

The Untapped Resource of Off-Site Staffing

by Russell Risko

You have many clients with dozens of job offerings. The problem is, where do you find the trained, qualified and experienced candidates to fill them all? You've exhausted the usual resources... resume files, classified advertising, job fairs, even the internet. But your needs grow ever wider, as the new millennium demands a technologically advanced work force with highly specialized capabilities. Where do you turn to find the most qualified candidates?

The solution lies in the largest generation of workers our country has ever had, a stable of candidates whose qualifications fulfill every requirement and more, a trained, experienced and available work force ready to answer your call. What is this resource I speak of?

They are a multitude of seasoned professionals who have left the corporate ranks, for one reason or another, to follow their dreams of independence and flexibility. Fortified with experience and confidence, many "Baby-Boomers" are pursuing entrepreneurial careers as independent contractors, freelancers and consultants. They are providing a vast wealth of qualified candidates ready to fill the needs of a widening new-age void. For reason of clarity, I'll refer to this resource as the "Off-site Worker" (OSW).

Off-site Worker Outsourcing

The off-site worker phenomenon, sometimes referred to as telecommuting, alternative workplace strategy, or even "work/life", provides a perfect solution for those professionals who can perform the majority of their service at home or another off-site location. Traditional services such as graphic design, illustration, financial consulting, writing and others have been long established as professional off-site outsourcing functions. Today, many new off-site outsourcing occupations have appeared, including

information technologies, software programming, web site development and maintenance, inquiry fulfillment, and telemarketing to name a few.

Already we are seeing dozens corporations adopting telecommuting for many of its key permanent employees. According to Cyber Dialogue, a New York-based research and consulting firm, found that almost 16 million workers were classified as "telecommuters" in 1998. That number jumped all the way to over 21 million in 1999, according to JALA International. There is no doubt that one day soon we'll see the majority of employees working remotely and independently as a common practice.

But the OSW solution comes with a price, and I'm not talking about money here. Before employers can tap this valuable resource, they must first be prepared to understand and accept the ideology behind why these OSWs became OSWs in the first place... namely independence, flexibility and convenience. After decades of corporate politics, the OSW seeks a less structured work environment. One where he or she has more control over time and travel demands, in lieu of salary and other financial benefits.

Another rationale for this practice is necessity. I faced this issue for the first time after I relinquished my interest in an advertising agency I once co-owned. Prior to establishing my new graphic design business soon thereafter, I agreed not to service any former or prospective clients located within 50 miles of my former agency. I then realized that the remainder of available clientele would be located beyond easy driving distance. That meant that I could be serving clients located several hours away. For me, outsourced telecommuted projects, completed at my facility (off-site), were the only practical solution

One Alternative To Permanent Placement

Many staffing recruiters are unsure of how best to promote the OSWs in their talent stables. When a typical employer calls, he or she is usually looking to fill a permanent placement position. The natural tendency is to find a permanent placement for them.

Perhaps a better solution is to locate the ideal candidate for the job, in spite of the working arrangements that candidate may request. If the ideal candidate is only accepting off-site assignments, then the recruiter should help the employer to resolve his or her concerns by focusing on the benefits.

The Benefits to Employers

For employers, many of the prime benefits include better trained/qualified/experienced personnel; candidates available for short assignment periods (no need for long term commitments); reduced employee tax filing (OSWs require only a 1099); no benefits, perks, or other employment compensation costs; and a broader pool of potential candidates to choose from. The research firm, Gartner Group, found that productivity rises as much as 40 percent in workers that telecommute. Teleworkers save companies 63 percent in absenteeism costs and nearly \$8000 per employee that does not have to be replaced, according to the International Telework Association and Council. They also found that 55 percent of workers surveyed in 1999 said they are more satisfied with their jobs after beginning to work from home.

According to a study by Arthur D. Little and Associates, if 10 percent to 20 percent of traditional commuters switched to telecommuting, savings would total \$23 billion annually. It would eliminate 1.8 million tons of regulated pollutants, saving 3.5 billion gallons of gas, freeing up 3.1 billion hours of personal time and reducing maintenance costs for the transportation infrastructure by \$500 million.

Therefore, are there any reasons why an employer would not want to hire OSWs? One concern is cost. With the OSW working independently, what assurances does the employer have that assignments will be completed in a timely manner? The answer lies in the fact that keeping the pipeline “primed” is critical for the OSW. If any assignment is not completed efficiently and effectively, there's a good chance that future assignments will go elsewhere. Plus, proposing total project time estimates in advance eliminate cost

abuse and time management waste. The employer knows exactly what his or her total cost will be up front.

Another concern is availability. The employer wants immediate access to the worker, and he or she can't have that if the worker is not physically on-site. However, with the availability of today's phone, fax, overnight courier, and internet technologies, many workers have the tools to provide immediate accessibility to employers over vast distances. While my design studio is located in one city, I can perform and deliver my work to clients located around the country. It isn't necessary for me to be on-site, physically present, all of the time in order to be effective at my job.

Communications Technology Is The Key

The internet provides a wonderful opportunity for businesses to communicate to their customers and prospects globally...at fractions of a second...at fractions of cost. Through this same digital transfer technology, the designer is capable of allowing clients to review and critique design work online as it happens, in advance of final delivery. This allows employers the opportunity to peek over the designer's shoulder from any location throughout the world, in real time.

Back in the days when I was serving as a full time advertising creative director, I never once produced my assignments at the client's location. I created the work back at the agency, then delivered the layouts to the client when completed. I appeared at the client's location only for assignment briefings, presentations and to direct photo sessions. Today, my studio is much more comfortable and my equipment is far more familiar to me than that of a corporate workplace. Therefore, I'm more creative and efficient.

In Summary

This article was written as a tool to assist recruiters, human resources and other staffing professionals in the placement of off-site workers. Hopefully, the ideas expressed here

have provided recruiters with ammunition for convincing employers of the benefits of off-site staffing. As the entrepreneurial business climate expands over the next decade, along with the demand for trained and qualified personnel, the off-site worker phenomenon could provide the answer for placing a steady, ready and reliable stream of workers. If staffing professionals are prepared to promote and actively support the OSW, employers will satisfy their staffing needs without the high cost of employment, recruiters will broaden their pool of potential candidates and fulfill their placement goals sooner, and the OSW will get the work he or she needs without the high cost of time and travel commitments. A truly win-win-win situation.

About the Author

Russell Risko is a graphic artist providing graphic design, web/multimedia design and digital illustration services to corporations, advertising agencies and design studios. Russ, an OSW, also collaborates with staffing agencies serving the New York/New Jersey metropolitan market. His award winning advertising and design work has been featured in leading business and graphic design publications. Russ has written on a wide range of marketing communications topics, and his articles have appeared in many regional, national and internet publications.

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