BREAKING THE CHAINS OF RECRUITMENT CLUTTER

COMPANIES THAT CAMPAIGNED DIFFERENTLY
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In the 2016 US Open, Rafael Nadal, once a feared titan in tennis commented, “In terms of energy, in terms of motivation, I was great. In terms of tennis, I needed more.”

This was after his fourth-round defeat to unheralded Lucas Pouille in five sets.

As mentioned, once a titan with near impregnable armour in his heyday, now merely a news headline for tournament upsets. In a harsh world with changing realities, it appeared for a moment that Rafael Nadal did not change, and as such was swept away by the currents of time and a more powerful younger generation.

Changing realities exist within the business world as well, and no organization is immune to it. We have heard constantly of Employee Engagement, but have we ever considered turning the cogwheels of time a step in reverse? Candidate Engagement; something largely overlooked in the corporate world.

Why has it become important, you may ask? Well, perhaps candidates have simply grown a brain and realized their worth as talent in the market space. Perhaps connecting with top tier talent is no longer as easy as it used to be.

The best candidates rarely respond to traditional tactics, often slipping through the net.

‘Out of the box’ creative recruitment campaigns, wacky if you may, have helped companies interact in a unique way with candidates, helping them gain a competitive edge early on. Little things matter, for a disengaged candidate may never become that top performer your organization yearns for.

And hence, without further ado, here are “10 of the Wackiest Recruitment Success Stories.”
THE SECRET MESSAGE
IS IT REALLY MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?

There is no denying that hidden job descriptions and messages help approach candidates in the most unexpected of situations. It’s also a great way to connect if the target market is employed elsewhere, tending to be a more cost effective method.
Have you ever heard the adage, “It’s hard to find good help these days.”?

It’s always been more of a fact in the gaming industry. While people in general and from other industries may shun players of MMORPGs, game development companies actively seek to recruit the same in the form of top-notch talent.

The competition for the best of developers is tough, especially when most companies in the industry refuse to reveal the project under production. But, to break the monotony of typical recruiter phone calls, Red5 came up with a unique method to attract potential employees.

Their Golden Ticket system sent 100 dream developers an unmarked FedEx box; inside which was another box that featured art from the game under development. This looked vaguely similar to the Mission Impossible set from the first movie.
Then, in a sort of modern Russian Nesting Doll manner, the potential employee uncovered a full set of five boxes, and an iPod within the fifth. This iPod was personally engraved for that recipient, along with a code to enter on the Red5 website.

Once connected to the website, the iPod played a personalized message, recorded from CEO Mark Kern, inviting the developer to the Red5 offices for an interview.

These were candidates vetted and thoroughly researched via social media, and 90 out of 100 recipients responded, including 3, who left their jobs to join the Red5 team.

**Quite the paranoia-inducing way to acquire new applicants, isn’t it?**

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<th>APPLICANTS REACHED OUT TO</th>
<th>NO. OF RESPONSES</th>
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There is no doubt about IKEA’s business success. Everybody knows them, or has at least heard of them. What’s their secret? Swedish meatballs? Perhaps. Those meatballs certainly are part of it, but there’s something deeper in their ideology. Something absolutely brilliant – yet fundamental to its business model – that keeps the company on top.

The answer? Well, that brilliant element is mere simplicity.

IKEA is known to provide functional, well-designed furniture that is affordable and can serve the many. Plus, buyers and customers assemble the furniture themselves. To break it down, there are two key points of brilliance at play here:

1. IKEA exploits the scientifically proven fact that people are more attached to things they make themselves.

2. IKEA has created a brand that is superior to the sum of its products. When people buy IKEA, they buy the brand.
What else makes the brand so attractive?

In its marketing, the company amuses with funny, clever ads that make you like the brand.

Paying homage to this ideology, when opening its new Australian Mega Store in the December of 2011, IKEA took these two core values and applied them to their recruiting strategy. The company needed to fill 100 positions and wanted a direct yet cost-effective approach to its recruitment process.

The solution? **Career Instructions** inside each of the company’s signature flat-pack product boxes.

That is, when customers opened their freshly purchased IKEA products, they found instructions on how to assemble a future with the highly successful Swedish company.

