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MOBILIZE NOW

Career Site Mobile-Optimization in U.S. Higher Education

Table of Contents

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Executive Summary

Globally, the biggest challenge for 58% of organizations is sourcing high-quality candidates for key roles.[1] U.S. higher education institutions are not exempt and recruiters face a unique combination of factors in the quest to find talent. Towards the end of 2016, the rate of job growth in higher education outpaced growth of the U.S. economy.[2] The ratio of administrative-to-faculty positions has steadily increased over the last four years,[2] and a strategy of using part-time positions before creating full-time positions to confirm the need to create full-time positions further complicates the recruitment landscape.[2]

Mobile devices and social media are reshaping talent acquisition. Job seekers are using their mobile devices, not only to search for positions, but also apply for them. Mobile-optimization has moved from a 'nice-to-have' to a 'have-to-have' as candidates expect a consumer-experience when dealing with potential employers. Mobile-optimized means that the site looks and feels like it has been built for a mobile device. Rather than a resizing of the desktop, content is reformatted with large navigation buttons and responsive design when the user is on a mobile device. Despite this, many higher education institutions are lagging in their execution of a mobile strategy. As a result job seeker expectations are considerably misaligned with the reality of the mobile recruitment experience they receive.

How big is the gap and what is the impact? We reviewed the 50 largest higher education institutions in the U.S. and found:

What we found

Why it matters

First impressions matter
- 56% of career sites provide a positive search experience.

If job seekers cannot find relevant information about job opportunities and why they should work for you, or if they cannot apply online for jobs, you don't exist.

Mobile is a competitive advantage
- 68% of the largest 50 universities do not have mobile-optimized career sites.
- Only 28% re-sized content to fit a mobile screen.

It is no longer enough to have a career site; the site needs to be mobile-optimized and engaging. 89% of job seekers say their mobile device is an important tool for job searching.[3]

Missed opportunities
- Only 40% of institutions are using social referrals to reach untapped talent.
- Only 26% of sites provide job seekers with the ability to receive job alerts.

Job alerts, referrals and sharing jobs via social media increase exposure to passive candidates. Organizations that embrace social sourcing increase the likelihood of attracting qualified candidates.[4]

Engage candidates on their terms
- 64% of career sites lack the ability to pre-populate application forms from social media profiles or resumes.
- Applications can be submitted without a resume for only 36% of sites.

Effective recruiting means connecting with candidates on their terms. Over one-third of job seekers do not complete online applications because the process is a hassle.[5]

Embrace all platforms
- 50% of universities inadvertently halve their candidate pool by not being compatible with iOS devices (iPads and iPhones).
- Only 10% of sites were mobile device agnostic (iOS, Android).

Over half the mobile web browsing done in the U.S. is from an iPhone.[6] Losing iPhone users because they are using an iOS device is unwise in a tight talent market.

Overall our research found that the initial career site experience and basic job search functions are mobile-optimized for the institutions reviewed. However, this is where the mobile-enabled recruitment experience ended for many. These results were unexpected given high smartphone usage rates and the maturity of the U.S. market. Being mobile-ready provides a competitive advantage when faced with scarcity of talent and hard-to-fill positions. This disconnect provides an opportunity for institutions willing to embrace mobile recruitment technology. Executing well on a mobile strategy increases the likelihood of building a strong employer brand, reaching passive candidates and engaging active job seekers.
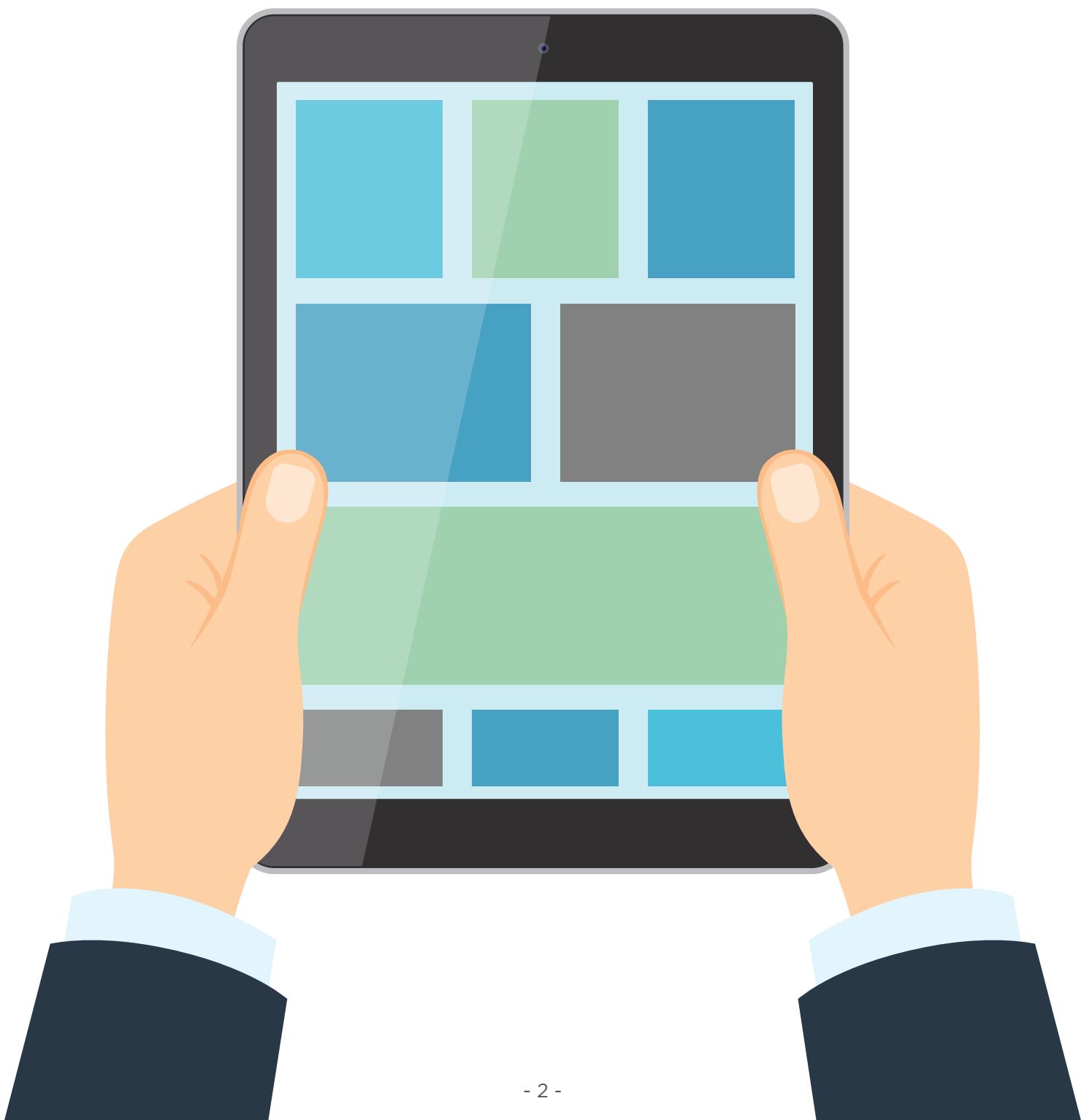
Is Mobile-Optimization That Important?

