

## **What Recruits Want Most to Hear From You**

By Pat Davidson

If you thought “schmooze” was something you only do to get clients, think again. With the numbers of accounting students and public accountant candidates decreasing, it may now be that recruiting is the most over-the-top schmoozing you will ever do. Tim Noworyta and Linda Watson of PDI Global presented some reasons why and lots of practical ideas on how.

### **Accounting Industry Future Expectations**

Tim Noworyta started with some dire predictions for the future of the accounting industry. There will be an *increasing* need for accountants, due to increasing regulation and public demand for accountability (est. at 40,000 new accountants needed per year) while as many as 75% of current accountants will be eligible to retire.

Even though the need is increasing, the pool of available recruits is small. Fewer young people are available to enter the market. Many will not choose *public* accounting. And those who do choose public accounting must still gain experience.

The competition is fierce.

The nature of the “recruitable” class is changing. More than half are women. Ethnic minorities are also increasing. Noworyta said that diversity is not an option.

The expectations of new recruits are also different from the Baby Boomers who are doing most of the hiring. Generation Y has never been without technology. It is second nature for them to use all the tools available – sometimes all at the same time. They have been heavily influenced by 9/11, fear of terrorism and fear of global warming. They don’t read as much as their elders and are more likely to be influenced by brands and by their peers.

Members of Gen Y are primarily motivated by salary, benefits and professional growth. They seek flexibility and the opportunity to work closely with someone who will truly teach them. They crave challenge, variety and training much more than a job title or a “hip” workplace.

So how do you recruit them? Connect with them.

Make your web site interactive, interesting, with valuable information, blogs, chat rooms and opportunities to sign up for more information.

Stay in touch. Recruiting can no longer be a one-time on-campus visit followed by the firm’s decision to hire. The recruiting process must now be ongoing with regular contacts.

### **Brady Ware’s 10 Most Wild New-Recruit Marketing Ideas**

Linda Watson took a cue from late-night television and combined it with the 2008 AAM Conference Theme “Wild on Marketing” to share some of the recruiting techniques of Brady Ware, a CPA firm in Ohio.

#### **#10 – Roar at the young ones**

Don't wait to recruit in college – begin with high school students. Hire high school interns. Invite an accounting class to lunch at the firm and have some of the young staff accountants explain a day in a life at the firm. Offer job shadow opportunities.

#### **#9 – Spear ‘em with a media plan**

Get to the college students with technology. Send blast emails through the accounting department chair person (after you establish a good relationship). Make your web site as inviting and interesting as My Space or FaceBook. Use texting, podcasts and blogs.

#### **#8 – Be visible in their habitat**

Marketers need to volunteer to help HR with career fairs and create an impact with your booth and materials. Develop a fantastic recruiting brochure. Give out scholarships at the local colleges. Frame a copy of the firm logo and offer to hang it in the job placement office or hallway. Offer to be a guest speaker for accounting classes.

#### **#7 – Have some jungle fun**

Wow them at a sporting event. The benefit of an informal outing is the opportunity to see how they interact with you and with their peers, or even if they interact! Entertain Beta Alpha Psi (on-campus accounting organization) and make it a fun event with opportunities to play games. One benefit of holding such an event at a restaurant, the responsibility for carding before serving alcohol falls to the establishment.

#### **#6 – Get your brand in their paws**

Give out trinkets and treasures that are useful, and have your logo on them, too. Some of Brady Ware's ideas were chapstick, deck of cards, extra iPod headphones. One way to be sure you pick out something they will like is to take a college student with you when you shop!

#### **#5 – Hire on-campus hunters**

Turn a college past intern into a recruiter on campus! Give your recruiter a budget and a credit card and set a goal for the number of lunches or other social interactions he or she should have with current students. This current student will know other students better than you can know them through the interview process and can steer the best students toward your firm. This person can also better position your firm with professors and get them to speak more highly of your firm. Your on-campus representative can also check the marketing supplies in the job placement center so you never run out.

Your on-campus recruiter can also help mentor other students on interviewing skills. He or she can volunteer to be on the committee that plans "Meet the Firm" events and can provide a list of attendees back to the firm. Your on-campus recruiter should keep a log of who she took out and what activities were attended. Watson explained the Brady-Ware recruiter was paid \$100 per week for her efforts, and it was well worth the expense.

#### **#4 – Treat ‘em like pampered pets**

Send a limo to pick recruits up from home for interviews. Give them flowers and special gifts on their first day at work. Be sure to talk about the benefits that your firm offers, such as flexible schedules, massages during busy season, dry cleaning pick up and delivery, complimentary beverage stations and others.

### **#3 – Wow ‘em in your office jungle**

When recruits come to the firm to interview, wow them with a personalized itinerary and welcome sign. Gen Y’ers are used to running strict schedules so a tightly scheduled itinerary is a great idea. Set up meetings with key team members from all levels and even have them attend a team meeting. Have them sit in on a training session to reinforce that the firm takes training seriously.

### **#2 – You’ve got ‘em (almost)**

When a recruit comes to the office, have business cards already printed and in an engraved card holder. Encourage them to give the cards to their friends. Give them pens with their names engraved on them – they won’t throw them away. Show them where they might be sitting and have a sign on that laptop that says something like “We envision you at our office – do you?”

### **#1 – Go after the parents**

Students have said that the most important influence in their job decision is still their parents. Ask for the potential recruit’s home address and send cookies with a note saying “You must be proud of your son/daughter – we were impressed too!” Later, if the recruit joins the firm, send a note of congratulations to both the student and the parents. If the recruit does not join the firm, keep the recruit and parents on your database. It might not be “no” forever!

### **Additional Tips**

Watson reinforced that recruiters must be committed to communicating throughout the year. She offered examples such as sending Valentine’s Day cards, a Halloween pumpkin carver and other fun ways to stay in touch. Don’t forget to include such ongoing communications in your budget.

Consider installing easy games on your web site, such as posting photos of firm events and asking the visitor to find 5 items in the picture. Give them a way to respond and the game is on!

Marketing should also be involved in the long-term retention of staff – from the moment they walk in the door to the time they are made partner. Go by and ask if a new accountant is happy and getting along okay.

### **Pursuing experienced recruits**

Reaching experienced CPAs takes an understanding of the firm’s culture, background research on other firms and research on individuals you are seeking, their likes and dislikes. Identify potential recruits with help from the accounting professionals within the firm. Don’t be afraid to use professional recruiters – they can present your story with candor as an outside expert and they can find potential targets through their networks.

Don’t forget about your own people. Sometimes the best candidate for an upper position is already in your firm. Provide training and help your people advance. This will free up lower positions which are easier to fill. Even more important, your staff will be out in the community sharing the good news.

Remember, experienced candidates, not you, are in charge of the hiring process. They already have a job and they don’t need you. They know what they want and can proactively choose an employer. Be sure your internal process does not get in the way. It is most likely set up to screen, not recruit. Don’t let the HR Director become an unwelcome intermediary.

Know what you are selling and what they want to buy. Then prepare your presentation, and design the whole process to address those needs. And have patience. It may take a while to get the best recruits to move.

**Listen to what they say**

The session was wrapped up with a panel discussion by three college students about to enter the job market. Their comments verified all the ideas that had already been expressed. These young people want to make a difference and they want to be mentored. They know what they want, so ask them!

*This is a summary of a presentation at the 2008 AAM Summit "Wild On Marketing". Pat Davidson is Director of Marketing for Deming Malone Livesay & Ostroff CPA firm in Louisville, Kentucky.*