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<th>REQUIRED HIRES</th>
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At the end of the day, finding inventive ways to look beyond core competencies never has to be a headache. Take a page out of the Red5 or IKEA playbook.
GUERRILLA RECRUITING
IT’S NOT WARFARE; IT’S SMART TACTICS

This is a good way to approach candidates an organisation might struggle to reach with standard practice.

After all, off-the-wall campaigns that approach hiring problems in unique ways have always enjoyed strong social currency. This is also a great tactic to go viral with your recruiting strategies. Here are two instances of staying true to the cause.
Who Cares?

The Swedes have a knack for recruiting differently. Certainly IKEA proved its point. But, smart recruitment strategies aren’t exclusive to the corporate world. The Swedish Armed Forces proved just that with their campaign, titled – **Who Cares?**

In a time when the easiest way for people to express and share what they care about is through social media, how exactly did the Swedish army attract people willing to sacrifice their comfort for the sake of others?

The method behind their madness, or rather their concept was to lock someone in a mysterious black, enclosed box in central Stockholm. Left with little to no instructions or information in the room, said person could only leave the box if a total stranger was willing to exchange places with them for another hour.

Of course, the box was full of cameras, and the footage was broadcast to the world via a campaign site, from which people could do absolutely nothing to free the person. This time, no status update could help, and no tweet could make a difference.
The only way to act was to physically take the place of the person trapped. The question was, “Who cares?” Harsh conditions considering the instinctive nature of people to look out for themselves, you would think.

Wrong. As it turned out, a lot of people did care. In a grand total of 89 hours, 74 people sacrificed their own freedom to free someone they had never met. In fact, people travelled to the box from all over Sweden.

With over 100,000 visitors checking into the campaign site on a daily basis, the Swedish Armed Forces had not only started a conversation among the target group, but proved – in practice – that some people are prepared to sacrifice their own comfort to help others.

Who knew compassion could take you places in a dog-eat-dog world?

TARGET APPLICANTS  POSITIONS  REGISTERED APPLICANTS  GROWTH FROM TARGET
4300  1430  9930  2.3x
Enough about the Swedes. The Danes have something to say about that.

Every technical recruiter understands exactly how hard it is to hire spectacular front end developers, and of course, few get as creative as Danish company – Uncle Grey.

Having failed with traditional advertisement methods, Uncle Grey soon understood the error in their ways. Thorough behavioural research revealed that their target candidates spent most of their time playing computer games – 8 hours a week on average. Talk about hardcore.

With the information in hand, they dissected their strategy into three key parts:
The Hunting Ground.
Uncle Grey identified the most popular of these games – Team Fortress 2. This led to negotiations with the best of players to become ambassadors for the organization within the game in exchange for sponsorship offers.

The Platform.
With the ambassadors afoot, the development of a website was set into motion wherein potential candidates could gain access to an application. The URL to this website was prefixed to the gamer names of the ambassadors.

The Bait.
Advertising posters were put up within multiple game levels for every player to see by the ambassadors.

Within a week, Uncle Grey had more than 50 applicants, and had found their ideal candidate.
Spark an interest if you seek to stand out from the crowd, spark an interest if you desire the ideal candidate. Complex puzzles help with both. Also, who knew that someday, puzzles would help organizations qualify applicants and filter away unsuitable candidates. Smart.
Quixey is a Silicon Valley app search engine that struggled to find quality developers, and understandably so, competing with powerhouses like Google and Facebook. Welcome to the gruesome world of start-ups, my dear friend.

Having initially paid over $20,000 per developer hire to traditional recruiters, the company emerged with an elegant solution to cut costs for better quality.

They called it the “Quixey Challenge” – a simple contest. If someone could find and fix a bug in the code for an algorithm in under 60 seconds, said person would receive a $100 deposit via PayPal into their account.

The strategy also served as an invaluable lesson for hiring managers with a knack to place college degrees above all else. As mentioned in an interview,

“We just hired a guy named Marshall, who doesn’t have a college degree and lives in Grand Rapids Michigan. He wouldn’t come in from a Silicon Valley recruiter, but he reads Hacker News and he nailed the interview.”

LIRON SHAPIRA, Co-Founder & CTO of Quixey
Way back in 2004, a mysterious billboard unveiled itself on Highway 101 at the heart of the Silicon Valley. The billboard read, “{first 10-digit prime found in consecutive digits of e}.com”.