Talent scarcity is a commonly cited challenge for talent acquisition professionals and business leaders. Many institutions struggle to build strong talent pools, fill critical technical and managerial roles, and improve their employer brand. The advent of social media and mobile devices is influencing talent acquisition strategies but many recruiters feel they either don't have the adequate technology or it is not being used effectively. Globally, 89% of job seekers search for jobs on their mobile devices and 48% believe this will become the most common method of job search within the next two years.[3] Organizations have been slow on the uptake, despite the ubiquitous use of smartphones, only 39% of organizations have optimized their career website for mobile users and only 36% say they have a mobile-enabled application process.[4]
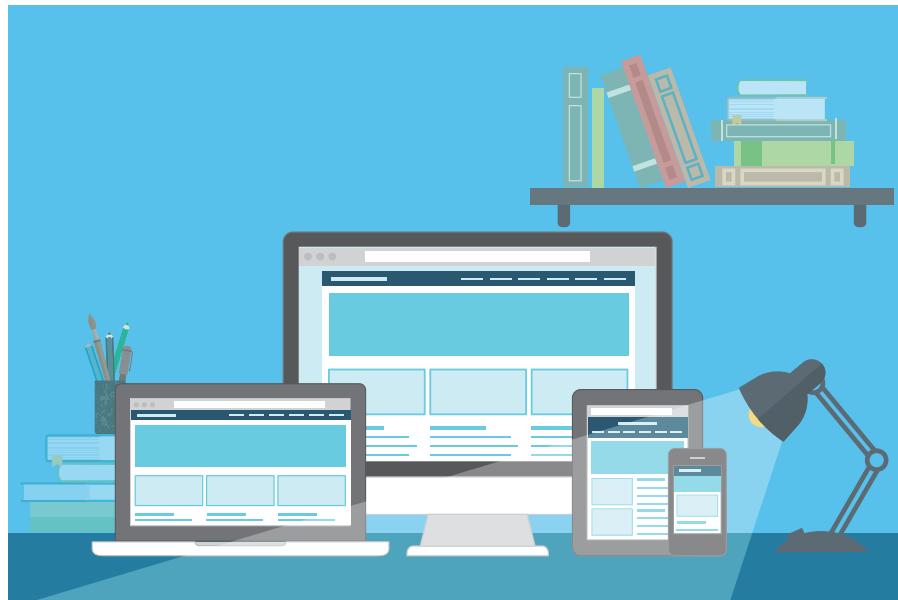
Does the misalignment matter? Surely candidates will still apply even if the experience is not as optimal as it could be. Apparently not, as 58% of organizations are finding it difficult to source high-quality candidates for key roles.[1] Higher education institutions simply cannot afford to make this assumption. Research has shown 25% of job seekers will not apply for a job if an organization's career site was not mobile-optimized[7] and 34% of candidates do not complete online applications because the process is too cumbersome.[5]

"Can you afford to miss a quarter of the talent because your career site is not mobile-optimized?"
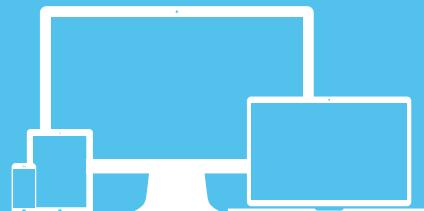
First impressions matter

Employers often make their first impression via their website and corresponding social media and mobile-enabled career offerings. The organization's website is where 59% of job seekers go to find out more about an organization before they apply.[8] The career site is very important from an employer branding perspective – it informs candidates about an institution's purpose, culture and priorities. Are they tech savvy and forward thinking? Do they understand how to engage today's candidates? Over 60% of organizations say strengthening their employer brand is a top priority[9] and 75% consider the career site the most critical way to engage candidates before they apply.[10] Yet, more than 40% of recruiters say that their employer brand is an obstacle to attracting talent and only 14% are confident their online application process aligns to their employer brand.[11] Aberdeen research shows mobile strategies play a pivotal role in improving employer branding and recruitment marketing efforts.[12] You have to be in it to win it. If job seekers can't find relevant information about why they should work for you, or apply for positions, you don't exist.

Mobile is a competitive advantage

In 2013, the number of mobile devices surpassed the number of people on the planet.[13] In the U.S., on average 90% of adults aged 18 to 49 own a smartphone.[14] Mobile device proficiency is shaping expectations of workplace technologies. Currently, 89% of job seekers think their mobile device is an important tool for job searching and 45% use their mobile device to specifically search for jobs at least once a day.[3] What does the future look like? – 48% believe that within two years, the most common way to search for jobs will be via a mobile device.[3] Yet, 90% of the Fortune 500 company career sites do not support a mobile-enabled application process[3] and only 12% of candidates say they have applied to a job via their mobile device.[10] Imagine the competitive advantage a mobile-optimized application process could provide. It is no longer enough just to have a career site; the site needs to be mobile-enabled and engaging. Complacency increases the risk of losing quality candidates to the competition. Are you a laggard or an innovator? Being seen as a market innovator could be one of the most compelling arguments for gaining executive support for a mobile strategy. There are no prizes for second place in the race to attract talent.

Missed opportunities

Globally, both active and passive candidates use their mobile devices to find out more about prospective employers. Over 70% of active candidates and 62% of passive candidates have used a mobile device to visit an organization's site to learn about career opportunities and search for roles.[7] Options such as signing up for job alerts, referrals, and the ability to share jobs via social media increase exposure to passive candidates. There are currently 39 million students or recent graduates on LinkedIn[15] and more than 133 million LinkedIn users in the U.S.[16] The majority of U.S. adults use social media, and within the higher education space, more than 70% of faculty members are active on social media.[17] Social media usage continues to rise and research has shown that organizations embracing social sourcing achieve a reduction in time-to-hire, an increased likelihood of finding qualified candidates and improved quantity of hires.[4]

Embrace all platforms

Mobile devices have catalyzed our approach to the Internet with the paradigm shift from desk-based to on-the-go Internet access. By 2019 the amount of mobile data traffic generated by tablets will be nearly double the traffic generated by the entire global mobile network in 2014.[18] By 2021, nearly three-quarters of all devices connected to the mobile network will be smart devices (compared to 37% in 2016) and 98% of mobile data traffic will originate from these devices.[19] In 2016, North American mobile data traffic grew by 44%, making it the second largest user of all regions globally.[19] Many have bypassed the desktop for the laptop and some have bypassed the laptop for the tablet. By the end of 2021, North America will have 99% of its installed base converted to smart devices and connections.[19] Where a job seeker can only access the Internet via a mobile device it becomes difficult to find and apply for jobs if career sites are not mobile-enabled. Higher education institutions run the risk of missing talent by not adopting a mobile-optimized recruitment strategy.

