

## Recruiting and Retention Strategies for 2016 in the SAS Programmer Staffing Organizations

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### ABSTRACT

SAS Programmers in the IT staffing sector continue to be in high demand with projections of continued growth of 6% in 2016 (Braswell, December, 2015). IT overall employment from 1999 to 2013 jumped more than 41% compared with 5.5% for nonfarm employment. Additionally, median unemployment rate for "computer and mathematical occupations" through 3Q14 was 2.9% compared to the 5% overall median unemployment rate (Braswell, January, 2015). Based on these statistics, it is critical to business strategy to understand the challenges both recruiters and managers face in order to successfully mitigate them. An additional pressure on the Staffing sector is that organizations are relying more and more on a contingent workforce. The fierce competition to attract the best and the brightest talent among the limited supply of skilled workers to a market that is increasing in demand results in both a difficult recruiting and equally difficult retention environments. This talk will explore some of the recruitment and retaining techniques that organizations can employ to stay competitive. Recruiting strategies that will attract the top players are explored including individualizing, use of social media, and calculating fit to the organization. Retention strategies which emphasize employee engagement are also explored, emphasizing current research findings for contingent workers and including several unique approaches to enhance employee engagement.

### INTRODUCTION

There are several pressures that exist when recruiting and retaining employees in the SAS Programmer staffing world, as a sub category of IT staffing, where projections indicate sustained continued growth. Bureau of Labor statistics, in the Occupations Outlook Handbook, noted that employment of computer and information technology occupations is projected to grow much faster than the average of other occupations, at 13.1% from 2014 to 2024 (Richards, 2015). Over the last 14 years, IT employment has increased at a rate of more than 30%, compared to just 5.3% for total employment (Braswell, November, 2015). Some of this growth is residual from the financial crisis in 2008; some are unique to the IT Staffing/ SAS programming business sector, and some from technology advances such as internet connectivity and mobile computing but also cloud computing and storage of big data. These general pressures in the IT employment landscape impact the temporary staffing sector which supplies contingent resources for placement of SAS Programmer positions. The pressures identified in this sector will be discussed, both in how it impacts the organization as well as the impact for the staffing agency. In hopes that the audience will find something new that will work, we will examine how experts view the mitigation of the pressures and how Experis plans to address them.

Talent shortage is an issue not just in the US but also worldwide (2015 US Talent Shortage Survey). Also, talent shortage is not restricted to IT as demonstrated in a survey conducted with employers in the US. Over the last 10 years, talent shortage is reported to range from 15% and 52%, with 2011 the highest at 52%. This was mirrored globally with percent of talent shortage since the worldwide recession ranged between 30% and 54%, with a 41% reported in 2007.

Talent shortage in the SAS Programming sector as well as contingent staffing is impacted by this general talent shortage. According to the IT Staffing Report, the IT overall employment from 1999 to 2013 jumped more than 41% versus 5.5% for nonfarm employment (Braswell, January 15, 2015). In this same report, it was noted that the median unemployment rate for US Bureau of Labor Statistics' category "computer and mathematical occupations" for 2014 was 2.9% which was less than half the overall unemployment rate of 5.5% overall.

An additional factor for employment in the IT/SAS Programming sector is the cap on the H-1B work visas. This cap limits the availability of out of the US resources (Braswell, November 30, 2015). Finally, the Bureau of Labor Statistics predicted a 16.7% increase from 2006 – 2016 due to the retirement of baby boomers and resulting impact on both the staffing and general sectors of business, one of which is IT (Dohm and Shniper, 2007).

It goes without saying that limited resources impacts business success. Manpower Group interviewed over 5,000

hiring managers in the U.S. in an effort to understand the employment projection for January Q1 2016. This is the tenth annual survey and even though talent shortages have fluctuated between 14 and 52%, talent shortages have remained constant. Based on this survey of employers (2015, US Talent Shortage Survey), employers without sufficient resources expect that the main impact will be in a reduction in the ability to serve clients. The second biggest impact will be reduction in competitiveness and production, and the third is increase in employee turnover. 80% of employers are employing some strategy to overcome talent shortages, such as a change in people practices (40%), using non-traditional recruitment practices (20%), and exploring new talent sources (10%), providing additional training and development to existing staff, or implementing different work models. Some are not exploring any new strategies (20%).

