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Blogs: Opportunities and Risks for HR

Like a growing number of people these days, Gretchen Ledgard maintains a blog (Web log). She writes about her dog, Oliver, her recent trip home to Tennessee to visit her parents and her fondness for Ruthie's Cubes. She also writes about her experiences as a Microsoft employee. One of her most recent postings was about her efforts to hone her public presentation skills by giving a speech: "It went well ... except for my coughing and runny nose ... I was pretty darn sick but I did fine presentation-wise."

Unlike most bloggers, however, Ledgard maintains her postings as part of her job as a Microsoft recruiter. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of her posts deal with the day-to-day rhythms of working at the Redmond, Wash.-based software giant.

Microsoft is one of a very small number of companies that maintain blogs specifically for the purpose of attracting qualified job candidates. Proponents say recruiting blogs can be invaluable tools for reaching sought-after "passive candidates"—potential employees who may not be actively searching for a new job—because they can offer an "unfiltered" take on a firm's culture.

Joel Cheesman, a Cleveland-based consultant and president of HRSEO, a firm that helps recruiters attract candidates via search engines, says a key benefit of blogs is their ease-of-use.

"With blogs, HR doesn't have to deal with IT or a vendor to update company information; recruiters and hiring managers can do it themselves," he says.

Cheesman says blogs offer an advantage over e-mail job notifications thanks to RSS—which stands for "Really Simple Syndication"—a format



for gathering and distributing content from across the Web that is commonly used by bloggers.

"If you have a feature that lets people sign up for RSS feeds, that will let you communicate with people in real-time, as opposed to e-mail, where things tend to get lost in the clutter," he says.

Establishing an RSS feed on your company's Web site or blog that streams updated information about new job openings and other information will help it become more "viral" and thus more likely to be seen by potential candidates, says Cheesman.

Ingredients of a successful recruiting blog should include content that is updated on a regular basis, says Cheesman. A recent posting on Ledgard's blog described Microsoft's recently revised annual-review process, in which employees receive their "formal" review during the summer and an "informal" one six months later. (Microsoft declined to make Ledgard available for an interview.) Her blog and others can be accessed at Recruiting.com, a blogging site maintained by recruiters.

At least one recruiting vendor is getting into the act. BrassRing recently announced a "Community" application that will be offered to selected users of its

Enterprise talent-management suite. The application, which is still in its testing phase, will include software designed to let companies rapidly post job openings on the Web and for creating recruiting blogs.

"We're putting these tools out to see how customers respond to them," says Iyad Saadeh, director of technology for the Waltham, Mass.-based company. "Blogs can help you expose the culture of your company. They're an easy way to get creative."

There are drawbacks to blogs as well, of course. A recent *BusinessWeek* cover story on blogs noted that employees often use them to communicate company information—information their employers may not wish to be publicized. Mark Jen was terminated from his programming job at Google after he posted comments comparing Google's employee benefits with those of his previous employer. Ironically, Jen helped craft a blogging policy for workers at his new employer, Plaxo, a Mountain View, Calif.-based firm that makes software for online address books.

"We'd always had an unwritten policy on employee blogging, but when Mark came onboard we saw an opportunity to formalize it," says Stacy Martin, Plaxo's chief privacy officer. The policy can be viewed online at <http://blog.plaxoed.com>.

Jen says blogging is part of the corporate culture at Plaxo.

"The general public doesn't believe corporate messages anymore—they want to hear from employees down in the trenches," he says, adding that Plaxo employees have used blogs to counter what they considered to be incorrect information that was being spread about the company.