Engage candidates on their terms

In 2015, Millennials accounted for 34% of the workforce in the U.S., surpassing the other generations for the first time.[20] By 2020, Millennials will represent 50% of the global workforce.[21] They are technologically savvy and have a strong social media presence, which shapes their expectations at work. Many universities have invested a lot of time and effort into creating positive recruitment experiences for prospective students, with over 75% of institutions mobile-optimizing websites and over 90% using social media such as Facebook and Twitter to reach candidates.[22] As this group transitions from student to student-worker, and then onto faculty or administration roles, their recruitment expectations will be influenced by their undergraduate wooing. Effective recruiting means connecting with candidates on their terms. If the experience of applying on a mobile device is time-consuming, inconvenient or frustrating, candidates will not apply. Although mobile capabilities are gaining enterprise adoption as candidates expect to search and apply for jobs, receive communications and manage schedules via mobile devices most institutions aren't there yet. Recent research has found that it takes more than 15 minutes to fill in an online application form for 74% of North American career sites.[10] A mobile-friendly application experience is about more than providing a seamless recruitment process, 34% of job seekers do not complete online applications because the process is too much of a hassle[5] and completion rates are 50% higher for jobs with a simple and mobile-friendly application process.[7]
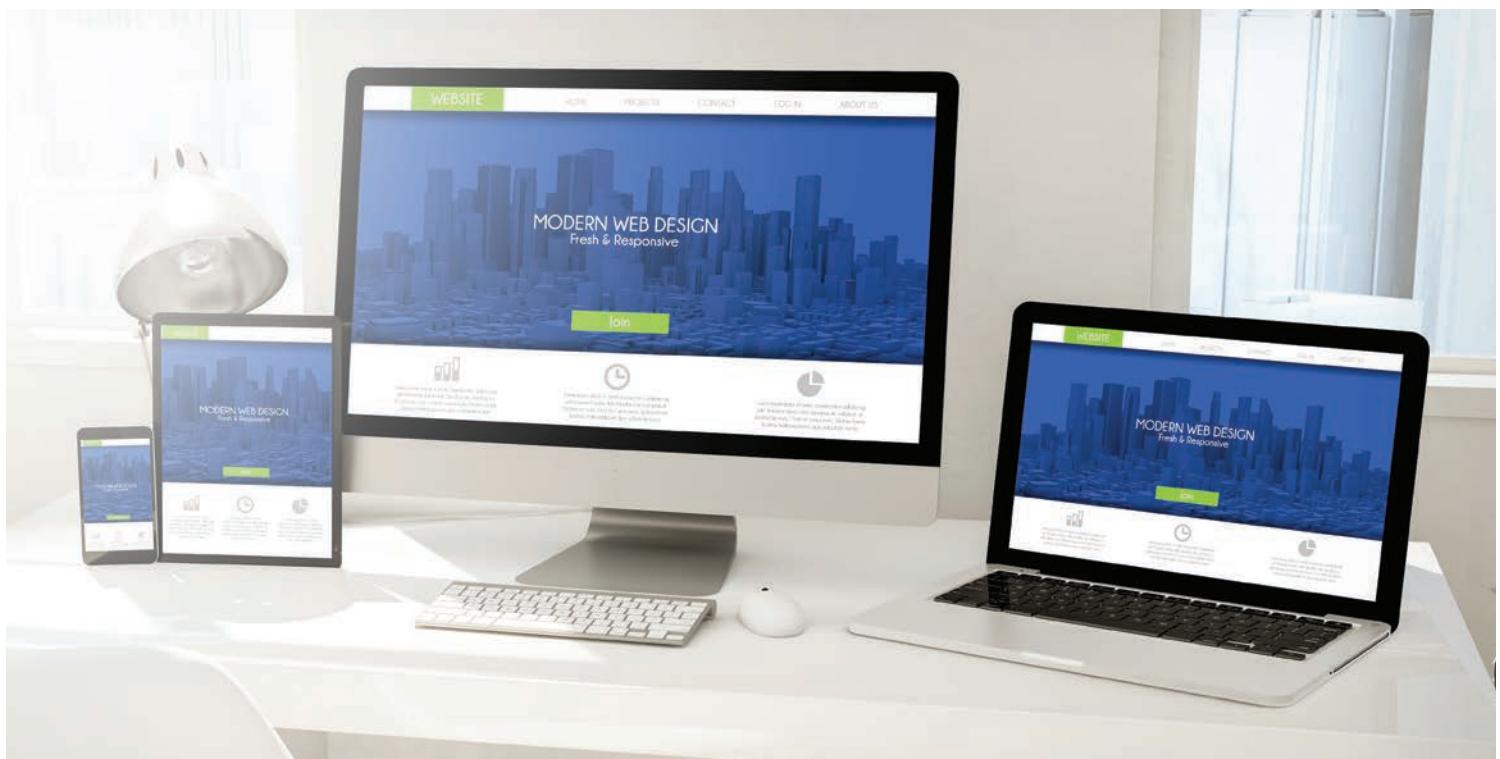
How Mobile-Optimized are Career Sites?

There is no question that technology is revolutionizing how people work. Although the importance and inevitability of a mobile-enabled workforce is recognized, there is a gap between candidate expectations and the reality of mobile talent acquisition practices. Many organizations are lagging and despite abundant evidence that candidates have embraced social applications and mobile devices, 70% of Fortune 100 companies,[5] nearly three-quarters of Australia's largest 100 organizations[23] and 90% of Southeast Asia's 50 largest organizations,[24] do not have mobile-optimized career pages.

Given the pace of mobile adoption in the U.S. and the increasing awareness that a mobile strategy is required to secure talent, does a similar gap exist for higher education?

We looked at two aspects:

1. Mobile experience – does the career site look and feel like it has been built for mobile content?

2. Recruitment experience – does the career site allow candidates to search and apply for jobs in a mobile-optimized manner?

## Mobile experience – functional capabilities

The desktop version of a website forced to fit onto a mobile screen is not a pleasant viewing experience. Instead, a simplified version with content arranged to fit the screen of the mobile device is required. Specific elements of a mobile-optimized site include responsive design, clean design, rendering, cross-linking and redirection (see methodology for definitions). For a career site to be considered mobile-optimized, this should occur throughout the entire experience.

We found that only 32% of the U.S.'s 50 largest higher education institutions have career sites that are mobile-optimized. A further 24% have a mix of mobile-optimized features and desktop features. A mobile-optimized career site is no longer a 'nice-to-have' – it's essential. Every interaction with your career site is an opportunity to build a strong employer brand, but more importantly, without it talent will look elsewhere.

