

# Adding Value to Recruitment Services

INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS BRING SKILLS TO RECRUITMENT THAT CAN TAKE SERVICE CAPABILITIES TO A HIGHER LEVEL.

BY MEGAN BUTTITA, MLIS

People sourcing—a process that involves identifying and contacting potential candidates for open job positions—is a skill that can be taught to individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds. The Internet facilitates this process by providing easy access to potential candidates, both through specialized databases as well as simple Google searches.

Perhaps because candidate information is so readily available, few organizations feel the need to include an information professional in the recruiting process. As the senior information specialist in the Talent Acquisition Department at Allstate, a provider of property and casualty products in the United States and Canada, I can shed some light on how librarians can assist with the recruiting function in this exciting and innovative space.

## Creating Our Team

In 2009, Suzanne Sinclair, Allstate's director of talent acquisition, had a vision to create an in-house recruiting model that mirrored the retained executive search process for bonus-level employees. The business case for this vision was presented to Allstate leadership after assessing the current state of the company's recruiting efforts and meeting with internal customers and retained search firms. The initiative was approved after leadership saw the value, significant cost savings, and energy it would bring to Allstate's recruiting function.

The mandates from leadership were to procure experts who were knowledgeable about the candidate markets and improve the efficiency of the methods used to recruit officers for the company. A new team, Leadership Talent Acquisition (LTA), was formed within

the Talent Acquisition Department. Soon, two executive recruiters from retained search firms, two search coordinators, and one sourcer (an information professional with a degree in library science) were added to the team.

The role of the sourcer/librarian was to add value by providing research and related services for LTA's emerging function. At first, the difference between a sourcer with general research capabilities and an information professional with sourcing capabilities was not immediately clear. It soon became apparent that an information professional, while not a traditional recruiting sourcer, could provide research services beyond simply finding pools of candidates. By adding an information professional to the team, Leadership Talent Acquisition took its service capabilities to a new level.

As the economy slowly recovered, the Talent Acquisition Department started to grow, and LTA began to rely less and less on retained and contingency search firms and started managing more candidate searches in-house. An additional information professional was hired in 2012 to support Leadership Talent Acquisition, and the team expanded to 12 members.



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In the latter half of 2012, Talent Acquisition made a strategic decision to bring recruiting completely in-house and expand the roles of its information professionals to serve all of Allstate's recruiting needs. To support this decision and meet the growing workload and research demands of the unit, LTA's then-senior information specialist, Ozzie Meza, and Suzanne Sinclair proposed the creation of a new unit, Talent Acquisition - Strategic Services.

Strategic Services consists of two teams: (1) Marketing and Branding and (2) Research. By creating Strategic Services, we are no longer competing with retained search firms—Allstate has recognized the value that Leadership Talent Acquisition and its group of information professionals provide. The goal now is to expand the role of the research team, in terms of both the offerings we provide and the impact our deliverables have on various projects and hiring goals.

### Maximizing Our Skills

The unique value the information professionals (known as information specialists within Allstate) bring to recruiting lies in the creation and presentation of information that has been synthesized from a variety of resources. This information is invaluable to business discussions and provides recruiters and hiring managers with the targeted information they need to ensure successful outcomes.

For example, as Talent Acquisition's strategy shifted from "post and pray" to passive recruiting (i.e., finding candidates who are not actively looking for new jobs), department leaders recognized the need to improve our sourcing operations. By adopting a more targeted sourcing approach using geographic and labor market data, competitive intelligence, and tailored searching strategies, our information specialists were able to set more realistic expectations and requirements for the types of talent that could be attracted.

The information specialists who comprise Strategic Services – Research

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are organized according to Allstate's business functions, allowing them to build expertise in, and consult on, certain areas. Each information specialist has his or her own "sweet spots" that are encouraged and utilized in different ways. Currently, Strategic Services – Research comprises the following personnel: a manager, a senior information specialist, and a group of information specialists.

**The manager.** In addition to setting strategic goals for the research team, the manager plays a key role overseeing workloads, networking internally and externally, coordinating the professional development of the overall team, and consulting on projects that specifically support Allstate's senior leaders.

**The senior information specialist.** The senior information specialist plays a key knowledge management role by managing technologies necessary for us to track our work and capture intelligence. Technology can include sourcing tools such as LinkedIn, project management tools such as SharePoint, and candidate management tools such as customer relationship management software.

**The information specialists.** Information specialists are the knowledge leads and serve on the front line of the team. They are responsible for managing research requests, fulfilling clients' needs, and participating in hiring manager kick-off meetings. In these meetings, the information specialists have the opportunity to ask pertinent sourcing questions of the hiring manager, thereby reducing the "telephone tag" effect. The information specialists also are the lead researchers for targeted recruiting initiatives, such as military recruiting, diversity recruiting, and college recruiting.

