

Recruitment Today: Managing the On-campus Brand

By Kathryn Christie

Kathryn Christie is an analytics and talent management consultant. She is focused on high-impact research and analytics that improve talent practices throughout the entire employee life cycle. Kathryn earned a Master of Science, management, from Smith School of Business, Queen's University. Additional reporting by Alan Morantz, editor of Smith Business Insight.

UNIVERSITY-BASED RECRUITING PRACTICES HAVE COME A LONG WAY FROM THE days of alumni looking to bring on new hires from their alma maters, when firms could just ship flyers to a school's career centre and make a few phone calls. Recruiting has flourished into a heavily resourced, high-touch approach to connect with, educate, and entice the most promising students as early as their first week on campus.

The evolution has been dramatic, from a one-size-fits-all approach to a focus on being the preferred choice for the preferred customer. If that sounds like marketing, it's no accident: on-campus recruiting is paralleling the world of marketing, specifically the niche world of content marketing. Content marketing involves creating and distributing relevant content — from how-to videos and buying guides to infographics and crowd-sourced lists — to attract and acquire a clearly defined audience. As firms increasingly focus on generating marketing content to attract their ideal customers, so to do corporate recruiters provide high-potential students with compelling and useful material that also brands the company as a top employer. It's been termed "[content recruitment](#)," and the trend is picking up steam.

This form of recruiter-driven brand management takes many forms. At the Smith School of Business at Queen's University, for example, recruiters sponsor major events during Frosh Week in order to expose Commerce students to their brand the moment they arrive on campus. Other recruiters take a more personal approach, running day-long student workshops, hosting networking events, and sending company representatives to student-run conferences and competitions. Some organizations even invite select students from their target schools to multi-day events at their head offices where the students participate in sessions, competitions, and workshops.

"Companies want more meaningful touch points with students," says Andrea Cuthbert, associate director of corporate relations at Smith's [Business Career Centre](#), "so they're transforming the traditional info session in order to build a brand and add value for the students."

Organizational initiatives such as these can be costly in both financial and human resources, forcing recruiting firms to be more strategic in deciding which campuses to target and how students are assessed. As the number of young adults choosing to attend university grows, organizations are inversely [narrowing their recruitment targets](#), creating a highly competitive market.

Companies are increasingly looking for students who successfully balance a demanding workload and extra-curricular activities that are

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relevant to their industry of choice. Besides staying on top of their studies, students are expected to nurture personal relationships with organizations, engage in activities that train them in their field, and build a personal brand as passionate young professionals who know what they want and how to get it.

Technology is changing the way they are reaching students. Advances in applicant tracking systems, webinar functionalities, and social media are allowing organizations to streamline their processes and interact with students from a distance. But technology is not replacing personal connections and face-to-face interactions in on-campus recruiting. As in conventional marketing, no amount of advanced technology can replace meaningful human connections.

Sitting between the seeker and the sought after lies the university career centre that expedites the recruitment process. Career centres at top business schools, such as Smith School of Business, are finding ways to add value to both the recruiting organization and the student. At Smith’s Business Career Centre, for example, officials help recruiting firms customize a year-long strategy to reach their target market and promote opportunities in the most cost-effective way. “In addition to having them participate in our recruiting events,” says Cuthbert, “we connect them with targeted student groups and encourage them to run workshops that add value to the student’s learning but that also helps differentiate their brand. We also encourage one-on-one connections like coffee chats and office hours and have a great connection with our alumni who actively contribute their time for such events.”

At the same time, career centres are preparing students for networking events and case-based and behavioural interviews as well as briefing them on specific industries. Smith’s Business Career Centre has developed an intensive extra-curricular course to train and prepare students for careers in investment banking that includes projects, competitions, and networking events with major firms. Another program for MBA students helps prepare them for the case interview for prospective jobs in consulting.

As Cuthbert points out, the trend for firms recruiting on campus is toward cutting costs, narrowing down the number of target schools, and determining a return on investment for each school. Despite this, the best strategy is still “feet on the street” as students respond to personal interaction and are very brand sensitive. According to employer branding consultant Universum, the number one motivator for a student to want to work at a company is the friendliness of employees.

“Top-of-mind awareness is key as the more they see a brand on campus through recruiting events or student events, the more drawn they are to it as evidenced by high application rates,” says Cuthbert. “The feet on the street strategy must be looked at as an investment. Companies taking this approach are attracting the best talent and tend to have better retention rates as they have invested time up front to create a relationship with the students.”

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Scotiabank Global Banking and Markets: Avoiding the ‘One Size Fits All’ Recruitment Strategy

Driven by the desire to sustain diverse and inclusive selection practices globally, the campus recruitment team at Scotiabank Global Banking and Markets (GBM) deploys a client-centric recruitment model and supports the business in meeting junior staffing needs.

The four members of the GBM’s campus recruitment team focus on building a broad yet focused cadre of top talent, looking for the students who best fit current and future business needs rather than simply matching students to a specific job description.

The students they target are those who have high potential, a demonstrated passion for capital markets, and a balanced profile of experiences proving that they can juggle numerous priorities, says Susan Yang, manager of campus recruitment for Scotiabank GBM.