Mobile optimization of functionality

- Mobile-optimized
- Mix of mobile-optimized & desktop features
- Negligible mobile-optimization

32%

24%

44%
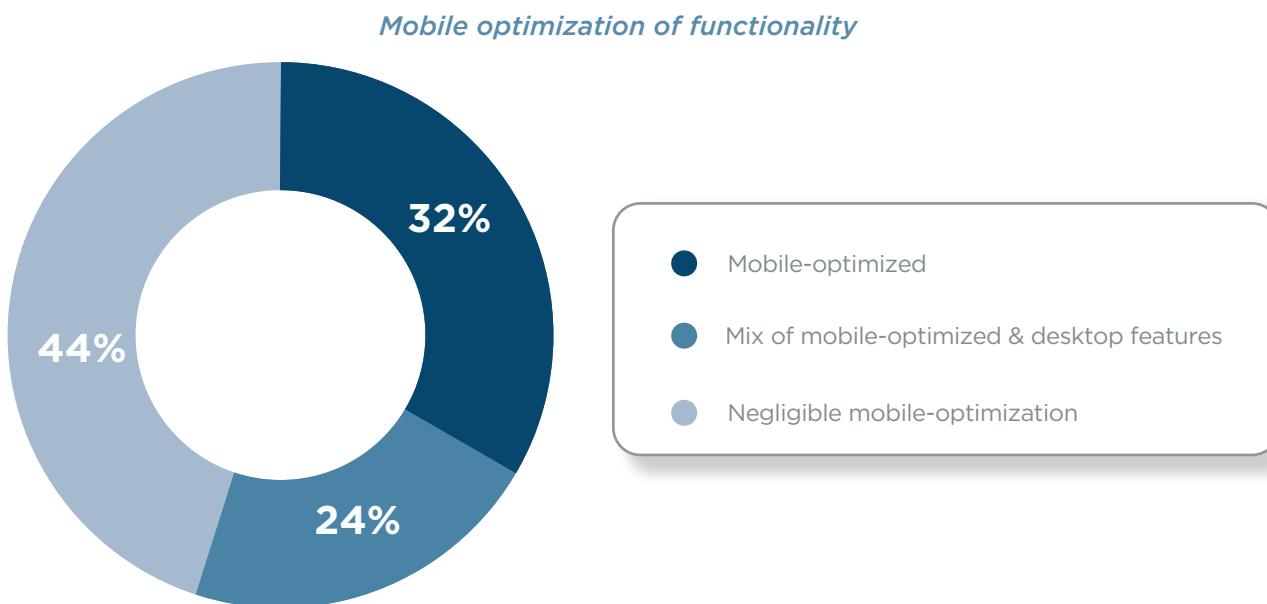
Mobile functionality of career sites

	Always	Sometimes	Never
Redirects to relevant content	82%		18%
Experience is mobile-rendered	34%	44%	22%
Clear calls to action	32%	42%	26%
Big buttons	30%	34%	36%
Minimal panning & scrolling	28%	56%	16%
Correct orientation	80%	18%	2%
Mobile-optimized sizing	28%	48%	24%

Clean design: Clear calls to action, Big buttons

Responsive design: Minimal panning & scrolling, Correct orientation, Mobile-optimized sizing

Always — 0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100% — Never

Legend: ● Always ● Sometimes ● Never

Our research found that 80% of career sites automatically re-orientate content and the majority correctly redirect candidates to pages involved in the recruitment experience (82%).

The other aspects of responsive design scored poorly, with content resizing to fit the screen only 28% of the time, requiring candidates to pan and scroll or pinch, in order to see information.

Roughly one-third of higher education career sites have clean design with big buttons (30%) and clear calls to action (32%). Mobile rendering scored poorly with graphical images displayed properly only 34% of the time.

If the experience feels clumsy or difficult, jobseekers will not persist. Candidates need to be engaged on their terms and expect sites to be mobile-optimized.

Only 28% of institutions re-sized content to fit onto a mobile screen

Recruitment Experience

Mobile-optimization is not an end in itself: sites can be mobile-optimized and still provide a poor recruitment experience. Big buttons, resizing, correct orientation, scrolling and cross-linking are important to enable a simple, easy and quick process. But if the recruitment process is not relevant or streamlined, institutions will fail to create an experience that engages job seekers. A poor recruiting experience can not only frustrate candidates, but also alienate them and their peers.

At a minimum, most career sites list open positions. However, applying online requires more effort and commitment and is of greater importance to the job seeker than simply viewing open positions. Many institutions rationalize their emphasis on search functionality over application functionality with the assumption that candidates will readily take the application step via a more traditional channel such as a desktop. Yet, evidence suggests that many job seekers prefer to apply for roles via mobile devices and become frustrated if this is not possible. A LinkedIn study found nearly half of active job seekers have used a mobile device to apply for a job. This is true even of passive candidates, nearly a quarter of whom have applied on a mobile device.[7]

We looked at two aspects of the talent acquisition process – the search experience and the application experience.

1. The search experience includes the ability to search for jobs, filter jobs, subscribe to email alerts, save jobs, refer jobs and share a job on social media.

