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Dice is pleased to present the third in a series of articles on tech recruiting by John Vlastelica, consultant and prior technical recruiting leader with Amazon.com and AT&T Wireless. [Bio](#)

Top 8 Techniques to Improve your Tech Job Postings

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“You never get a second chance to make a first impression.” Remember that, from the shampoo TV ad? Job postings often create candidates’ first impressions; sometimes they’re the first — and only — shot you have at convincing a tech candidate to apply. Unfortunately — and I don’t want to make you feel bad by saying this — our job postings are often horrible; they’re uninspiring, they’re all about us, and they’re just not nice to look at.

So, what can you do to maximize your job postings and turn them into a more competitive weapon in your quest to find great tech talent? Here are 8 practical tips to get you started.

We should answer the question, “so what?” for our readers.

1

Job postings are *not* job descriptions

Job postings are marketing tools. If we let our job *descriptions* — which are often two pages of detailed responsibilities and wish-list requirements — make it to our career site and job boards, we’re not going to attract great people. Job postings are ads, and should be written to appeal to our candidates, not simply to comply with HR/legal requirements.

2

Speak to what the candidate cares about: What’s in it for me?

The key to writing a good ad is to speak directly to the motivators of our target audience. We must speak to “WIIFM” (What’s in it for me?). My experience has been that A-player tech candidates are primarily motivated by:

- **Challenging work.** Great tech people are great problem solvers. We must help them understand what kinds of interesting problems they’ll work on. Give them some “meat”; describe the challenging work, not just fluff about responsibilities.
- **Opportunities to learn and grow.** We must help them understand how — by joining our company — they can continue to grow their skills and learn from other smart people. Nothing’s scarier for some tech people than boredom and stagnation.
- **Making an impact.** Show them how the work they’ll do will impact their division, the company, maybe even the industry or the world. No great tech employee wants to work on projects that don’t matter. We must show them how they’ll make a difference.

These bullets are general. How might you develop a specific list for your target candidates? I've had success getting recent hires and longer-term high performers — who do this job today — into a room to lead them through a discussion that focuses on what kind of work here is challenging and engaging, what kind of opportunities they've had/will have to learn and grow, and what kind of difference they're making. I then write up their feedback — in a job posting format — and validate it with them before posting it.

3

Sell benefits, not features

Fortune 500 Company. Five million customers. Start-up. New team. These are all features and matter-of-fact descriptors. Nothing's wrong with mentioning them, but we want to give them meaning, and convert them to benefits.

Why should a top candidate care that you're a Fortune 500 company?

For example, what's more appealing...“New team” or “Build from scratch opportunity”? We should rethink some of our standard descriptors/features and answer the question, “so what?”, for our readers. Why should I, a top candidate, care that you're a Fortune 500 company? Does that impact the stability of your company, the international opportunities, the ability to get your/my product out to a mass audience, the quality of your pay or benefits? Or, what if you're a start up? Does that mean I'll get to play a larger role, be more involved in key business and technical decisions, get more stuff done in a shorter amount of time, or change the world with our new ideas? The key is to sell the benefits, not just the features. Here is an [example](#) showing unique benefits used in a job posting.

4

Draw them into your ad with the first few sentences

Great ads draw their readers in. One effective technique to connect with tech candidates is to leverage what I call “identity questions”. These questions are designed to 1) help the candidate identify with the job, 2) make the job sound a little more exclusive, and 3) compel them to keep on reading. (Note: A side benefit, if these are written to appeal *just* to our target candidate, is that people who *don't* identify with these questions may not apply, which may save us from reviewing 50 extra, unqualified candidates).

Here's an example of some questions and a short summary I might put at the top of a job posting, right underneath my company logo and the job title:

- **Are you the go-to person in your company for the most challenging tech support issues?**
- **Do you live by the “teach a man to fish” philosophy, and take the time to teach end users how to solve their own tech problems?**
- **Do you get frustrated by bureaucracy and red tape that keeps you from quickly getting your internal customers the tools and software they need to do their jobs?**

If so, we'd like to hear from you. We're building a world class internal tech support organization and need you to help us build it the right way.

We must convert our internal acronyms — in job titles and in our posting content — into industry standard, candidate-centric terms that appeal to our target audience.

5

Lose the internal acronyms

BAC II. FSC. SCOS. EOS. These are actual terms I've found in job titles — not just within job postings — for tech jobs on a job board. Now, imagine you're a tech candidate, searching for a job. You get 200 hits from your job board search. Will you take the time to click on any job titles that don't make sense to you?

We must convert our internal acronyms — in job titles and in our posting content — into industry standard, candidate-centric terms that appeal to our target audience. Granted, some terms — like RF or QA or DBA — make total sense to our target audience. But those are industry standard acronyms. We have an opportunity — as recruiters — to convert our internal mumbo-jumbo into terms that our candidates relate to and use as keywords when searching for jobs.

6

Formatting matters

Using bulleted lists, HTML, color, bold titles, and even white space (so not all the text is crammed together) can make our job postings much more appealing to a candidate. And job boards have tools to help us. Dice, for example, has [Brand Maximizer templates](#) that can help us create more visually appealing, easier to read, exciting job postings.

7

Make your website/ATS application form more user friendly

Once you get a candidate to click your “Apply Now” button, they’re often taken from your posting to your website or ATS-hosted application page. It’s critical that we recognize that even the best job postings — the ones that really draw a candidate in and get them excited — are wasted if the candidate arrives at an application page where they have to jump through 15 hoops to apply.

All candidates expect to paste/upload their resume into your system, but be careful about the number of steps it takes to actually apply. Some organizations turn on page after page of questionnaires, force users to create accounts, and ask for information upfront

that seems premature to a candidate (like salary requirements). Drop-off rates go through the roof when candidates have to suffer through more than a few questions and clicks before getting you their resume.

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Bottom Line: Make it easy, quick and user friendly.

8

Get professional help if you don’t have the time

Many of us just don’t have the time to rewrite all of our postings. We often let bad postings or much-too-detailed, boring job descriptions get up on the job board because we’re swamped, not because we’re bad recruiters. So what do you do?

First, don’t try to do everything I’ve outlined in this article for all of your postings. If you’re a busy recruiter, there’s no way you’re going to have the time — or maybe even the marketing/writing skills — to fix all of your postings. Instead, focus your re-writing efforts on your higher volume and/or most critical openings. Then leverage a lot of the same intro language, benefits, formatting, and call to action language across many postings.

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Second, if you can’t do it yourself, get some help. See if your internal marketing/PR/communications department can help you. (One way to motivate them to help is to set up a meeting with them where you take in your “bad” job postings, and place them side-by-side with very well-written postings from your competitors; they’ll begin to think of job postings as more than just HR stuff when we talk about how many potential customers, investors and college students use our career site to research our company.) If they can’t help, they can probably connect you with a professional outside writer that already works with your company and knows your company’s “voice”.

If you're completely on your own, you can often find a writer to help by posting a "gig" opportunity on craigslist.org. It doesn't cost anything to post it, and you'll often find people who will do this for \$20-30/hour. In the grand scheme of things, \$100 for a well written, reusable posting is well worth it.

Wrap Up

Top candidates are in demand. There are often hundreds of companies that need the same type of candidate you need, and they're often posting jobs in the very same places you post. By creating great job postings, you attract more great candidates and maximize the hundreds or thousands you spend on your job board ads.



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