Usability Matters: Why the User Experience in Recruiting Technology Can Make or Break Your Hiring Process
Matching good jobs with strong candidates is tough work that requires comprehensive technological support. For starters, recruiters need ways to look for talent in the right places. Candidates need easy access to job openings that suit their skills, along with a straightforward means to apply for jobs that interest them. Recruiters and hiring managers also need effective tools that let them research prospects and schedule interviews, so they can rapidly determine if there’s a good match. And the list of necessary stars to align—all those critical features and functions—goes on.

The problem is that features and functions, while certainly important, don’t equal success on their own. There’s another component that plays a massive role in how well recruiting technology works (or any technology, for that matter), and that’s usability.
Usability and the user experience: What do they mean in recruiting?

Picture this: Candidates, recruiters, and hiring managers are spread out across three rivers, all seeking to join the same ocean of employment bliss. How can they come together quickly and efficiently?

You might be inclined to stick a tool in their hands—a boat or a paddle, for example. But then what? If they can’t figure out how to use these tools, or they don’t like how the tools feel, or the tools require too much additional work, they won’t use them. And then what happens? Candidates stagnate. Frustrated recruiters can’t reach them, and hiring managers can’t easily interact and bring them on board.

Recruiting platforms work in much the same way. They’re meant to connect candidates, recruiters, and hiring managers. And it’s true—you can load these platforms up with features that, in theory, make the talent search and hiring process easier. The problem, however, is that if no one can effectively apply these features, they’re meaningless.

Here’s the key: The process of bringing great talent to great jobs should be intuitive and straightforward for everyone involved. Candidates, recruiters, and hiring managers all need something that naturally drives them together. That’s where usability comes in.

Usability is what triggers your instinct to adopt a solution meaningfully. Like the current in a river naturally flows downstream, usability compels you to move forward by intuitively transforming features into innovations. Put a boat in a river with a current, and it moves practically on its own. This ease and efficiency define the user experience. And ultimately, a positive user experience creates the critical confluence that unites candidates, recruiters, and hiring managers.

“Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works.”

-Steve Jobs
Usability = User Engagement

According to HR and talent management expert Josh Bersin, the HR software landscape has been changing consistently over time to reflect the growing need (and desire) for “systems of engagement”—rather than the traditional “systems of record” that comprised most early enterprise software. Whereas systems of record are generally those software applications required for use to run a business (think financial, back-office type tasks), systems of engagement are often cloud-based applications that draw users together, promoting collaboration, productivity, and efficiency.

As the world of email and social networking has rapidly become the new normal, more and more software users have grown to expect engaging systems. They now understand they have a choice whether or not to use available software or tools to complete their tasks. And, as Bersin reflected in a recent blog post, one the main issues with today’s HR software in general is that “employees don’t use it much. And when they do they rarely give it the attention it warrants.” Why? Because what they’ve been presented with has been less than engaging. It lacks usability. Today, HR users—whether candidates, recruiters, or hiring managers—crave that *usability* more than ever.
What happens without usability?

“Just as the mass market has demanded and is receiving more usable products, so should businesses demand that their technology vendors make their software easier to learn, more efficient to use, and easy to remember.”

All parties in the hiring process are indeed demanding—whether explicitly or implicitly by their lack of use—a more positive user experience from their software applications and platforms. That’s because they’ve seen what happens when usability falls by the wayside.

- Candidates are deterred from applying for jobs, and they can form negative opinions of employer brands. Why? Because lengthy, repetitive, and complicated processes drag the process out beyond what today’s commonly used platforms, such as Facebook, have encouraged us to expect. Companies that put candidates through too many hoops to apply can be viewed as behind the times, inconsiderate of applicants’ time, or—in cases where technology fails to keep candidates updated on their application status—outright rude.

A recent review of Fortune’s Best 100 Companies to Work For found that:

- More than 40% fail to provide straightforward navigation during the online job application process.
- More than 50% fail to provide or promote access to relevant content.
- More than 25% don’t even attempt to integrate the application process with social media.


