



Recruiting Best Practices:

What You Can Learn From Our Vancouver 2010 Winter Games Recruitment Campaign





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Since the Games were awarded to Vancouver in 2003, it's been an all-out sprint and marathon preparing. Organizing a project of this magnitude demands commitment, goodwill and flexibility from all levels of government and citizenry; creativity to overcome the many obstacles; and boundless energy. The Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC) would need to attract more than 50,000 individuals and inspire at least half of them to commit to giving their time freely, two years in advance. All this during a labour shortage with an historic 4% unemployment rate on the West Coast – even without the Olympic Games, there was already a war for talent in Vancouver. Furthermore, VANOC had rightly committed to making these Games Canada's Games. This unprecedented recruitment campaign demanded a sensitive eye.

It was February 12, 2008, exactly two years before the opening of the 2010 Olympic Winter Games. VANOC kicked off a massive recruitment drive. **The goal: recruit 25,000 people**, whom would be unpaid volunteers, working from a spirit of civic pride. One year later, what VANOC (in partnership with Workopolis) has learned can benefit any business looking to recruit quality candidates.

The Comprehensive Campaign

This drive to recruit was orchestrated and massive, featuring significant public relations (PR) and advertising campaigns. To increase effectiveness, VANOC and Workopolis developed a true partnership, relying on each other's expertise.

On the PR front, together they chased as much news coverage as possible, offering built-in 'hooks' for stories, starting with the need for volunteers in exactly two years. Like a blast from a canon, they piggy-backed on all the other two-years-until-the-Games announcements and stories blitzing the media that week.

Their news stories championed the historical thrill of being involved in 2010 but, cleverly, also stressed the resumé-friendly professional development that volunteering would provide. It worked. They raised awareness among a wider constituency, capturing the imagination of many individuals not considering volunteering.

Another clever tactic, they broadened the appeal, changing Vancouver's into Canada's Games, and featuring Canadian Olympic heroes like Beckie Scott, Russ Howard and Marc Gagnon in cities throughout the country. Playing up the partnership with Workopolis, VANOC spoke of the vital role volunteers play in a successfully run Games.

It worked. Suddenly this recruitment drive became many news stories that could be found across different sections of the newspapers and newscasts: sports, entertainment, Olympic beat reports, career/workplace and local colour.

The advertising included traditional media, online efforts and guerilla marketing. (This is stunt advertising, the reality of which falls somewhere in the region between traditional advertising, PR and performance art.) National TV and radio spots complemented local Vancouver print ads.

Online, they created banners, interactive games, and their unique web portal. Plus they optimized all the jobs they advertised to ensure they would stand out from the crowd. They advertised in targeted emails and made use of a searchable resume database. They advertised the more targeted positions on specialized industry publication and organization websites, connected covertly to Workopolis for greater efficiency.

At the same time, promotional (ie guerilla) teams blitzed the streets of major cities. Here they engaged the public one-on-one with fun thematic activities, and distributed promotional items, physical reminders of how to apply for volunteer positions.

The results? “Critical to the success of the volunteer program and the 2010 Winter Games is the recruitment of a large, dedicated and passionate team of volunteers,” said Donna Wilson, Executive Vice President, Workforce, VANOC. “Thanks to the recruitment and promotional campaign we launched in partnership with Workopolis last year, we have received over 60,000 volunteer applications from across the country to date, which is an outstanding result.”

On top of that, in 2008, VANOC received almost 40,000 applications for their paid jobs, resulting in 100,000 applications in total and ensuring the absolute best candidates!

How can you apply these tactics to your hiring practices?

Chances are your hiring budget's not of Olympic proportions and your positions won't be celebrated in history. But there are proven tactics you can employ to increase your chances of recruitment success.

1 Reach out to your audience. We're all busier than we've ever been these days, and are looking to stretch recruiting dollars. But too many employers are reactive, looking for and talking to potential employees only when it's finally time to hire. Be like VANOC, prepared and proactive. Create job descriptions now for those positions you frequently staff so they're ready when it comes time to hire.

Get your name out there now even if you're not hiring at the moment. You will be eventually. Cultivate your next generation of employees by getting involved locally with your community at a grass-roots level, again like VANOC. If you're recruiting right now, continue with the PR efforts even after you've hired. It's simply better business and will pay off later.

Sponsor community events and attend local career fairs. Send as many of your senior-most employees to these as possible. It shows you're serious. If your company has several offices, get involved in each community. VANOC took their very local message, a hiring frenzy in Vancouver, and made it a local story in cities across Canada.