Now, the obvious answer, 7427466391.com, led to another equation and challenge. On completion, they were met with the message below:

“Nice work. Well done. Mazel tov. You’ve made it to Google Labs and we’re glad you’re here. One thing we learned while building Google is that it’s easier to find what you’re looking for if it comes looking for you. What we’re looking for are the best engineers in the world. And here you are.

For the company, this effort answered one their most potent of HR problems – “How do we recruit the best engineers in the world?”. Additionally, the spread of this concept added to Google’s then quirky, but now respected, culture of innovation.

The campaign generated strong discussions on Mathematical and Engineering forums even before the architect of the message unveiled itself, giving Google access to a small group of enthusiastic ‘problem solvers’ – a trait valued quite highly within the company.
GAMIFICATION

WHO SAID RECRUITMENT PROCESSES COULD NOT BE GAMES?

Gamification works by encouraging users to engage in game-like behaviours, in non-game contexts. Also, the role of gamification in the industry will act to become a game changer, pun intended. So, if you aren’t already thinking about its applications in your recruitment strategy, then perhaps it’s time you start.

Oh, we aren’t making claims out of thin air. Information Technology research firm, Gartner once predicted for over 70% of Forbes Global 2000 organizations to have at least one gamified application by 2014. This, inclusive of 25% of day-to-day business processes using aspects of gamification.

“Gamification aims to inspire deeper, more engaged relationships and to change behaviour, but it needs to be implemented thoughtfully. Most attempts at gamification currently miss the mark, but successful and sustainable gamification can convert customers into fans, turn work and recruitment into fun, or make learning a joy. The potential is enormous.”

BRIAN BURKE,
Research VP at Gartner
Cognizant Technology Solutions Corp is an American multinational corporation and also one of the world leaders in custom information technology, consulting, and business process outsourcing services.

As part of its Campus Engagement exercise, Cognizant in partnership with Mettl crafted a contest to test the skills of B-School graduates on multifaceted parameters. The idea was simple – brand promotion, and to hand-pick students to interact with their CXO team through a contest.

Top B-School students battled in a fierce contest on simulated real-world business problems to find the best solutions. Powered by Mettl’s simulator, the contest dished out challenges across a spectrum of genres – puzzles, case studies, guess estimates, and spreadsheet analysis.

Wary of company-candidate synergy, the challenge was additionally topped off with a psychometric evaluation to provide insights into basic motivations and organizational compatibility of the contestants. Talk about covering your bases.

A leader board throughout the campaign helped create much needed social visibility, invariably enhancing the competitiveness among candidates. A rare case of candidate engagement at its finest, indeed.
“The CXO Challenge is part of our efforts to foster a spirit of entrepreneurship amongst business students.

In providing first-hand insights into what it takes to successfully grow a business in terms of strategy, competitive dynamics, financials, marketing operations, and so on, the competition helped students not only discover and hone their leadership skills, but also understand corporate challenges faced by the CXOs.

It provided an opportunity for students to wear the CXO hat, learn from experienced Cognizant experts, and come up with innovative business ideas.”

SRIRAM RAJAGOPAL, VP HUMAN RESOURCES AT COGNIZANT

Moreover, the campaign emerged strong with extensive outreach in India, Dubai, Manila, and Singapore.

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<th>STUDENT PARTICIPATION</th>
<th>POTENTIAL CXO'S DISCOVERED</th>
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<td>2300</td>
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Marriott, a hospitality giant, had thrown away conventional recruitment strategies with the introduction of an online game titled – My Marriott Hotel. Marketed on the organization’s Facebook jobs and careers page, the game targeted the youth in developing countries like India and China, where the hospitality industry was yet to gain prominence.

A simulation game akin to the annoyingly famous Farmville, My Marriott hit the digital world to engage, educate, and potentially source good candidates into the hospitality industry.

The idea stemmed from an earlier Marriott virtual experience game, Xplor, which awarded players with redeemable gift vouchers. These rewards could later be used to amplify customer experience at Marriott hotels.
At any given time, we have players from 120 different countries running their own kitchens – and that’s compared to the 73 countries we actually operate in. We also know that one-third of our gamers end up clicking on the ‘try it for real’ button, which pops them out onto the careers section of our website.”

