Ten Essential Strategies for Making Your Career Site Usable, not Confusuable
How quickly can a job applicant apply for an opening on your company website? How many clicks does it take? Then, once the candidate is busy applying for the opening – how long will that take? How long are the forms? How many questions are asked?

The heart of the concept of a usable job applicant experience is ease of navigation, simplicity, consciousness around time taken to apply, and the opportunity for an applicant to share relevant information for the hiring team.

When the job application process is easy to navigate, more of the right people will apply. Plus, fewer will drop off due to lack of interest. And, the time to fill a position can be reduced significantly.

This is a win-win for all involved.

Jennifer Brogee, part of an elite group of 3300 Certified Usability Analysts worldwide, and also the Chief Information Officer for myStaffingPro, describes the best way to test a career portal’s usability. “You really have to watch the applicant apply. The process needs to work for someone who is relatively new to computer technology, yet not painstakingly slow for people who are more advanced with technology.”

Brogee has implemented the concepts of *Usable, not Confusable*, on several hundred client websites for myStaffingPro, a company that provides applicant tracking software.

This paper will highlight these primary concepts:

- Be accommodating
- Show your true colors
- Make it easy to launch the application
- Deliver a clear and relevant job description
- Outline expectations
- Collect only what you need
- Keep forms small
- Give progress updates
- Follow up often
- Build a relationship

**Be Accommodating**

Job seekers today rely on a multitude of technologies and platforms. A savvy employer will make sure their site works on a spectrum of devices as well as all of the most popular web browsers.

...When a job seeker lands upon the job description, is there an “apply now” button? Or must the job seeker go to “careers” and “about our jobs” and then “job openings” and then find the actual opening he or she saw on the tease?
A potential employee should also be able to apply via a computer, smartphone, and telephone interactive response, in an ideal scenario. When a site is accommodating to the greatest number of job seekers possible, it will pass the “usable” test. Additionally, to stay in compliance with federal regulations, every job opportunity should be accessible to those with disabilities.

Show Your Company’s True Colors

According to Bob Schulte, CEO of myStaffingPro, a job applicant should leave the process of applying for a job with a good feeling about the company, and a solid awareness of the company brand. Taking advantage of the career application process to extend the brand awareness is a cornerstone of myStaffingPro’s service.

“We want the web site for the job applications to look and feel like the company website,” says Brogee. “We want the potential employee to learn about the company, and feel like they are on the company site.”

“We brand the online application process,” explains Schulte. “We want the potential employee to have an experience that is consistent with the corporate culture.”

To this end, Schulte suggests the photographs depict actual employees – instead of pictures of generic individuals that are all too common on company websites. And, ideally, the pictures will encompass employees at different levels, sharing their experiences working at the company.

The job applicant gets to see and listen to real life experiences to build a picture of what it would be like to work there.

Make It Easy to Launch – How Many Clicks to Apply?

When a job seeker lands upon the website, is there an easy way to apply? Or must the job seeker go to “about us”, “careers” and “about our jobs” and then “job openings” and then find the actual opening he or she saw on the tease or advertised page, and then click on “apply” and then “register now” and then provide personal information and then begin to apply?

Schulte maintains that making the job seeker experience friendly and easy will reduce the time to fill a position. The greater the number of relevant applicants, the easier it will be for human resource departments to fill the opening. “We do not want to see five or six clicks to apply for a position that a job seeker finds,” says Schulte. “We would like to see one or two clicks to apply, and no registration required.”
When a company requires a login registration process, a password creation process, and more detail to simply apply for a position, this reduces the number of applicants who complete the application.

And while reducing clicks is important, Brogee states that the application process needs to be thorough enough so that a decision can be made by the hiring professionals involved.

For the job applicants, Schulte and his team at myStaffingPro work with clients so that their website says a lot about the company brand, culture and environment. An applicant should leave the job portal with more than just a vague memory of applying “somewhere” for a position.