• Recruiters and hiring managers grow frustrated with functions that are difficult to find and apply, or that put the user through too many “unnatural” steps to complete a basic task. For example, when an applicant submits a resume, recruiters grow weary of launching separate applications to view the resume or schedule an interview. There’s a disturbing amount of back-and-forth involved in simply researching and tracking talent effectively. Often, the functionality is there in the software—but users can’t handle the legwork that’s asked of them. They’ve grown accustomed to consumer-friendly platforms, touch screens, mobile access, and intuitive navigation. When they can’t find the value in a system, they don’t use it.

Bottom line:
Only usable systems of engagement will drive user adoption.

Here’s what can happen when intuitive interfaces and navigation structures are missing.

• Productivity actually declines because regular, key processes take too long.
• People completely gloss over an application’s supposed benefits, “because users vote with their fingers and don’t adopt the new system.”

The Real Value of Usability

In a recent survey, 628 HR organizations were asked if they would consider switching from their existing HR system of record to a new system of engagement. An astounding 58% of them agreed they would undertake a migration—potentially amassing millions of dollars in cost—purely for the new system’s more engaging user interface.

That data demonstrates not only how important usability is today, but also how incredibly valuable it can be to a company. More and more organizations are realizing that when users become fully engaged with a new system, the value of their technology investment skyrockets. In other words, you get more for your money in a well-designed, intuitive application than you do in a system that’s non-intuitive—no matter what features and functions it offers.

70% of companies believe the number one driver of software value realization is effective user adoption.

Only 1% see software functionality as the primary value driver.

84% of companies believe the improved software usage will lead to reduced costs.

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What does a “Usable” Recruiting Platform Do?

“We’ve talked with hundreds of HR systems buyers over the years…and what they tell us is that the real ROI of these systems is not the software, it is the introduction of new, streamlined, data-driven processes to hire, manage, engage, and support people,” writes Bersin. And ultimately, he believes, software should be built to “enable people to work better.”

This means that recruiting and hiring professionals should seek out systems of engagement that provide the kind of usability designed for today’s expectations, so they can just do their jobs better. According to one IT management blog, companies would do well to find “a SaaS system that is as simple as Facebook, Gmail, and other popular Web applications, so users can work in an environment they are already familiar with, and get up and running instantly.”

When your recruiting platform is a true system of engagement, it will combine innovative features and interface design to fit right into the formats users already know. For example, on this type of recruiting platform:

- **Candidates** can apply for jobs using Facebook or by directly sending LinkedIn profiles. They can access jobs and apply from their mobile devices. And they can track application status with real-time updates.

- **Recruiters** can find everyday tasks within simple reach on the application’s interface. Candidate resumes and other uploaded files are presented seamlessly within the application, without having to launch external programs. Applicant tracking and reporting becomes a painless task and provides current status updates to everyone in a familiar, consumer-facing display.

- **Hiring managers** can work directly with recruiters through the application to schedule candidate interviews, enjoying seamless integration with their existing calendar programs, such as Google Calendar or Outlook.

These are the sort of features only enabled by innovative design to truly engage users and motivate them to apply technology effectively.

**Bottom line:** Only recruiting solutions that place a high priority on usability will be successfully adopted by all parties in the hiring process—resulting in more filled job openings and greater ROI.

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Conclusion

If you’re in search of the critical confluence—where candidates, recruiters, and hiring managers can come together to mutually achieve their objectives—then beware of feature hype.

“Featuritis,” warns user experience expert Paul Sherman, “is a pernicious malady. Both vendors and purchasers contribute to the persistence of this disorder.” When business competitors simply glob on features in order to say they offer similar capabilities that purchasers want, you end up with a “kitchen sink approach to product definition” that “leads to a mishmash of features, with no organizing principle or overarching information architecture.”

Instead, seek out usable recruiting solutions that:

• Leverage the consumer-facing platforms people expect to interact with daily
• Make the most of mobile devices and touch screen compatibility
• Put common-sense and innovative features where users expect to find them
• Integrate third-party data into a single seamless interface
• Unite the entire solution under a usability umbrella, with organized and intuitive features and navigation

And don’t be afraid to trust your own instincts as a user. Try a solution out, and see how it feels. Ask yourself: Would I really use this application daily? Is it going to make my job easier? Will job applicants be attracted to or repelled by this process?

Remember, you shouldn’t have to paddle hard to keep technology afloat. Your recruiting solution should help you simply—and naturally—go with the flow.