2. The application experience includes the ability to start the application process, the application form, requirements for attachments (e.g. resume, cover letter), and the ability to complete and submit the application.
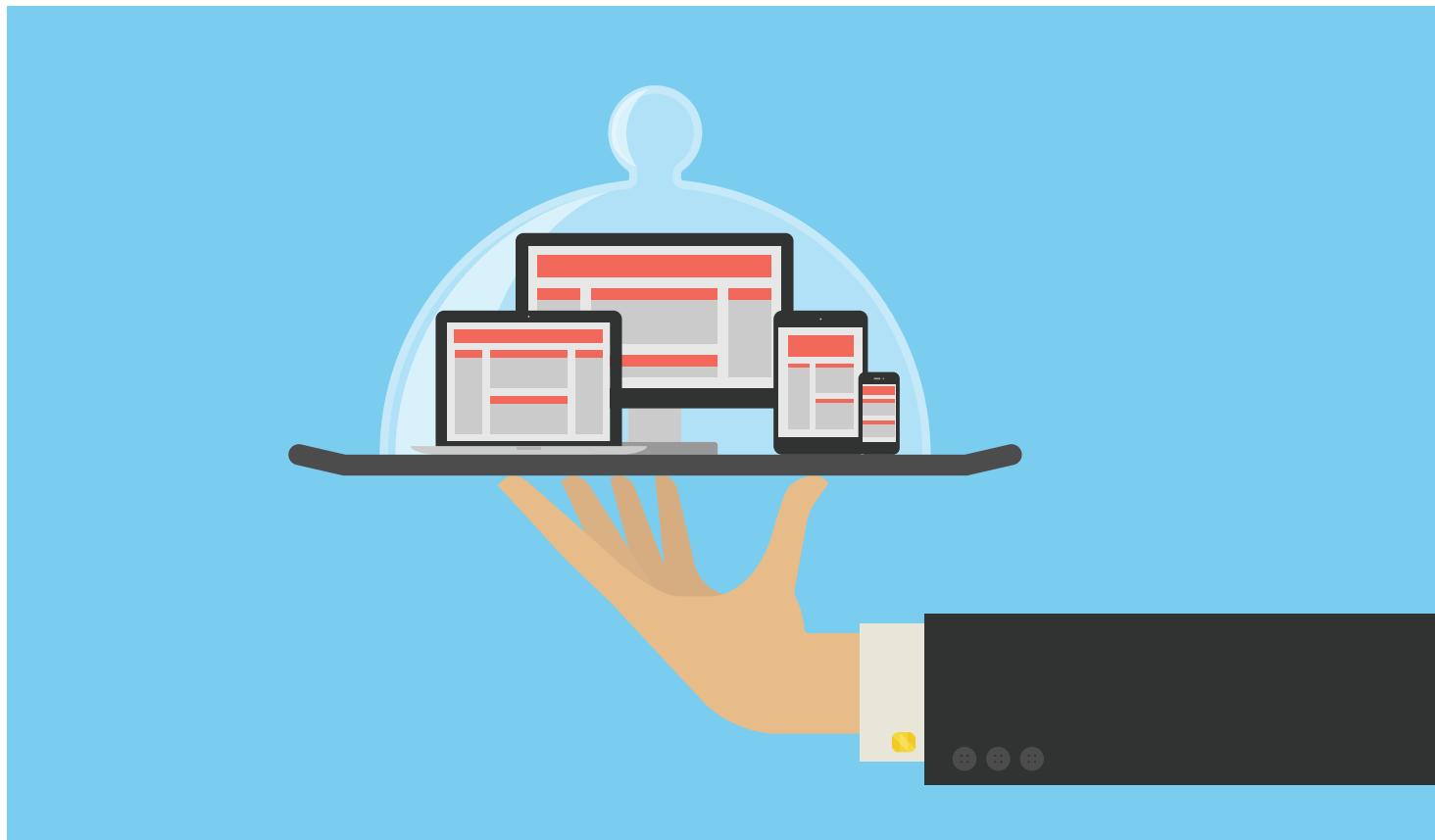
Search experience

Search for a job

All of the largest 50 U.S. higher education institutions have job search functionality but only 56% provide an experience that is mobile-optimized. In comparison, 90% of Australia's top 100 career sites have search functionality and 61% are mobile-optimized.[23]

The ability to refine or filter the search is particularly important for higher education institutions given the vast range of job types and specialities on campus. Two-thirds of institutions have sophisticated filter functionality that works well on a desktop, but only 22% have filtering search capability that is mobile-optimized. Poorly mobile-optimized search capability increases the likelihood that candidates will either skip the step of refining their search (which results in more irrelevant jobs to review), or will be frustrated by the need to pinch and scroll to select the search criteria. The outcome? The process becomes more time intensive increasing the likelihood that candidates disengage.

Job search features most likely to be mobile-optimized

Feature	Percentage
Candidate can save job/job basket	84%
Candidate can search for a job	56%
Candidate can subscribe to email alerts	26%
Candidate can filter the job	22%
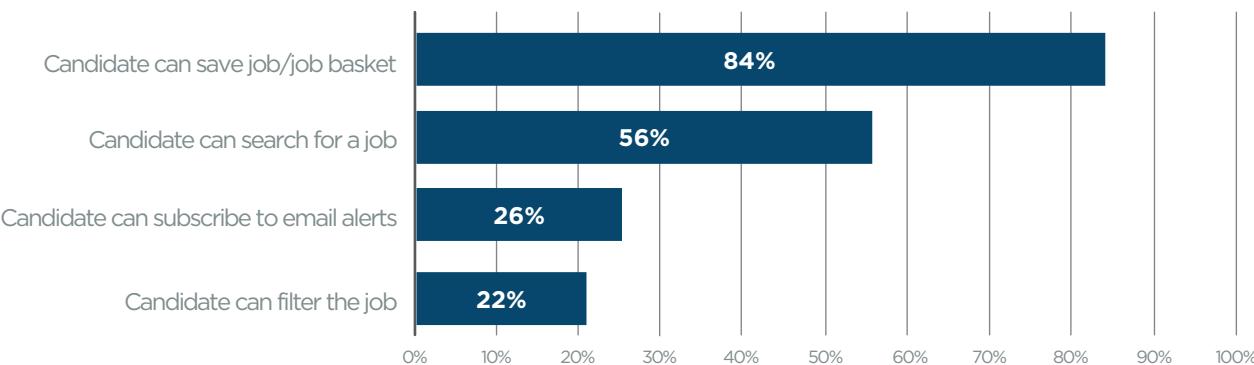
Job search functionality alone is no longer enough to stand out amongst the crowd. Sites that provide a better experience also have functionality for saving searches and subscribing to email alerts. The majority (74%) of institutions are missing the opportunity to engage talent and build out their talent pipeline by providing candidates with the ability to subscribe to email alerts.

Only 26% of career sites provide candidates the ability to subscribe to email alerts

Social referrals

Email referral

Only 30% of the 50 largest U.S. higher education institutions' career sites allow candidates to forward a job to a friend via email. We found U.S. higher education institutions are lagging behind other industries and regions: 85% of the Fortune 100,[5] 53% of Australia's top 100[23] and 32% of Southeast Asia's largest 50 organizations[24] allow candidates to share job opportunities via email.

Social media referral

The ability to share via social media was lower for U.S. institutions, at 40%, compared to other industries and regions. Approximately half (49%) of the Fortune 100[5] and Australia's top 100[23] allow sharing via social networks like Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. This is a missed opportunity for both candidates and institutions.

There are currently 39 million students or recent graduates on LinkedIn[15] and more than 133 million LinkedIn users in the U.S.[16] The majority of U.S. adults use social media. Although younger age groups are more prolific users at 86% for 18-29 year-olds, older demographic are still avid users with 80% of 30-49 year-olds and 64% of 50-64 year-olds using social media.[25] Within the higher education space, faculty members use social media for both personal (70%) and professional (55%) reasons.[17] Social media provides access to millions of high-quality candidates for free. Smart recruiters are going beyond Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter to Instagram, Pinterest and Snapchat in a bid to link to all demographics.

Although often overlooked, social media is an essential recruitment tool, with many recruiters already reaping the benefit of improved time-to-hire and improved quality of candidate.[4] To further increase the likelihood of reaching qualified candidates and tap into the passive audience, institutions need to embrace a social-enabled sourcing effort, which allows candidates to post to social media sites. Given the rapid uptake of social media, failure to do so may see scarce talent secured by competitors.