Upon entering 2015, a staffing industry analyst, in the IT Staffing Growth Assessment, noted that “the factors we elucidate here imply … the competition to attract the best and the brightest talent among a supply of skilled workers is sure to remain fierce” (Braswell, January, 2015). A similar projection in the market was made for 2016, where it is expected for the demand for IT staffing, uptick in perm conversions, and limited supply of experienced staff, has made recruiting particularly difficult (Braswell, December, 2015). IT staff made the list of the top 10 hardest jobs to fill over the past 10 years and is projected to continue.

In essence, the recruiting and retention for IT and associated SAS Programmer environments are projected to be extremely competitive with a declining number of resources for 2016, where “competition to attract the best and brightest talent among a supply of skilled workers [will favor] the more nimble and innovative” (Braswell, January, 2015). It is an employee market where organizations need to assess their current ability to be competitive with recruiting and retention strategies designed to meet the current demands. Each organization already owns a current set of strategies, but they need to ask themselves if what they currently do is enough, and explore other strategies presented by researchers and experts in this area. The current market pressures, which promise to remain, beg the question of **What strategies can be used for recruiting and retention of staff to distinguish you from the competition?**

## RECRUITING

Using research and experience gained in Experis, we plan to examine marketing strategies, how to attracting top talent, what is involved in performing due diligence, and how recruiting needs to be individualized. Recruiting top candidates requires paying attention to several different dynamics, 1) know where to market and which modality can be used to optimize the maximum number of recruits, 2) understand the particular challenges of the staffing agency which is one step removed from the organization needs, 3) follow the advice of experts in recruitment in attracting the top talent, and individualize taking into consideration what motivates recruits, with consideration for generational differences.

## WHERE TO MARKET

### Research

In general hiring, only 37% of employers are exercising change in people practices to respond to current hiring difficulties, of which 22% include using updated recruiting practices (2015 US Talent Shortage Survey). For example, the Manpower 2015 Talent Survey Results suggest only 2% of employers broaden the geographic reach to outside of immediate area.

As an example where creative recruiting resulted in a hire of needed technical staff; one organization in the software development sector used an unconventional solution to the recruiting challenge which enabled them to staff to their needs (E. B., 2012). They met the challenges of the current market by hosting educational events which brought recruits to them. They held learning sessions where they marketed new opportunities and shared the culture of the organization before receiving resumes. Surprisingly, the younger group of potential recruits liked this approach because they wanted opportunities which included both learning and networking. This organization happened upon this by accident. Their motivation was to provide fast and affordable training for the skills needed in their organization but ended up growing the organization, with a two year sales growth of 822%.

Amy Kot, Vice President in the employee engagement practice at Edelman, states that “gone are the days of generic postings on job boards. Social networking sites, such as LinkedIn and Twitter, are now the “second-greatest source of hires for companies” (Kot, 2015, p. 17). Kot proposes 6 steps to use for attracting top talent when using social media outlets:

- Define your social engagement approach.
- Meet your audiences where they are
- Promote your employer brand
- Keep it Fresh

- Activate your employees (engage current employees in search)
- Know your channels (LinkedIn, Twitter, Glassdoor, Facebook all offer unique features)

Danielle Monaghan, head of talent acquisition-consumer at Amazon, concurs with Amy Kot claiming that *mobile recruiting* will become a primary global recruiting strategy (Monaghan, 2016). She also stated that with continued globalization and widening skills gap will require global talent acquisition strategies. US companies have used this already but other countries such as India and China are engaging in this type of global recruitment strategy. She also seconds Amy Kot's prediction about use of social media for recruiters. She predicts organizations that resist this type of recruiting strategy will be left behind.