“We like to see an overview of the company, a message from the CEO or president, employee testimonials, and a typical day in the life of an employee at that company,” says Schulte. “We’ve been focused on this since 1998. We see the applicant experience as an extension of the company brand, and we hold this to be very important. We want to carry the good feeling about the company into the recruiting process.”

This gives the applicant a consistent experience with the company, whether they are going to use the services of the company that day, that week, or in the years to come. A usable, friendly job portal branded to feel like the company emerges as a win-win for all concerned.

**Begin With a Clear Job Description**

First off, a job description needs to say something about the job that helps the candidate discern if he or she should take the time to apply. The title of the job description should give strong clues, and should be optimized for search engines. The actual description should be clear and differentiated from other job openings. “Have you noticed with many job descriptions that it can be almost impossible to figure out what the job is?” poses Brogee. She states that when a company takes time to create a good job description, carefully explaining the qualifications and skills required, and outlining the tasks that the employee will be asked to perform, an employee can better tailor his or her resume for the position. The result will be advanced quality of the entire process.

A company can obtain more of the right applicants if the description is search engine optimized for key terms an applicant would use to find the opening. Applicants prefer job descriptions that are real, accurate, and provide enough information so that they can figure out if their background is a good fit for the
position. “We don’t like to see too much “corporate-speak” or in the use of acronyms in the job description,” says Brogee.

The World According to Twitter

How can a good job description fit into 140 characters or less to reach the Twitter crowd? Short, concise teaser language will help companies recruit across the social media frontier. What is the job? Answer the question with as few words as possible, while capturing some of the company culture or identity.

Here is an example of a Twitter job posting that works:

Now Hiring – Microsoft Certified Professional Developer for myStaffingPro in Lima #ohio apply at URL #jobs

Tweet Tips:

- Include hashtags
- Avoid acronyms
- Incorporate a call to action
- Utilize a URL shortener
- Use SEO savvy terms that will attract job seekers

How Long Will it Take to Apply?

Applicants like to know what they are getting into. Another measure of usability and friendliness of a job application process involves providing the applicant with a “time to finish” indicator. If most people will take about 20 minutes to fill out an application, it is a best practice to keep the person informed on their progress. If an application is for an executive position or a deep background position, more time would be appropriate. For an entry level position, or any position requiring very little background, the process should go quickly.

Keep Forms Small

Putting into place a two-step application process increases completion rate by 20 percent, according to data gathered by myStaffingPro. This means creating a tiered application process where initially the applicant is only asked a few qualifying questions.
“We don’t want to see 30 qualifying questions in the initial step,” says Brogee. A better practice would be four to six qualifying questions, and then the applicant can continue to the next level or leave if he or she does not meet the basic background requirements for the job opening.

Then, collect only the information that you need from the applicant. If a question is not relevant to the position, delete it.

The applicant response to simplifying the process is tremendous. myStaffingPro has received the following feedback from applicants:

“There is no question or problem, I just wanted to let you know that your online job application is one of the best I’ve ever filled out. Simple and efficient.”

“I have submitted many online applications over the last several months, but although the experience is never pleasurable, it was pleasurable indeed to have the opportunity to provide the company with all of the information they requested in a highly readable format with as little effort as possible, while also being able to provide additional information I believe will be useful.”

“…I was searching for a job on the Midmark website and noticed it is powered by you. It is a great tool. I am very impressed. It is easy to use, it works, and is very aesthetically pleasing.”

“Putting into place a two-step application process increases completion rate by 20 percent.”

Collect Only What You Need, Focus on the Right Questions

It’s easy for human resource departments to rely on systems they have had for years to gather information from applicants. Yet, just like a garden that gets overgrown when left to itself for too long, weeding through the questions and deleting information that is not needed will improve the experience for human resource professionals and applicants alike.