VANOC latched onto the momentum of other Games announcements to get their message out. What public events and efforts is your company involved in? Could you insinuate a recruitment sub-theme into their messages? If it's an ad, maybe it's as simple as modifying its URL to talk about hiring. If the CEO is giving a speech at the local Chamber of Commerce, maybe she could mention how you're company is always searching for talent and to contact you online.

2 You have celebrities in-house. Maybe you're not a world-record holding speed-skater, but you are an expert in your industry. And to the people you want to hire, what you have to say is important. Publish articles in industry publications. Make speeches at local events. When the time comes to hire, your elevated status will soar above the crowd and you'll be noticed first by the best candidates.

3 Create news hooks to suit your purposes. Today, as the availability and number of media grows, counter-intuitively, the number of journalists is shrinking. Meaning? Journalists are spread thin and the news cycle is now 24/7. They need to submit more frequently to more sources. They're hungry for content. If you offer something newsworthy – it can't be blatantly self-serving – they just may pick it up. And you get free publicity. What's more, if you get picked up in one medium within a chain, chances are very good these days that'll it will spread to others.

Say you're looking for software developers. Can you commission a study showing how local colleges aren't meeting the demand for industries? Maybe your company's 50th anniversary is coming up. Your headline can emphasize how you're still growing strong at 50. The possibilities are endless, but the more genuinely newsworthy the subject, the better your odds are of being picked up. Of course, you can't govern what they'll say about you but, as VANOC demonstrated time and again, you certainly can influence them.

4 The best advertising is word-of-mouth. All the local networking you do will help get the word out about you. Use these events to network and build a database. Add clients and former employees who left on good terms. Stay in regular contact with your network whether you're hiring or not. Then, when you are hiring, turn your network into recruiters by asking if they know anyone who would be a good fit.

VANOC sold the resume-enhancing aspect of volunteering at the 2010 Winter Games. From sports and event-planning to group-work to interpersonal skills development, the Vancouver 2010 Winter Games will be about far more than warm memories for many volunteers. Think laterally about how any experience with your company will expand your candidates' list of skills. Then trumpet it.

5 Be online. The Internet is the first and often only research tool that candidates use, with an average 8,269,000 unique visitors in the career services and development category each month.¹ Over 60% of Canadians believe they will find their next job online.² Advertise here and include it first on your PR strategy. Be on your industry's job boards. Advertise there too. Search resume databases for suitable candidates. Often the best people aren't actively searching for a new job but you never know what would happen if you reached out first.

6 Posting jobs needn't be costly if you plan well.

- a) *Optimize your job title.* Tell candidates exactly what the job is. Build some kind of benefit into the title. Avoid internal buzzwords, acronyms and business babble.
- b) *Customize your posting to stand out.* Put your company's logo in the search results. People recognize a brand like a face and isn't it comforting to find a familiar face when you're looking for a new job?
- c) *Make your posting descriptive.* Complete every field in the posting. Jobs with more content attract more candidates. But be clear and concise. Again, avoid buzzwords and internal codespeak. Give candidates plenty of detail about your company here while they're interested.

7 90% of candidates use the search functions. ("Fish, meet barrel!")

Most job seekers search by keywords: job, industry, location, skills, accreditation and the like. People search differently. Cater to them all.

- a) *Post your job in all relevant categories.* Say you're hiring a bookkeeper for your child-care centre. Post your job in our Bookkeeper, Child Care and maybe even General Office categories. By casting a wider net, you increase your odds.
- b) *Post in all relevant job locations.* So even if you're only hiring in Calgary, you can post your job in Calgary, plus Calgary and area, then Alberta and even Canada. Again, it's a wider net.
- c) *Optimize your posting.* List key categories, locations and keywords at the bottom of your posting and separate them all with commas. Including these keywords increases your likelihood of being found by searches. Picture your ideal candidate and list her qualities. Include the job, location, skills, technology, accreditation, anything that may draw her to you.

Interested in solutions for hiring sooner or in learning more about the tactics above? Talk to us today.

Workopolis is always looking to create more success stories like VANOC's. Contact us today for more detail at 1-888-641-4047 ext. 8310 or by email at info@workopolis.com. Together we'll attract the best candidates.

¹ Source: comScore Media Metrix – Canada All Locations, average January-December 2008.

² Source: Northstar Research Partners, May 2008

