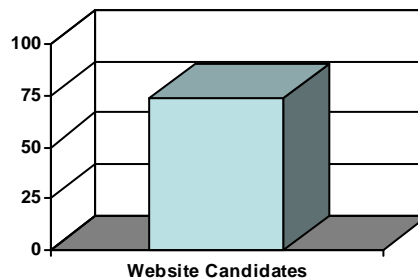


3 Most Important Considerations When Evaluating an Applicant Tracking System (ATS)

By Sherry Panciera, *President of North Star HR Inc.*

Research has shown that employers' own corporate websites are now considered **the top source of new hires**, as reported by more than 74% of organizations. And in further leveraging this strategy, employers are marrying their corporate careers website with an Applicant Tracking System to achieve outstanding results, in not only increasing the quality and time to hire but also saving organizations significant time and money.



As an expert and leader in the ATS industry, I am often asked my thoughts and advice on what distinguishes one vendor from another, as well as what one should consider when choosing an ATS provider. My advice to organizations considering an ATS, is to evaluate each vendor against the following **3** criteria:

1. Technology

Technology is the concrete foundation of an ATS decision, and each vendor can be evaluated in terms of 4 technology aspects:

- **Base functionality** should offer user-friendly features that streamline administration, promote collaboration, and, align with and support your organization's recruitment strategy and business processes;
- **Ability and willingness to customize** in the event your organization requires features and/or automation that are not currently present within the base 'off the shelf' software;
- **Future developments and enhancements** are important to explore to ensure your ATS investment continues to grow and provide value as best practices evolve over time and new technology becomes available; and
- **Maintenance and updates** are included in most web-based solutions. Look for a system that is maintenance-free. i.e. the vendor is responsible for such things

as technology maintenance, data storage and security updates – this will save your organization time and resources that can be put towards other tasks.

To fully assess an ATS including the above technical aspects, I recommend that you request a live demonstration, as well, I encourage people to take advantage of a complimentary trial, if offered, there is no better way to assess an ATS vendor than through a ‘test drive’.

2. Customer Service & Support

The evaluation of an ATS vendor goes much beyond the actual technology offered—rather your evaluation should examine the overall ‘service’ experience. There is some really impressive technology out there that will make you go ‘wow!’, but if you have a question and/or something is not working properly within the ATS and you are unable to rely on your vendor support team, the outcome will be less than satisfactory over time. Look for a vendor that is responsive, easy to work with and shows dedication to prospects . . . and yes, even before they become customers. Here’s a service excellence test that I often use – place a call to a vendor you are considering (for any kind of service) and see how long it takes them to respond back to you in addition to the quality of response. Vendors tend to invest most of their resources in obtaining new clients and/or revenue-generating areas, i.e. sales. If you are unable to obtain a quick response when you are a prospect looking to be a customer (and there is revenue at risk by either a delayed response, or, not returning the phone call at all), it is not likely to change once you have signed a contract and are a customer.

Once you find a vendor that passes the *service excellence* test to your satisfaction, also inquire about ongoing training and support, as well as, if and how often the vendor solicits feedback from customers in developing new features. Vendor excellence should demonstrate a good balance between obtaining new customers and retaining existing customers.

Before committing to an ATS, the final customer service excellence test should include references from other customers who have utilized and benefited from the services and technology the system provides. Well-conducted references can provide insight into not only the technology the vendor offers, but also the service ethics and integrity of the vendor.

3. Return on Investment (ROI) versus The Price Tag

When people ask me about pricing and comparing ATS vendors, my advice is to consider and evaluate the money (and time) you will save as a result of implementing a particular ATS, or otherwise known as calculating your return on investment (ROI), i.e. the difference in your hiring costs pre-ATS versus hiring costs post-ATS (and as different as each ATS is with features, there will also be different savings and ROI associated with each).

Although some systems may display a higher price tag, if you examine the efficiencies the organization is realizing, i.e. how much time and money the ATS is saving the organization due to streamlining administration and automation, what you may initially

understand to be the most expensive system may actually generate a greater ROI than the least expensive system. The secret is in evaluating each ATS and comparing ROI figures, not actual price tag figures. Look for a vendor who has experience in calculating ROI, and vendors who are really interested in your business will even prepare a Return on Investment Report at no charge.

I receive many calls and e-mails on this subject – my advice is once you have a few vendors identified . . . do some demo's . . . check a few references . . . calculate your ROI . . . and try before you buy!

For more information about Applicant Tracking & Resume Management, and the benefits North Star could provide for your company, contact Sherry Panciera at sherry@northstarhr.com or phone 204.294.9793.