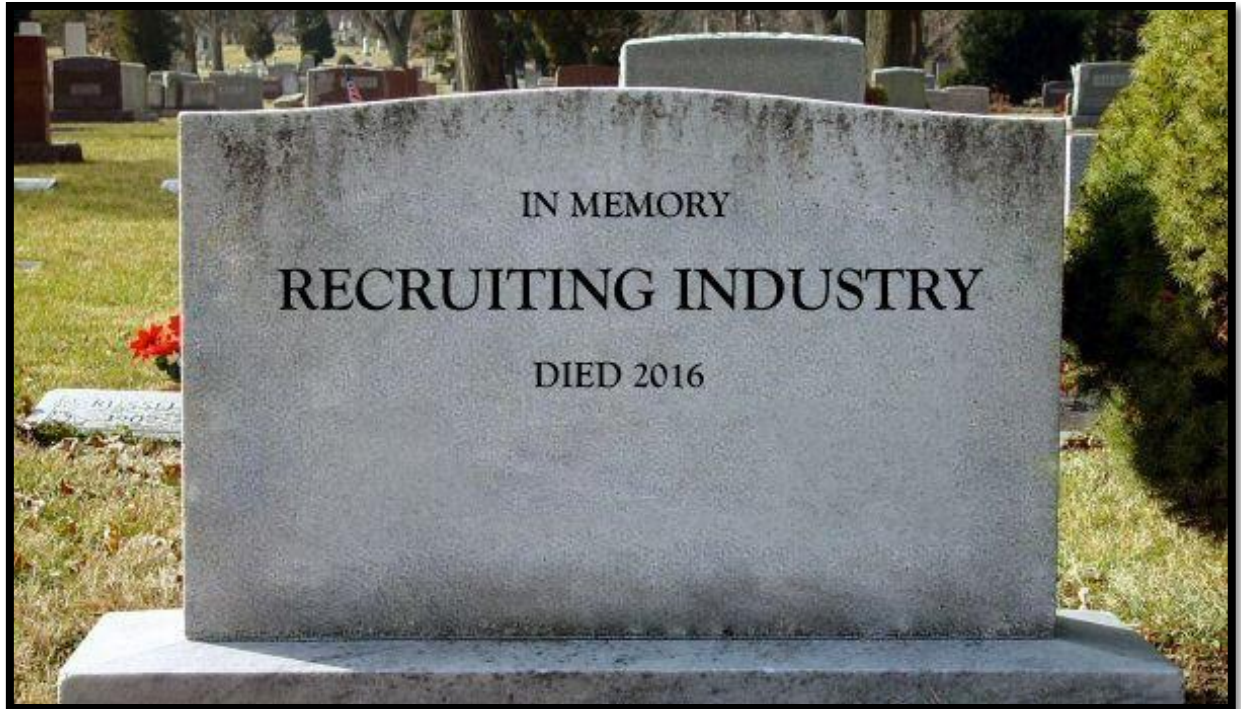


# Has the Digital Age Killed Recruitment?

Jennifer Swain



In the 15 years I have worked in recruitment I have seen the business landscape change beyond recognition. When I first started, business development often involved the Yellow Pages and a phone. The advent of the internet and social media has (thank goodness) completely changed the face of Business Development, not just in recruitment, but across the entire business world. In fact, the digital world has changed many facets of the way we work, in most part for the better. Video Conferencing and Skype means that you can easily face-to-face with colleagues and contacts across the globe, paperless environments are becoming more and more the norm, flexible and home working has empowered millions of people who are no longer wasting hours sitting on tarmac, instead choosing to work from home or the local café who offer free WIFI along with a hot brew and a bacon butty!

Recruitment, in terms of the day to day of how we do our jobs has been transformed due to the digital revolution. However, I believe that this has not necessarily been a good thing for our industry. I think there is a real discord between what the digital world COULD offer recruitment, and the reality of the damage it is doing.

Recruitment processes HAVE altered due to the digital world, but I think they have been altered in the wrong places, with the focus being on volume and speed as opposed to quality. We have changed too much in some directions, and not enough in others.

Let's take the contingent, multiple agency recruitment platform as an example.

20 years ago, when social media did not exist, it made sense to use more than one agency in order to "cast the net wide". Agencies would be very regionally focused, and would not have easy access to all candidates actively pursuing new employment. There was a huge difference between the way a contingent recruitment agency went about the daily grind, and how a search and selection, retained consultancy would operate. It made sense therefore, to give a vacancy to 3 or more agencies in order to cover all bases and get the best coverage possible. If you had a particularly specialist role, you would consider giving it to a head hunter and paying a retainer, as going out and unearthing great talent who were not actively putting their CV out there was very time consuming and required a huge investment of time from the search firm.