Social referral mobile-optimization
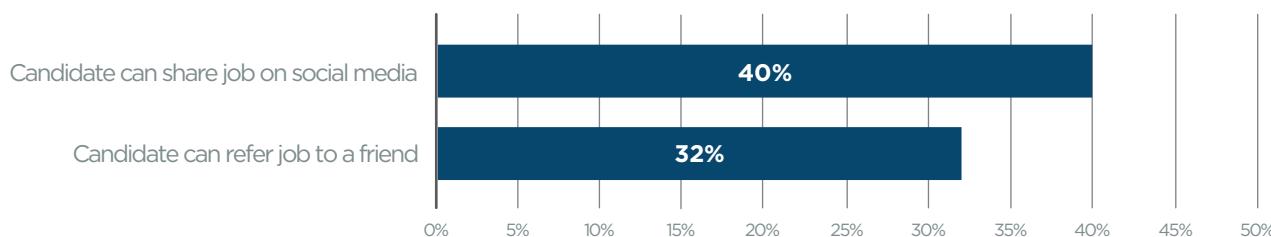
Only 40% of institutions are using social media to reach untapped talent

Application experience

Although all the institutions reviewed have a career site and online search and application, the maturity levels vary. Most execute basic search and filter functionality well, but the application experience is less consistent.

The conversion rate from search to application is influenced by the candidate's initial experience of the career site. The conversion rate from application to submission is further influenced by three elements that impact the application experience – the ability to apply online, the application form and the need for attachments.

Filling in an application

Minimizing data entry simplifies and speeds up the application process. Yet the vast majority of institutions fail to minimize this labor-intensive process for candidates, despite job boards and social media sites providing functionality that allows career sites to pull information from the profile of the candidate directly into the application form.

Only 36% of the career sites reviewed enabled candidates to pre-populate the application form with personal information stored in either LinkedIn or Facebook profiles, or from a resume stored on a mobile device or in the cloud. Of these, 28% required additional information to be manually entered. The remaining 64% of career sites had no prefill capability. Candidates are required to manually fill in all data to begin the application process.

Ability to pre-populate application form

Optimised

Experience

Basic

100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%

34%

2%

64%

Autocompletion
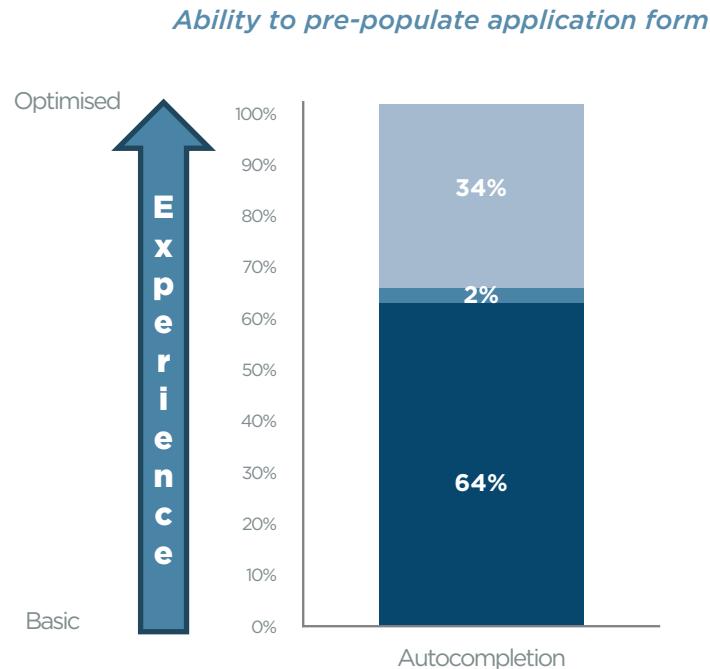
● Yes, minimal or no editing required
● Yes, extensive editing required   ● No, prefilling unsupported

The majority of institutions do not effectively utilize data pre-population from online sources

Submitting an application

Our previous research found that many career sites are not mobile device-agnostic.[23, 24, 26] If a resume is required to complete a job application, users of iOS (iPhone or iPad) devices cannot submit the application because the only "attach" option available is from phone storage, which takes candidates to their photos. This is not an issue for Android devices as they contain storage functionality.

All sites reviewed had online application ability – however, the experience varied dramatically based on the mobile device used (iOS vs Android). The iOS limitation is vendor specific and we found institutions that used non-device agnostic vendors employed one of three different strategies. They either did:

1.   Nothing – a resume was required and iOS device users could not submit the application.

2.   Manual workarounds – where no "attach from cloud" functionality was available candidates could type their resume into a blank document or use the application as the resume. This is a very time consuming task on a smartphone, taking in excess of 20 minutes. Sites which were poorly mobile-optimized and not sized correctly increased the time taken. The likelihood of candidates completing such an arduous process is slim.

3.   No resume required – candidates could quickly and easily complete and submit the application without the need to attach a resume.

In addition, some institutions allowed candidates to embed links to a website or a video to encourage alternative ways to provide resume information.

Only 46% of institutions saw all available talent

We only came across one site (2%) where an online application could not be submitted from a mobile device. The site required a resume to be attached and froze at this step for both iOS and Android devices. The majority (98%) of career sites theoretically have the ability to apply online via a mobile device. But what was the reality of applying via a mobile device?

4% of sites saw none of the talent:
- • 2% cannot submit application
- • 2% manual resume required

50% of the sites saw half the available talent:
- • 28% had an iOS issue – resume required to submit which cannot be done from an iPad or iPhone
- • 22% had an iOS issue but provided the option to manually type in the resume which has practical limitations

46% of sites saw all available talent:
- • 10% required a resume but were device agnostic – "attach from the cloud" functionality
- • 36% allowed candidates to submit an application without the need to attach a resume