Through co-op programs, summer internships, and a high-touch presence on campus, Scotiabank recruiters are able to identify top-tier students from both business schools and non-traditional programs. The team relies on student ambassadors — students who intern with GBM and are given full-time roles who then return to school for their final year — to act as their eyes and ears on campus and to help strengthen the bank’s presence among fellow students.

The campus recruitment team at Scotiabank GBM knows that having a strong brand on campus goes beyond just ‘pitching’ the firm. It’s more about providing ongoing opportunities for students to be better prepared for a career in capital markets. This is done by using content recruiting initiatives such as staging Industry 101 workshops and by-invitation events in head office, offering business representatives as guest lecturers, or hosting workshops during student conferences. The actual tactics vary by school, based on which will yield the best return on investment.

As a result, Scotiabank GBM recruiters have seen the benefits of a targeted campus recruitment strategy as they can get to know the students on a more personal level. By the time they are looking to actually hire students, they have already established multiple touch points with them. “The campus recruitment landscape has drastically changed,” says Yang. “As the capital markets world is constantly changing, it’s vital that our recruitment practices are nimble to meet changing business needs.”

Walmart Canada: Aligning with Corporate Culture

The high-touch approach is certainly Walmart Canada’s style of engagement on university and community college campuses. Members of Walmart’s 12-person talent acquisition team are active on 15 university and 12 community college campuses in Canada. They’re looking to recruit graduating students as future leaders rather than to fill specific jobs; finding them requires in-

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person attention and careful assessment of how well they will fit into Walmart's distinctive corporate culture.

"We're looking for employees who can relate to a customer-focused culture driven by a passion for efficiency," says Lana Bryon, director of talent acquisition. "Our goal is to help families save money so they can live better by providing access to affordable groceries and products. Service to our customer, respect for the individual, excellence, and integrity form the foundation of our culture. It's a humble environment. It's not for everybody, so we want to make sure that candidates are aligned to our purpose and culture."

Walmart Canada's university recruitment season begins in September with campus visits by company executives and former students. Inevitably, Walmart recruiters run up against their counterparts from the finance, consumer packaged goods, and consulting firms that are well known on campus.

Often, the first task of the Walmart representatives is to challenge student assumptions. While Walmart is the world's largest company (by revenue) and biggest private employer, "often graduates don't realize the breadth of career opportunities Walmart offers," says Bryon.

"When we talk about the retail industry with students they begin to understand the kind of career opportunities they can have. It's very different from the U.S. and Europe. Store management roles in the UK and across Europe are seen as professional careers. That perception doesn't seem to exist as readily in Canada."

In addition to on-campus information sessions, Walmart broadens its campus presence through its support of [Enactus](#), an international community of student, academic, and business leaders who create initiatives that combine entrepreneurship and sustainability. Enactus has chapters on many Canadian campuses, and the students attracted to them match well with what Walmart looks for in future leaders.

"If you're just sending out branding it doesn't necessarily help as much because you can bring only so much awareness that way," says Bryon. "We try more targeted campaigns through Enactus and leverage social media through the schools' business career centres."

For students that do make the grade, Walmart offers three in-take streams: a one-year retail rotation in head office which gives new employees exposure to the eight core areas of the company; a finance and accounting development program for those working towards certification; and a 12-week accelerated assistant manager program for graduates interested in retail operations. All three offer mentorships by Walmart leaders.

A.T. Kearney Consulting: Entrepreneurial Approach That "Gives Back"

A.T. Kearney, a leading global management consulting firm, takes an all-hands-in approach to campus recruitment.

Annual turnover in the consulting industry can be as high as 33 percent, so it is essential to have a steady stream of new talent that can

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quickly succeed as consultants. To identify this talent, Kearney empowers its consultants to run their own recruiting events at schools from which they earned their MBAs or undergraduate degrees. Passionate alumni can be counted on to attract more than their share of high-potential upper-year students who can exceed the standard set by the firm's partnership group for new hires.

Each alumni recruiting team work closely with campus career centres and student groups in order to meet candidates and build meaningful relationships during the recruiting season. A.T. Kearney conducts both case- and behavioural-based interviews directly on campus with a select group of students for a first round, before inviting an even more select short-list of candidates to second round interviews with the firm's partners in Toronto.

Each year, Kearney can only make offers to a handful of new hires, so making the choice of who should receive an offer can be the toughest part of the recruiting process. By building a personal relationship with candidates, Kearney consultants become invested in their future in management consulting. At the very least, those candidates who are not selected are better prepared for their next recruiting endeavour as a result of the skills they built during the rigorous hiring process.

Andrew Witzke, a former senior business analyst at A.T. Kearney who led the undergraduate recruitment efforts at Smith School of Business, says Kearney's approach to recruiting offers candidates the most in-depth and authentic experience within the industry.

"From the first time we met a candidate at an info session or coffee chat, to the last interview they go through, we took pride in putting the firm's culture on display," he says. "The Kearney culture is defined by a group of smart, sometimes quirky, individuals who work extremely hard to exceed our client's expectations but who also know how to unwind and have fun."

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