## SPECIAL CONCERNS FOR THE STAFFING AGENCY

### Research

Staffing Industry Analysts annually surveys large companies to estimate the percent expected for contingent labor. The current projection for 2016 is 18% (Contingent Workforce Strategies, 2015), from 12% in 2009. After the recession of 2008 companies still wanted to remain flexible about hiring which also increased the need for contingent staff (Wood, 2015). However, for a contingent worker hired through a staffing agency, there is generally less attachment to the job; and they do not have access to participate in bonus and recognition programs as would be offered to a full time employee. Thus, the better staffing agencies alleviate concerns by ensuring individuals involved in the contingency work are aware of the length of the assignment and are prepared to stay to the end.

### Experience

Based on Experis experience, one recruiting practice which is recommended is finding available staff by word of mouth, using current staff and professionals. Additionally, having visibility at conferences, where you would find individuals dedicated to the particular area(s) of interest such as PharmaSUG, is important.

## ATTRACT TOP TALENT

### Research

Patrick Valtrin, author of "No-Fail Hiring" and an international public speaker is well engaged in the hiring of staff, with business owners and executives in many different sectors of employment (Valtin, 2012). He suggests a recruitment strategy which evaluates each candidate against four levels of motivation, two in the logical realm and two more irrational.

The two logical are: a) communication to the candidate that you only are looking for someone who is passionate about what they do, and b) to pay them what they are worth. Most candidates know what they are worth so you need to offer them an attractive package of salary and other compensation benefits including some for commitment to the organization.

The two irrational selection criteria are:

a) Recruits are not always looking for an increase in compensation. Valtin states that people do not leave a previous job, they leave a previous boss, one who does not keep promises or does not give them due or customized recognition. The candidate will judge the organization in the same way as a potential customer would do with a supplier. The people who the recruit interacts with prior to the hire will be the ones that establish the factors of attraction to the organization, such as tone of the Recruiter on the phone or other employees' friendliness. Your message as an organization is that you want to hire only someone who "wants to have fun on the job, enjoy ... teamwork, and contribute to others" (p. 7).

b) Top candidates do not shop for security in a job. They want challenges and an opportunity to meet their potential. The question to ask a candidate is whether they want an active role in the expansion of the business. Also observe whether the recruit responds positively to any challenges that might be posed in an interview.

Valtin claims that developing the last 2 criteria will ensure you attract the best candidates and will ensure you develop the ability to beat the competition.

Another source that can be used to understand how to better attract top talent can be found in the survey results from the Manpower talent shortage whitepaper. This research cites lack of available applicants as the most common reason how 1 in 3 employers explain why they have difficulty in filling jobs (2015, US Talent Shortage Survey). Specifically, lack of experience (19%), lack of candidates with technical competencies (17%), industry specific professional qualifications (14%), and lack of workplace competencies (i.e. soft skills) (7%) are the top reasons given for not having a good pool to select candidates from. Once a candidate is located, his/her skills need to be vetted during the hiring process to ensure that those who do make it have the hard and soft skills critical to success for the

SAS programmer position.

### **Experience**

In line with Valtin's irrational suggestions, Experis recruiters perform due diligence with candidates by providing a technical screen, running background checks, and verification of certificates and educational credentials. These procedures take time and money but will yield better results in the end for hiring and allow for sufficient time to learn about the candidate and have the candidate learn about the organization.

### **INDIVIDUALIZE**

#### **Research**

Again, in line with Valtin's suggestion, an employer needs to get to know each candidate enough to understand what motivates them. Interviews need to challenge the candidate as well as inform the organization to assess best fit. Generational differences impact expectations from the employee and further impacts motivation strategies. It is only through a thorough interview process that personal motivations can be understood. For example, research is pointing to the critical nature of *relationships at work* for the millennial generation (born 1980 to mid to late 1990s). The relationship with the immediate manager is the key to "leveraging, motivating, and retaining Millennials" (Thompson and Gregory, p. 238). Millennials are expected to make up over half of the U.S. workforce in the next decade, so it probably is worth learning specifics to attract them. The same type of sensitivity to generational differences also applies to cultural differences.