### Leveraging Our Tools

Recruiting is a fast-paced function, and the information specialists who work in this space must be able to find, analyze, and provide information in an accurate, clear and concise way under very tight deadlines. A desire to discover new tools and techniques for finding information is a must, as is a passion for solving complex problems in creative ways. Project management and business analysis skills are helpful as well, as they enable information professionals in recruiting to translate the needs of the wider business into actionable information.

While technology in all of its forms—in-house, ad hoc, and vendor-specific—supports the information specialists, it is only a means to connect the dots and help make sense of the data. Ultimately, information specialists must use their professional skills and training to optimize Allstate's recruiting efforts, which requires providing a variety of services such as competitive intelligence, labor market intelligence, benchmarking, resource evaluation, and research instruction.

Before the Research team was developed, Allstate relied heavily on third-party research vendors to provide competitive intelligence and other sourcing services. Reducing and, in some cases, eliminating our dependency on these outside vendors freed up financial resources that enabled us to purchase some key research tools.

While we use many traditional resources that special librarians in other fields would recognize, our suite of tools changes depending on the specific need and the recruiting landscape. We rely on the following for our core toolkit:

- News aggregators, which allow us to monitor important industry and company news;

- Market research tools that provide us with market segmentation data;
- Business research tools, which are necessary for building comprehensive target lists;
- Government sites that provide demographic information (usually free of charge); and
- Employment Websites, which allow us to post jobs and provide quality information on talent pools.

### Aligning with the Organization

Because we are function-specific within Talent Acquisition, we have the luxury of concentrating on one business area (recruiting) and thus can dig deeply to address the needs of our clients. This has enabled us to build specific business acumen related to recruiting and provide Allstate with a competitive advantage for talent.

To help stay connected to the needs and concerns of the larger organization, the Research team introduced communities of practice in 2012 to enable recruiters and sourcers from various teams to connect and learn. This method of sharing information has been extremely successful, as today a community of practice exists for each major role within Talent Acquisition.

Being function-specific, we also face challenges navigating the larger organization. The Research team has made connections with other information professionals within Allstate by tapping into our professional and personal networks. There are several other information professionals within the company, and they are wonderful resources to have at hand. We share ideas and keep each other up to date on the work we are doing and the resources we use.

Additionally, we work with other groups within Allstate that provide services similar to ours, such as Workforce Measurement and the broader Human Resources Department. Establishing these types of relationships allows us to stay abreast of the overall research needs of the company and helps align our strategy with that of the enterprise.

### SERVICE PRINCIPLES OF TALENT ACQUISITION – RESEARCH TEAM

- Act as consulting partners
- Maintain consistent methodologies
- Foster collaboration across talent acquisition
- Communicate Allstate’s value proposition
- Identify opportunities for learning
- Participate in communities of practice
- Influence through education and information
- Connect clients to dynamic resources

SOURCE: Allstate, 2013

Promoting our services has been a challenge thus far, as our clients have varying needs and our team in its current state is still relatively new. One of our main objectives this year is to conduct “road shows” to provide instruction on our research techniques. We also want to create a feedback mechanism that will continually help us gauge the types of research activity that are in demand.

### Serving Our Clients

When we present information, it is a learning experience for both the recruiter and the hiring manager. For example, when we pull demographic information for a region or build a target list of competitors, it helps everyone involved better understand the supply of, and demand for, talent within a specific occupation. The work our information specialists perform allows them to conduct informed conversations with their clients and builds market knowledge that will help them provide even more value when responding to the next request.

We are always making sure we stay on top of industry trends and techniques and remain open to change. The Research team holds weekly meet-

ings where we come together to review projects, balance workloads, and solicit ideas about new tools. We meet with our Marketing and Branding colleagues on a monthly basis to touch base and align projects and strategies as necessary.

In keeping with Allstate’s commitment to its customers, the Research team commits to delivering a service that is aligned with the business needs of its customers. We have established service principles (see sidebar) that hold us accountable for being *consultants* with our partners, not just information gatherers. We recently implemented a number of processes and mandates to ensure we “live into” our service principles; these processes and mandates include the following:

- We use a research request form (which we developed with SharePoint) that serves as our research tracker and knowledge base.
- With each request, we complete a robust service level agreement detailing our time to respond and service expectations.
- We know that change is inevitable, so we expect team members to be agents for change and use teachable moments to ease anxieties and transfer knowledge.
- We remind ourselves that sometimes the most obvious answers are free, easy, and quick wins.
- Teach, learn and improvise!

Our service principles underscore the purpose of creating the Research team, which was to fundamentally shift the perception of the Talent Acquisition Department so that others would see it as a strategic partner within the enterprise. Adding information professionals to Talent Acquisition has enabled our unit to make great strides in this direction and improve the recruiting function within Allstate. **SLA**