FRANCESC MARTINEZ,
MARRIOTT VP OF HUMAN RESOURCES.

Susan Strayer, HR Branding Expert at Marriott, helped develop ‘My Marriott’ and also credited its success to a very basic idea behind the gamification of their recruitment process. “Not only am I having fun, but I’m actually gaining an understanding of what it takes to run a kitchen.”

The first iteration of the game included a rough simulation of the Marriott kitchen, honed around three principalities:

- **Acquisition of raw materials and ingredient selection in categories of quality & price by players.**
- **Staffing for the players’ Marriott kitchen on the basis of expertise, experience and salaries.**
- **Inspection of outgoing orders for quality before delivery to customers.**
MGM GRAND

The Iron Chef

Going down the creative route is not always easy; devising an original, clever idea takes the right people is not a straightforward process, so let's not sit here and pretend that it is.

MGM Grand, a Las Vegas Hotel & Casino, took it up a notch for a recruitment campaign that required a thorough plan and a firm understanding of their ideal employee characteristics.

The Hotel needed a new Head Chef for one of their Asian restaurants, and turned to TV programme ‘Iron Chef’ for inspiration – a battle among chefs to put it simply; and what a battle it was. No, seriously. We do not kid.

A 23-year old sous-chef, formerly an employee at a 24-hour coffee shop, emerged the leader of the winning team, thereby conquering status as the new Head Chef for the upscale Japanese restaurant. Sales had a particularly nice impact under the new leadership.

This was an ideal case for a two birds with one stone scenario, where the campaign served to reveal a candidate of the strongest innovative calibre, and to send a positive message to all MGM employees:

**Performance and talent are certainly rewarded, and there's always room for growth and movement up the hierarchical employee ladder.**

We could all learn from MGM Grand; one smart investment on a grand scale competition to phenomenal rewards. A fitting story of high stakes gambling, considering MGM's line of business. How appropriate.
HISTORICAL

THE INNOVATION THAT EXISTED BEFORE OUR TIME

History has never been about textbooks; in fact, recruiters could learn a lot from some of past's most famous hiring campaigns. There are many of note and reputation, but we chose to highlight one of the most notorious, most successful campaigns yet in the course of history. Read on.
Could this in reality remain history’s most notorious finger? This poster went on to become one of the most iconic and enduring images of World War I; simply because, Lord Kitchener’s appeal to Britons was vital to the army’s recruitment drive.

A 1914 advertisement by Alfred Leete, the poster depicted Lord Kitchener, the British Secretary of State for War, above the words — “WANTS YOU”.

In the image, Kitchener, wearing the cap of a British Field Marshal, stares and points at the viewer, calling them to enlist in the British Army against Central Powers – Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire.

Historians call it a masterful piece of wartime propaganda that helped bring the army 1,000,000 recruits. A million, bloody recruits! In fact, September 1914, the month of Lord Kitchener’s advert debut, saw the greatest number of new recruits during a war. And trust when we say, not everyone is eager to join the armed forces during wartime.

Even now a hugely influential image and slogan, the poster has also inspired imitations in other countries, from the United States to the once Soviet Union.
As far as business is concerned, especially with recruitment, a little exploration within oneself possesses immense possibilities for use in the creation of powerful, disruptive and effective recruitment campaigns. We hope to have opened that door of innovation for you, just a little bit.

After all, any business is its employees, as subjects are to a king.

With all the digital noise around us, it’s tougher than ever to find the right talent for business. So many factors to consider – cultural synergy, technical competencies, behavioural competencies, and so much more.

Perhaps, it’s time we acknowledge that it is not job postings on LinkedIn or a dozen other job boards that stands out on top, but the need to be the best to receive the best. Perhaps, it’s time to devise disruptive recruitment campaigns, attentively planned to reach and move your best candidates.

Good luck, and Godspeed!

A Parting Note

Thank You!
WHAT IS METTL?

Mettl is a Saas based assessment platform that enables organizations to create customized assessments for use across the entire employee lifecycle, beginning with pre-hiring screening and candidate skills assessment, training and development programs for employees/students, certification exams, contests and more.

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