Case Study – Web Programmer

Background:

In the spring of 2004, a web programmer position was posted on Dice.com and on the hiring company's web site. The position was asking for 2+ years experience in web programming (specifically with the PHP programming language), a bachelor degree or better, that the applicant be local to the company, and that the applicant has the appropriate visa to work within the US. The hiring company used the HELPUHIRE system to prescreen their applicants.

The Raw Results:

The position received 60 applicants. 59 followed the instructions and applied using the HELPUHIRE system (one sent in an application through the to the generic email address used to request info from the hiring company). Of those applicants who applied through the HELPUHIRE system, the following percentages were found to not be qualified based on the questions asked:

Category	Hiring Company's Requirement	% who didn't meet this requirement
Programming Experience	2+ yrs	15%
Degree	BS	17%
Need to relocate	Local only	44%
Need a Visa	Not willing to sponsor Visa	10%

In total, 61% of the applicants were screened out because they did not meet one or more of the requirements.

Findings:

1) More is Not Better:

The more questions asked did not necessarily make the screening any more accurate. Using the most effective question (need to relocate) only, 44% of applicants who did not meet this requirement were screened out. Using both this and the second most effective question (degree) brought us to 53%. Adding the third, we increase to 59%. And the fourth question only brought us to 61%. As you can see, each additional question is adding a smaller amount to the effectiveness.

2) Consider Using Maximums with Minimums:

One of the most important criteria for choosing a web programmer would likely be their web programming skills. Yet, the screening only found that 15% of the applicants did not have the minimum requirement of 2 years experience. But, a further look at the data showed that 36% of applicants had 5 or more years experience (some more than 10 years).

The company was not looking for a senior level person, and was concerned that an overqualified person would either be too expensive or the person would not stay with the company once the economy improved, so they decided to also screen out those who were overly qualified. The screening system allowed them to quickly and easily screen these overqualified candidates out.

3) Dealing with Unexpected Results:

The screening found a higher than expected number of applicants who were not local, even though the job posting specifically said local candidates only. Two factors appear to affect this:

1. that even though the posting specifically said local candidates only, Dice had an option which could be selected to show that telecommuting is Ok. Applicants might have read it as an either/or, where the company did want even telecommuters to be local to facilitate face-to-face meetings when required.

2. that the position was posted on Dice, which is a national job board (and does have some international job hunters on it). If the position was posted on a regional or local job board, the number of non-local applicants would likely decrease. For example, a Web User Interface position posted on Craigslist San Francisco Bay Area (and also listed in the posting "local candidates only") by another company received 40 applicants in its first week, only 1 of which was not local.

Even though a higher number of applicants than expected were not local, the prescreening system automatically screened these applicants out, so they did not burden the hiring manager.

Time savings:

Prior to using the HELP**U**HIRE system, the hiring manager estimated that he spent 3-4 minutes per applicant to review their resume. This meant he saved about 2 hours of time by not having to review the ones who didn't meet his requirements.

When he adjusted his screening criteria to screen out the ones that he felt were overqualified, an additional 12 applicants were screened out. This saved him an additional 45 minutes of time in reviewing applicant's data.

Comment:

The one applicant who applied without using the system was disqualified and does not show up in these statistics. The applicant was actually a company trying to sell a service of PHP programming, not an applicant for a position within the company.

Conclusion:

Using a short questionnaire to prescreen applicants saved a lot of time for the hiring manager of this position. It reduced by more than half the number of resumes and cover letters that needed to be read.