#### **Experience**

For the staffing agency, there is an added requirement to match the candidate to the needs of the client. Hand in hand with knowing the specifics of your client's needs is the knowledge about a candidate to ensure a successful pairing of a candidate to a position. Individualizing for the client relationships in addition to individualizing for recruits is critical in finding a successful fit.

### **HIGHLIGHTS FOR RECRUITING**

To summarize strategies for hiring practices, examining marketing strategies, attracting top talent, performing due diligence, and individualizing were found to be important factors based on both research and experience. Recruiting top candidates requires paying attention to several different dynamics, 1) know where to market and which modality will reach the maximum number of recruits, 2) understand the particular challenges of the staffing agency which is one step removed in the hiring process from the organization, including understanding the needs of the clients and assessment of staff for a fit particular to the organization, 3) follow the advice of experts in recruitment in attracting the top talent, and individualize taking inconsideration of what motivates recruits and inherent generational, cultural, or other differences.

### **RETENTION**

Once the prospective candidate makes it through the hiring process, the remaining challenge is to keep him/her. Retention, like hiring, needs to be customized both to the business of interest and to the employee. For retention, compensation, recognition, and appreciation will be emphasized with engagement of employees as the main emphasis. The economic turmoil after 2008 kept employees in place but that is no longer the case (Kwan, Schwartz, and Liakopoulos, 2011). The current market, with strong competition for resources, mandates a change in retention strategies. However, in a recent survey by Manpower Group, only 37% of employers are exercising a change people practices, and from that only 78% include practices in the organization which focus on retention and or engagement of current employees (2015 U.S. Talent Shortage Survey). These strategies include additional training to existing staff (12%), clear career development (7%), specific current and new skill training (13%), and an increase to starting salaries (5%). Additionally, in recent research, Allen, Bryant, and Vardaman (2010), looking for evidence-based strategies for retaining talent, highlight reasons for turnover in an organization, some of which are surprising. Organizational commitment to the employee and job satisfaction are the two most important indicators of employee turnover. By monitoring these two drivers, organizations can impact retention. Let us consider each of the factors involved in retention in more detail.

### **COMPENSATION**

Compensation is important but is not a strong predictor of turnover. Moderately related to turnover are job design and the work environment, with components of communication, work satisfaction, promotion opportunities, and participation in decision making. Also, organizations that foster a supportive and cohesive culture may be able to impact retention. Money not as powerful reward as many people think. Gostick and Elton (2007), authors of The Carrot Principle and recognized thought leaders in workplace strategy, ensured that top employees have to be

compensated competitively to attract and maintain staff, but bonuses designed to reward in amounts less than \$1000 are easily forgotten. Employees generally know there are constraints on how much cash is available for compensation within their or their manager's control. They have agreed to a salary based on initial agreement and generally controlled by job type, amount of experience, corporate policy, location and other factors outside of the employee's control.

Deloitte Consulting conducted a global survey series to explore talent strategies and trends expected in the near future. They discovered that companies usually match compensation packages, so what differentiates organizations is what they do beyond financial incentives when creating retention strategies, and is what really matters. 7 of top 10 job-related concerns uncovered in the Deloitte survey are non-financial or related to issues such as career advancement and greater recognition (Kwan, Schwartz, and Liakopoulos, 2011). Concurring with this, the Bureau of National Affairs, using a survey conducted by Deloitte Consulting, see Table 1, found several top factors which indicate when employees are looking for new employment. Employees are concerned about lack of career progress (27%), new opportunities in the market (22%), and dissatisfaction with current manager (22%), to name the top three. Attending to what motivates employees outside of fair compensation is critical to a retention strategy.