The reality is, the above landscape is completely different in 2017. Active candidates are easily accessible through job boards, most contingent recruiters within specialisms such as supply chain tend to head hunt daily for ALL positions. In 2017, the best candidates don't NEED to put their CV's out there because they know they will get approached by proactive recruiters. The line between contingent recruitment and search recruitment is very much blurred.

**The fact is that the traditional contingent recruitment model is outdated and irrelevant in the digital world.**

To ensure businesses get the best candidates on the market, you need to afford your recruitment partner the time to go out and network amongst the passive candidate market. If you give a role to multiple agencies and ask for CVs in a couple of days, you will end up with an inbox full of duplicate applications and poor quality, irrelevant candidates because you make it about a numbers game and a foot race. You need to give your recruitment partner the time and space to really capitalise on the benefits the digital age has provided us – the ability to go and head hunt the best of the best, not just make do with the pool of candidates who apply to the advert. That word "partner" is very important in this. If you empower your recruiter with all the information they need, if you afford them time to give

them full visibility of your business and the vacancy, if you work with them exclusively, I can promise you they will work so much more diligently to get you the best person for your opportunity.

By empowering them you also give them accountability. So, if they fail, it's their fault, not yours for choosing the wrong candidates from the 245 CVs that land in your inbox....

The utopia for me, would be that clients pay a nominal fee upfront to engage with recruiters. I am not talking the traditional 3rd/3rd/3rd traditional search model, I mean a small percentage of the placement fee at the start of the process.

This would serve a number of purposes, firstly and foremost, it would make businesses really think about who they engage with and do some research on the proposed partner. This would very quickly weed out the bad recruiters I see so often talked about on LinkedIn, because let's face it, if you have to pay up front for any service, you will always do your homework more than if there is little perceived risk of engaging with a supplier. Secondly it will give your recruiter the confidence and time to do a thorough job of sourcing candidates through networking and head hunting, and thirdly it will ensure that businesses don't engage recruiters on positions which may not be viable in the first place. A practise which occurs massively because of the "risk free" factor of contingent recruitment, and can be very damaging particularly for smaller recruitment businesses who spent 100's of hours in good faith recruiting for a role, which does not come to fruition for a multitude of reasons, none of which are the recruiters fault (e.g. recruitment freeze, strategic business review, last minute internal candidate etc.)

I am a realist however, and whilst I am passionate in my belief that paying a small retainer would transform the recruitment industry for the better, I recognise that this wholesale change may be too much for some to stomach. I implore businesses then to go down the exclusive, partnership route, as a very healthy compromise.

So, Contingency is an example of where I believe we are not using the digital age to our advantage.

Where I believe that we are using it TOO much.....well I could write a book. EVERYONE involved in recruitment – be it recruiter, candidates or hiring companies, make mistakes in over-using technology in recruitment. I will just address the main points here:

## RECRUITERS:

The digital age has allowed for lazy recruitment. Software that sifts CVs looking for key words that should effectively do the recruiters job for them, but in reality causes frustration by the many candidates who don't work in IT but have "it" in their CV (as an extreme example!) and get bombarded with roles that have no relevance to what they do.

## CLIENTS:

Many clients rely on technology to prevent the need to speak to us pesky recruiters. They email out job descriptions with a "no contact with hiring managers" policy, and want all CVs submitted on to their portal (Of Doom). How any recruiter is going to be able to effectively source, and then procure interest from the best candidates using this method, is beyond me, and the mind boggles how anyone can think this would be a good way to recruit, yet many of the bigger businesses now employ these methods.

## CANDIDATES

Candidates fall victim to how easy it is to post CVs on job boards and apply for jobs. These days you only have to upload your CV once and then apply-per-click. You may think you are giving yourself the best chance of securing a role. The reality is that you are only diluting your proposition, particularly if you take a punt on roles that you do not have relevant skills for. This may take some of you by surprise, but over 80% of applications I receive in response to adverts are not relevant in any way, shape or form to the posted job. This only serves to call your calibre into question and also clogs up the recruiter's inbox, It is extremely frustrating and time consuming, and prevents them from getting in touch with relevant professionals sooner.

So there you have it, the digital age has a lot to answer for! Would we be better getting rid of our LinkedIn pages and going back to good old Yellow Pages and a land line? No, I think not, but I do believe we have a huge amount of adjusting to do before we stop seeing post after post of complaints about recruitment and recruiters. We just have to stop moaning and start doing something about it. Are you brave enough to try something new?