Submitting an application
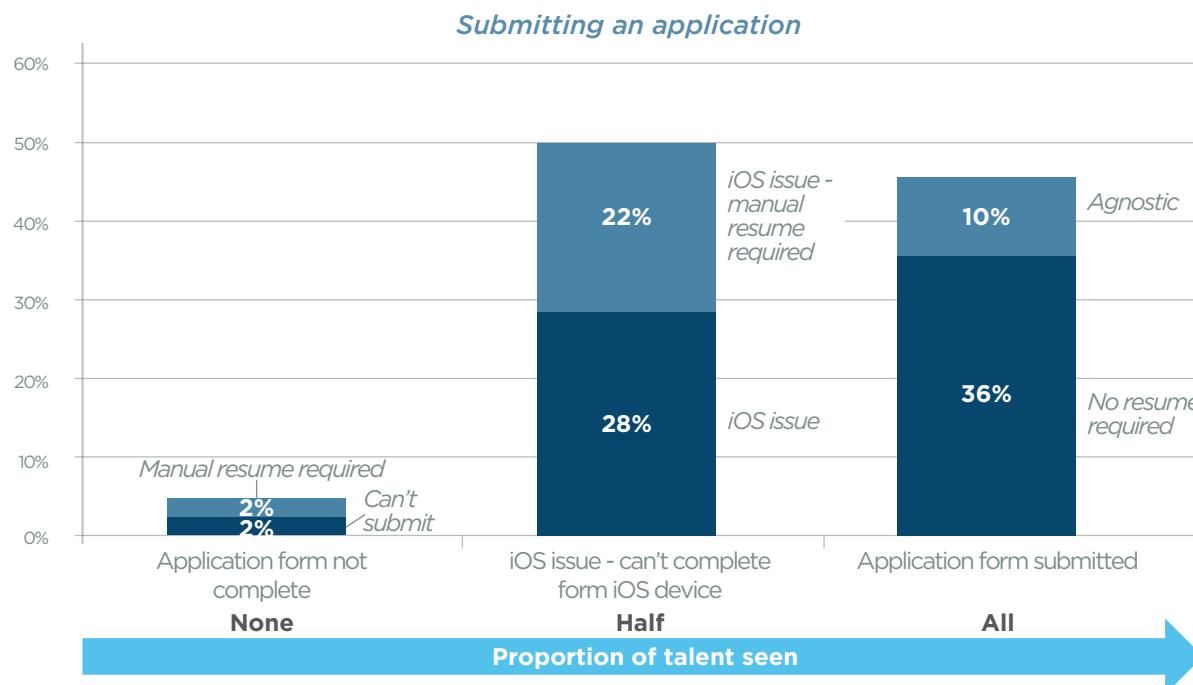
Data entry is laborious for candidates and assumes in a large part that candidates have stored their resume on their phone or in the cloud. Research shows that 40% of professional and 50% of active candidates have not applied to a job via mobile device because they did not have a stored resume.[7] For many job seekers the need to attach a resume negates the whole purpose of applying to a mobile-enabled career site.

Some roles require a resume – namely technical, specialist or senior positions, where there is a need to demonstrate experience and skills. The resume is the quickest and easiest way to communicate this information, and preferable to lengthy and unwieldy online application forms. However, many institutions are now embracing Talent Relationship Management (TRM) software and forward-looking institutions view resumes as becoming a thing of the past, as the ongoing relationship between the institution and prospective talent replaces this traditional mechanism.

In the near term, to simplify the application process and improve the candidate experience, institutions could offer jobs based on social profiles. Research indicates 38% of organizations believe LinkedIn will replace the resume over the next few years.[12]

Technology Experience

Apple vs Android – Choice of vendor matters

In the U.S., data usage is fairly evenly split between iOS and Android mobile devices, with iPhones used for web browsing just over 50% of the time.[6] Regardless of the exact split between Android and iOS, blocking iPhone users from applying because they are using an iOS device is unwise in a tight talent market.

In addition to the phone storage system, resumes can be stored in the cloud using applications such as Google Drive or Dropbox. This enables the application process to be completed and makes a site device-agnostic. Leading talent acquisition technology vendors provide this functionality.

In this study, only five out of the 50 career sites tested had device agnostic functionality. Vendors that do not provide the functionality to "attach resume from cloud storage" are potentially halving their customer's candidate pool. As discussed above, institutions using non-device agnostic vendors used one of three different strategies – nothing, manual workarounds, or no resume required. None of these options are ideal as they decrease the available talent pool or alternatively they forego the depth of information provided by a resume.

A similar study in Australia found that one-third of the sites were powered by PageUp, and enabled 100% of candidates to successfully and easily apply via mobile devices.[23]

Can you afford to miss all available talent? The choice of vendor matters.

Career site hosted by...

Legend:
- Brassing
- iCIMS
- Jobview
- Oracle
- Oracle/Peoplesoft
- PageUp
- PeopleAdmin
- Peopleclick/PeopleFluent
- Silkroad
- Taleo
- Workday
- Unspecified/Inhouse

Chart values: 10%, 4%, 2%, 2%, 14%, 4%, 30%, 2%, 10%, 4%, 16%, 2%
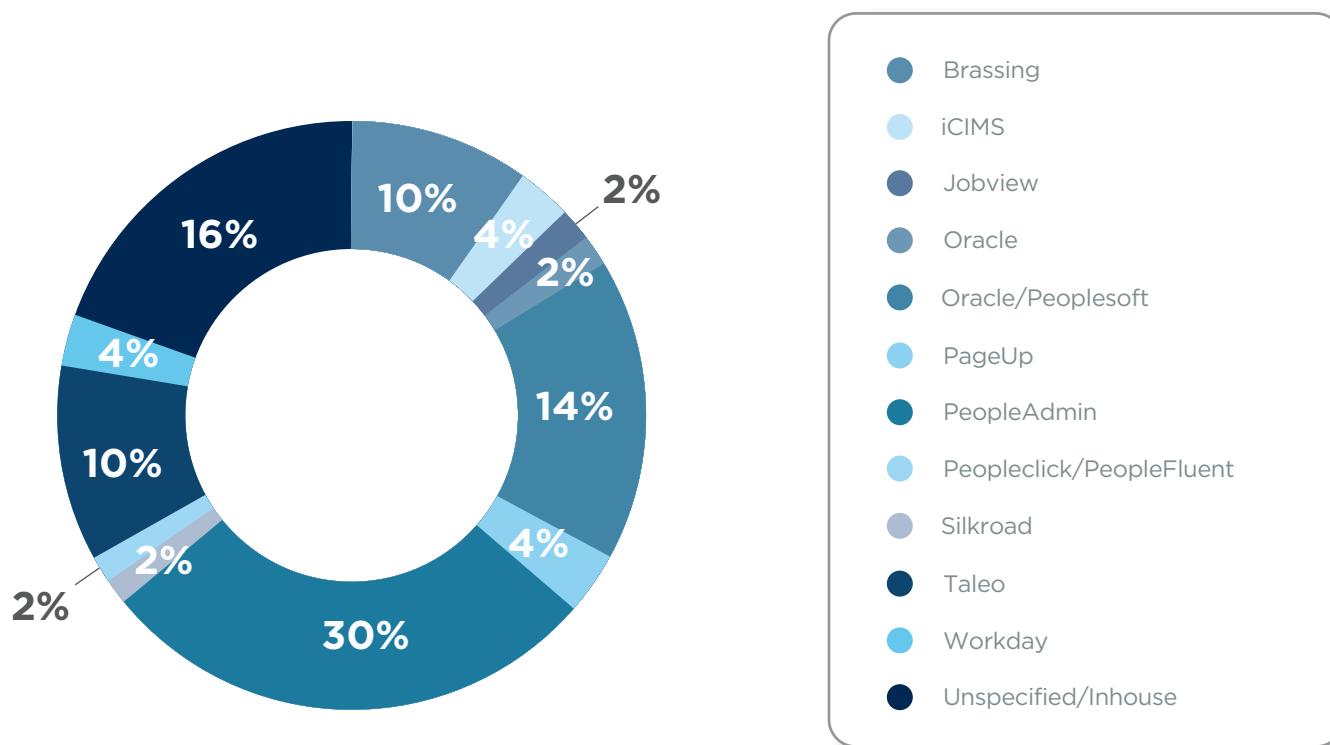
Can you afford to miss seeing all available talent? The choice of vendor matters

So What and What Now?