Factor	Percent
Lack of career progress	27%
New opportunities in market	22%
Dissatisfaction with supervisor or manager	22%
Lack of challenge in the job	21%
Lack of adequate bonus or other financial incentives	21%
Lack of compensation increases	21%
Excessive workload	20%
Lack of trust in leadership	17%
Inadequate or reduction in benefits (i.e. health and pensions)	

**Table 1. Reasons for Looking for employment**

Source: Deloitte Consulting (Bureau of National Affairs, 2013).

## RECOGNITION

A key finding by the Jackson Organization is that employees respond to purposeful and strategic recognition by their management (Gostick and Elton, 2009). They shared an example story from one of the Disney theme parks. In one year, when an expected 15% rise in guest attendance was expected but no pay raises or bonuses were given, during what seemed like dire circumstances, employee job satisfaction increased. This satisfaction was attributed to recognition that management gave to selected employees. Specific training was given to managers and supervisors to learn to praise their staff appropriately to achievements in their specific position. "Now , frontline leaders had the ability to praise operator Steve for keeping people happy when a ride went down for maintenance, recognize the restaurant staff for making the kitchen sparkle, or thank Goofy for being especially . . . well . . . goofy" (p. 12). In addition to outstanding employee morale, business returns were increased by 1.5% that year. They concluded by stating that perks can never take the place of a frontline supervisor who sets clear goals (p. 14). From the employee perspective, recognition by the employer would be viewed as appreciation by the employee. When leaving employment, 79% of the employees cite lack of appreciation as a key reason for leaving (Gostick and Elton, 2009).

## ENGAGEMENT

### Research

Engagement of employees is a factor where an employer has some control over retention. Gostick and Elton (2007), in a Jackson Survey, found that approximately 75% of the U.S. workforce is not engaged. They also cited that United Kingdom surveys show that about 80% of workers lack commitment to their jobs. One factor already identified to help remedy this was recognition as evidenced in the Disney story. This calls for an organization to have a clear recognition strategy for employees. Another more comprehensive approach was proposed by Aarts (2014), in reviewing small and medium employers in Canada. She found that employee engagement is a fairly common catch phrase today. However, she characterized engagement as something more than making employees happy, by having a coffee bar or game rooms, but instead as the

secret to making an employee a “productivity powerhouse”. Engaged employees can be identified as ones who are excited to be at work, they strive to be the best at all kinds of tasks. Research supports that engaged employees are more productive, innovative and share in delivering shareholder returns for the organization in which they are employed at 5 times the rate than in organizations where employees are not engaged. Aarts’ solution to developing engaged employees involves getting to know employees, know their abilities and preferences, and put them to work on tasks that tap into their particular skill set and motivations.

Engagement has to be individualized for the employee which as noted for recruiting, includes adjusting for generational differences. The Baby Boomer generation responds to different motivational factors than Generation X (1960 – 1980) or the latest Generation Y (1980 – late 1990s - Millennials). Successful relationships at work are important for Millennial satisfaction and retention, as well as mentoring, career development, job satisfaction, inclusive style of management, work environment, and nature of working style (Thompson and Gregory, 2012; Aruna and Anitha, 2015). Another factor to be considered in individualizing, Ortlieb and Sieben (2012) emphasized the need to differentiate clusters of job functions; not all employees and functions are critical. For example, while retention is important for all employees, motivation and dedication of the professionals and managers is critically important to ensure success in the organization. These resources are important within the organization but also valuable to those outside of the organization risking the employee to leave for better circumstances, and perhaps taking his/her experience to a competitor. There is no single strategy proposed to ensure that an organization will secure resources, but the organization that bundles a package that exceeds those of individual ‘best practices’ will be effective in meeting their retention goals (Allen, Bryant, and Vardaman, 2010).

Specific to the SAS programmer are strategies used by SAS institute (Florida and Goodnight, 2005). SAS holds the belief that the company’s most important asset is their “creative capital” so the company endorses strategies to ensure maximum creativity. SAS maintains an average turnover rate between 3% and 5%, compared to the national average of 20%, and attribute it to their creativity model. First, they believe that their staff thrives on challenging projects, and reward success of one challenge with an even more challenging project. Additionally, SAS sends staff to industry- and technology-specific conferences to stimulate their intellectual curiosity. The culture at SAS does not distinguish between management and staff with respect to expectations for creative contribution; all SAS managers do hands-on work. These are some very specific recommendations from an organization that is successful in the sector of interest for this talk.