Questions should be gone through regularly and pruned for quality and relevance. When delivered correctly, the right questions give the HR managers enough information to find out if an applicant could be the right fit for a position.
Explains myStaffingPro client Rhonda Thompson of River Spirit Casino, “This has made our applicant search so much easier. We create the questions that are best suited for our business needs.”

With a two-step process, the first series of questions can be relatively general. However, the next level of questions should provide hiring managers with enough data to figure out who should make the next cut.

Each question should be important. If certain information is not needed until an employee gets through an interview, for instance, that information should not be collected on the first step of the application process.

**Save**

Can an applicant save periodically? A quality job application process will allow the candidate to save the application responses if they get called away and must leave and then return prior to completing the process. Some sites require a login or a registration, and then the applicant will be reminded when they don’t finish the application process with a link back.

**Reduce Clicks, but Don’t Reduce Quality**

As a trend emerges for one-click to apply for positions, Brogee explains how this can work and describes some instances where it might not work.

“We’re seeing a trend where applicants don’t have to do anything. They can just apply by linking an application to their LinkedIn profile,” says Brogee. She cautions that this system may not end up being that friendly or usable for applicants or human resource professionals. “We want people to be able to apply, but a good system will meet the needs of the applicant to explain why they are a good fit, and for the recruiter to differentiate between candidates,” explained Brogee.

When a candidate hits a button to apply with their social media profile, this could be too general for some job openings. “This would work for high profile, executive level jobs. But for most jobs, it would not be a best practice for a recruiter to need to spend a half hour per applicant trying to dig out the information they need.”

When the application process works for both the job seeker and the company, cycle time reduction occurs on filling openings. Companies can cut down the number of weeks it takes to fill an opening. “We like to see the system be simple, clear, but with enough opportunities for applicants to say why they are a good fit,” Brogee said.
Give Progress Updates

Brogee likes to see clients of myStaffingPro take friendliness and usability to another level. She works with clients to build a self-service functionality into the job portal. “The human resource departments we work with really like this,” Brogee says. “They don’t get bombarded with phone calls from applicants.”

Potential applicants receive automatic updates every step of the application process, first announcing that they are being considered for a position, then later, updating them upon their status as they move up into the interview process.

Clients of myStaffingPro may then customize their job portal so that applicants can check on their status online. “This really helps the applicant and the hiring managers alike,” says Brogee. “It also gives a good impression of the company as being responsive, without taxing the recruiter and hiring manager’s time.”

Integrating the Corporate Culture

When things are done right, the career portal will look and feel like the rest of the company website. Plus, real employees will be featured, and potential applicants can watch videos that talk about the company culture and get a glimpse into “a day in the life” of an actual employee.

This attention to integrating the corporate culture into the job applicant experience results in an extension of the company branding. This gives a potential employee an opportunity to figure out if they like the culture, or would do well in that culture.

Additionally, job applicants who experience the company brand could ultimately also be a customer or send other employees to the job portal. When jobs are shared, this reduces the time it takes to fill any job opening.

Build a Relationship

The concept of building relationships with potential job candidates is central to strategies outlined in the concepts behind usable, not confusable. Long term relationships can blossom into future customer or employee relationships, even if the perfect job fit is not achieved the first time around.

Making a job application process easier and more efficient will result in cost savings, less time to fill the openings, plus greater efficiency of human
resource professional and hiring manager time. It also delivers a valuable resource for building the company brand identity.

An opportunity for building a relationship exists every time an applicant fills out a job application. Are you taking advantage of this opportunity or letting it go by the road?

About myStaffingPro

myStaffingPro, a full-featured SaaS applicant tracking system, provides HR professionals with the tools they need to recruit, qualify, track, and hire the best applicants. The scalable myStaffingPro system can be configured to any hiring process or budget. myStaffingPro currently delivers the hiring process for more than 500 companies and has processed more than 20 million applications.

To learn more about myStaffingPro applicant tracking system, visit http://mystaffingpro.com.