Tips for mobile-optimizing your career site:

Mobile-optimization is not whether or not it's possible to apply, but whether or not it's a simple, engaging, frustration-free experience. The best way to determine if your career site has content suitable for mobile devices is to search and apply for a position from your mobile phone.

Does your career site have the following?

☐ The ability to browse through job postings, filter and save jobs of interest on your mobile device.

☐ The ability to subscribe to alerts, refer a friend and share jobs via social media.

☐ A streamlined process which only includes steps essential to the recruitment process.

☐ No dead-ends or back tracking when searching or applying for jobs.

☐ Short, clear text with obvious calls to action.

☐ An application process that takes less than one minute.

☐ A seamless experience from the institution to career vendor site.

☐ Application forms that can be prefilled from social profiles or resumes and requires minimal editing.

☐ If a resume or cover letter is required it can be attached from cloud storage.

☐ The same experience on an Android or iOS (iPhone or iPad) device.

☐ Auto-acknowledgement of submitted application.

☐ An end-to-end mobile search and application experience.

If the answer to any of the above is 'no', now is the time to rethink your strategy and build out your long-term vision for mobile recruitment. Once you have set your plan of attack in motion, it's important to track its success.

The acceleration of smartphone penetration coupled with the uptake of social recruiting is shaping talent acquisition strategies. Having a clear strategy for leveraging mobile and social media will help overcome the challenges faced by talent acquisition leaders such as creating strong employer branding, sourcing talent in a tight market and the development of a strong talent pool. Continuing to place a low priority on a mobile-friendly recruitment experience will diminish your competitive advantage as talent is lost to the competition.

Methodology

Findings in this paper are based on PageUp's analysis of the career site experience of the 50 largest higher education institutions in the U.S. by employee number. The research was conducted during March 2017. Career sites were viewed on Smartphones, using the iPhone 5. Experience was measured from when a candidate clicks on job opportunities, ending at the point where the candidate clicks submit. iPhone mobile-optimization experience was tested using Safari. Android mobile-optimization experience was tested using Google Chrome.

What does mobile-optimization look like?

To be mobile-optimized the career site must include responsive design, clean design, rendering, cross-linking and redirection. This should occur throughout the entire experience.

- *Responsive design* refers to the viewing experience and has three main elements – orientation, sizing, and panning and scrolling. In an optimal experience these aspects happen automatically – pages rotate horizontally and vertically without affecting the content, content resizes appropriately, there is minimal panning and job seekers can easily scroll through content.

- *Clean design* is important to the user experience. Correct, big buttons and simple, clear calls to action are important to ensure a clean mobile-optimized experience.

- *Rendering* is the process by which computer graphics generate an image. In the context of mobile-optimization, rendering is crucial as it implies a website is built specifically in a mobile page format. Sites should stay clear of Flash which is not supported by Apple devices (iPhone and iPads) and have lightweight pictures and videos so they can be downloaded quickly.

- *Redirection and cross-linking* means only pages or links relevant to the recruitment experience are presented. A candidate should not come across any dead-ends as this negates the whole experience. Correct cross-linking and redirection provides the candidate with a seamless recruitment experience while minimizing the number of clicks.
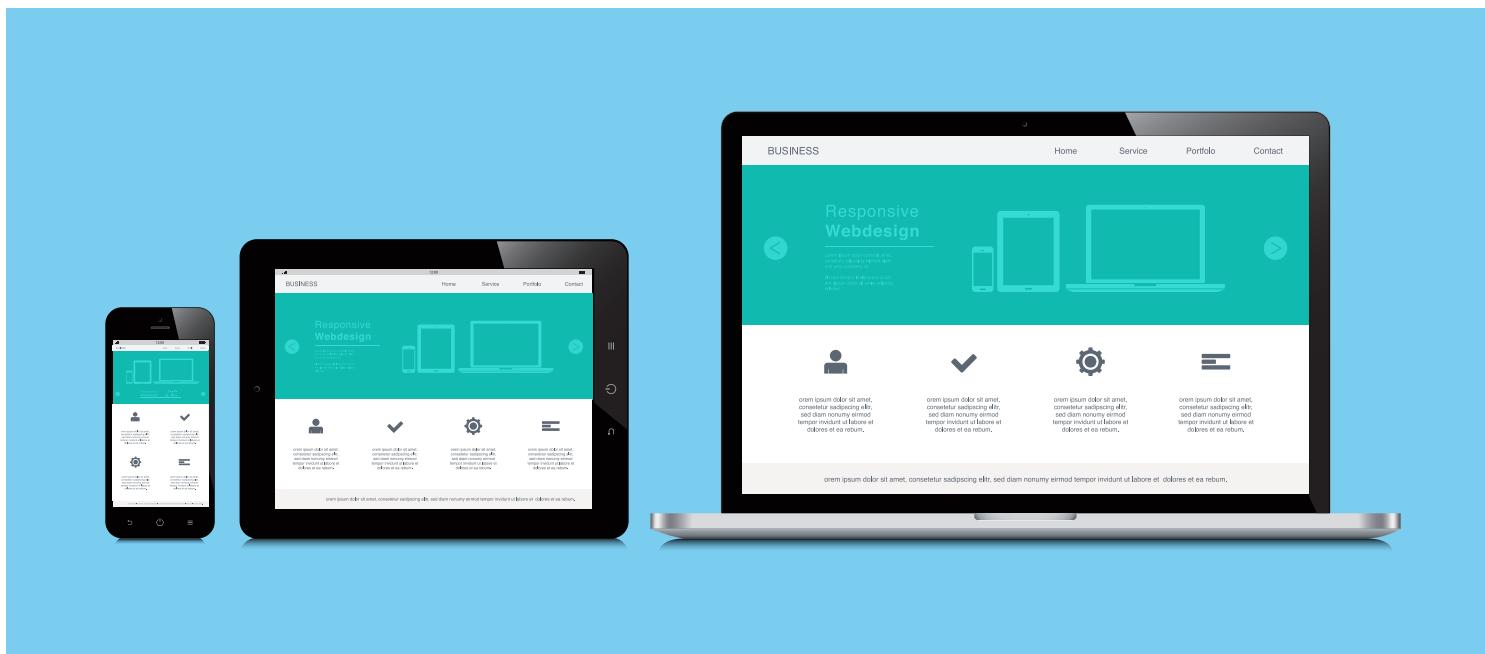
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