers were asked to reflect further on these issues.

Forty seven percent of UK employers do not agree with the statement that "Internet recruitment has proven to be suitable for all types of jobs", while 17 percent of employers (N=66) testify that has proven to be suitable for all types of jobs. This low

level of agreement might lead to a reluctance on the employers' part to adopt the Internet as a recruitment tool.

The Internet's original image of being a tool to recruit IT people does not seem to reflect the common use of the tool by employers, as 73 percent of employers surveyed (N=62) indicated disagreement with the statement that "In our organisation the Internet is used mainly to recruit for IT-related jobs". The findings suggest that the tool is used to attract applicants for the different areas in the organisation and thus suggests a move away from the Internet's original image.

The suitability of the use of the Internet for recruiting for all levels of jobs is also questionable as the figures suggest that 45 percent of employers disagreed, either strongly or mildly, with the statement that "Internet recruitment has proven to be suitable for all levels of jobs". Only 15 percent of employers (N=66) believed that the tool is suitable for all level of jobs.

Thus, these findings imply that in order to make effective and efficient use of Internet recruitment, employers should know which types and which levels of jobs can be filled by using the Internet in the recruitment and selection process.

Effectiveness and efficiency

Another issue directly related to Internet recruitment is its effectiveness and efficiency. Effectiveness and efficiency have to do with finding suitable applicants/positions and the use of resources in doing so.

Twenty four percent of UK employers agree with the statement that "Internet recruitment has proven to provide my organisation with suitable employees", while respectively 3 and 13 percent of employers (N=64) disagree. Thus only 1 out of every 4 employers has a positive experience.

When reflecting on efficiency, costs and comparative costs are important. Twenty seven percent of employers believe that "The Internet has led to cost saving in the recruitment process". However, 17 percent of employers (N=63) disagreed with the statement.

The relative costs of Internet recruitment are perceived to be lower in comparison with non-electronic recruitment sources by a 36 percent of UK employers (N=62). Respectively 15 percent of employers did not agree with the statement that "The Internet has proven to be a relatively cheap recruitment tool in comparison with non-electronic recruitment sources". The low numbers of employers disagreeing are in line with the indications of the literature review (e.g. Galanaki 2002; Mohamed et al. 2002), which suggested that low costs and cost savings are potential advantages of Internet recruitment. Eleven percent of employers do not agree with the statement that "Internet recruitment has proven to be efficient", while 22 percent of employers (N=63) do agree.

These figures suggest that a quarter of UK employers have found that Internet recruitment can be effective, delivering suitable candidates. Furthermore, one out of every five UK employers perceived the tool to be efficient, with only a slightly higher

percentage of employers indicating cost-saving and acknowledging that Internet recruitment tools are relatively cheap in comparison with more traditional tools.

Given these findings, one might wonder why so many organisations have adopted the Internet as a recruitment and selection method and what needs to change to make the tool more effective and efficient.

Discrimination

One of the disadvantages of Internet recruitment and selection is the opportunity for discrimination. The findings show that 45 percent of employers (N=69), agree with the statement that "Internet recruitment discriminates against those who do not have Internet access". However, only 13 percent of employers disagree. In order to reach the group of applicants who do not have access and thus to avoid discrimination allegations, organisations should use several recruitment channels and not adopt the Internet as only recruitment source. Seventy eight percent of employers (N=69) agreed with the statement that "the Internet is not the only source used in my organisation".

Beside possible access to vacancy notification, discrimination can also take place during the actual Internet recruitment process. Only 8 percent of employers (N=66) agreed with the statement that "Using the Internet in the recruitment process decreases the chances of discrimination". Twenty seven percent of employers disagreed with the statement.

Thus, the findings imply that the Internet recruitment practice can be perceived as discriminatory to those without Internet access and that its use does not decrease the chances of discrimination during the process. Given increased interest in corporate social responsibility, one might wonder how desirable this situation is and what can be done to make the process less discriminatory.

5. Conclusion

The results provide clear evidence that the majority of the advantages and disadvantages identified in the literature are also experienced by UK employers. However, as with the majority of studies in the field, the findings reflect the perceptions of the UK employers involved. Future research should focus on verifying the identified advantages and disadvantages by using empirical tools such as time-studies and document reviews. For example, by using empirical tools such as time-studies it could be established if Internet recruitment is indeed having a quicker turnover-time in comparison with traditional recruitment, as concluded on the current findings, and, if so, how much this time-saving really is. Nevertheless, the current study is a good starting point for future research as it describes the phenomenon which, according to Christensen and Sundahl (2001) is the starting point for theory development.

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