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**Q** *What's the single most important issue, or investment, HR executives should be considering in the year 2005?*

One of the biggest challenges I see facing HR professionals in 2005 is determining how their organization plans to address the increasingly inefficient process of recruiting. The traditional recruiting process as we know it does not deliver consistent or predictable results. Nor does it lend itself well to fluctuating economies and changes in hiring needs. In the near future, the demand for labor is predicted to be greater than the supply for talent. Cost-of-hire and time-to-hire will increase substantially and the traditional practice of posting jobs to job boards will no longer be able to deliver the level of candidates needed to meet the hiring demands of your workforce. I urge HR professionals to think about this now because recruiting in the future will require a different strategy for companies to find the best candidates and maintain their competitive advantage.

Over the last several years, I have had the opportunity to work with recruiters and study their processes. I've interviewed and observed them in hundreds of

recruiting situations and organizations. What I have discovered is that recruiting is an immature process that is getting more and more inefficient over time. There are several reasons for this. First, it is an interrupt-driven profession that deals with an unpredictable commodity: people. In addition, the sourcing strategy has become far more complicated and expensive than it used to be. Recruiters cannot perform efficiently because they are spending too little time specifying needs and too much time sourcing, screening and performing administrative tasks. Job requisitions are often unclear or they contain too much or too little information. Resumes do not provide what you really need to know: if the person can do the job, if the person will do the job and if they will fit in the job. Finally, companies rely on technology to assist in the process, but we cannot expect that the technology alone is going to find them the best candidates.

To address these process inefficiencies, HR professionals must find ways to establish what I call "a smart and lean recruiting machine." There are four key elements to creating this machine as you anticipate hiring needs in 2005 and beyond:

people, process, knowledge and technology. HR professionals should be looking for a recruiting solution that can support them with the proper blend of these key elements. Think about assembling a team of individuals with specialized roles versus relying on a team of recruiters and expecting each one to work individually, performing every single task in the recruiting process. Look for a process that will perform multiple tasks in parallel, reduce interruptions, monitor and measure, and allow you to make the best use of your recruiters' skills. Consider bringing in knowledge experts; recruiting practitioners who know your organization, but who also understand the market. Understand the technology and be realistic about the role it will play in the recruiting process.

With the proper blend of these four key elements organizations can expect much greater results from their recruiters. HR professionals can start expecting more than just qualified candidates, they can start expecting to get the best candidates—ones that will lead them to better corporate performance, and build for them a workforce guaranteed to set them ahead of their competitors.