### **Experience**

Experis has identified several factors that are successful for retention when placing consultants in an organization. 1) important to work with the client to ensure engagement of employees on client projects, 2) solicit feedback from consultants and be honest about the things you can and cannot change, 3) establish a career progression plan for consultants that desire that track, and allow for career growth. Some of the ways to support career growth are attendance at conferences, certifications, lunch and learns, and tuition reimbursement.

### **MANAGEMENT OF A CONTINGENT WORKFORCE**

Are there special considerations for a consulting firm when it comes to retention? The Boston Consulting firm says that by ensuring that they are doing all they can to be flexible to the unique needs of their consultants they are retaining their employees (Fisher, 2008). They believe that it is important for consultants to develop skills that interest them most. Their best practices are to 1) not “skimp on benefits” and 2) prepare their consultants to gain global know-how, and remain flexible to the unique needs of their employees. BCG believes that when employees are doing something that excites them, they do not leave and their low turnover rate confirms their practices work.

One of the outcomes of the recent recession is that organization’s want a more flexible workforce, growing and reducing as the market demands so there has been a rise in contingent workforce who are hired on-demand for specific projects or long term for supplementing (Wood, 2015). This arrangement benefits both employees and organizations. However, the management of this temporary workforce has an extended set of demands both within and outside of the organization. From the organization perspective, it is important to partner with the right staffing agency. The better staffing company helps employee with understanding of their position and how they can be effective as a consultant, and aids the organization in finding the right fit for their needs.

### **HIGHLIGHTS FOR RETENTION**

Although there is still a gap between research and practice with regard to best strategies to use for retaining talent in the organization, the organization can find help to manage turnover and develop a framework using evidence-based strategies (Allen, Bryan, and Vardaman, 2010). To secure retention compensation, recognition (appreciation), and engagement were found to be important factors, with engagement of employees as the most important.

## CONCLUSIONS

The issue with talent shortage is real, not just in the US but worldwide and in all employment sectors. Organizations that are interested in recruiting the best will benefit from staffing strategies that allow them to have a cutting edge in this space. There are specific pressures that exist when recruiting and retaining employees in the SAS Programmer role as well as hiring through a staffing agency, where competition for resources is increased from the other sectors.

Having limited access to resources clearly impacts business success. The Manpower Talent Shortage Survey indicated that employers without sufficient resources expect that the main impact will be in a reduction in ability to serve clients. The second biggest impact will be reduction in competitiveness and production, and the third is increase in employee turnover. 80% of employers are employing some strategy to overcome talent shortages, such as a change in people practices (40%), using non-traditional recruitment practices (20%), and exploring new talent sources (10%), and providing additional training and development to existing staff, or implementing different work models. Some are not exploring any new strategies (20%).

We have made the case that strategies for recruitment and retention employed in organization are critical to being successful in attracting and maintaining a viable work force. Some very specific strategies were presented as found in both research and from experience in the staffing sector.

The recruiting factors of 1) using appropriate tools to reach the population you are targeting, 2) targeting your approach, 3) meet recruits where they are, activate your current set of employees, and 4) know your social media channels were explored as steps for attracting top talent. Then, when you have reached the interview stage, have well defined selection criteria. Finally, offer a fair package which is individualized for the recruit.

The retention strategies need to include 1) engagement, 2) fair compensation, 3) finding the right fit for a job, and 4) management that will support a well thought out retention plan. Organizations need to see what they currently have in place that is customized to their business needs and then consult with experts to see how to fortify their plan. Engagement of employees, in addition to fair compensation and benefits, requires customizing to the employee, by individualizing, challenging, and providing recognition.

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