

VIRTUAL VETTING

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ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

In other software-based industries, job candidates often are asked to do a formal product presentation as part of the interview process that gives them a chance to show their skills at identifying opportunities and solving problems, said Candice Crane, a talent consultant who works with dealerships. [...] hiring managers could evaluate candidates' written communication skills in an email, but also how promptly they respond. Online options Amanda Whiddon, executive and corporate recruiter for Chicago-based Berman Auto Group, said the six-store group uses technology to automate part of its recruiting process, including chatbots that help with initial employee screening.

FULL TEXT

Hiring managers at Mini of Austin still want to meet a job applicant in person.

Yet just as auto retail itself has become more digital during the pandemic, so, too, has the hiring process. The first conversation with a potential hire now often happens in a video call, said Tracy Gurnett, general manager of the Texas dealership. And candidates' ability to correspond in an email or a text message often can tell recruiters how they might interact with customers.

That kind of vetting may increasingly become the norm, some auto retail talent consultants say, as customers and dealership employees alike grow more comfortable with transacting online. Now that vehicle shoppers can do multiple steps virtually, from browsing to financing, some retailers say they're interested in knowing how prospects might handle those tasks if they're offered the job.

Spelling and grammar, and the ability to compose a professional email message, might be important to know about a candidate for an Internet department role, Gurnett said. Likewise, an applicant for a service adviser job might be assessed on his or her ability "to send those short but complete messages" that customers enjoy receiving by text, she said.

An unsatisfactory response itself isn't a deal-breaker if the candidate shows a willingness to be coached, she said. "The important part for managers is just to assess the skill set and where the opportunities are within the store," Gurnett said, "and place that person in the best position for success."

In other software-based industries, job candidates often are asked to do a formal product presentation as part of the interview process that gives them a chance to show their skills at identifying opportunities and solving problems, said Candice Crane, a talent consultant who works with dealerships.

Dealership hiring managers can take a similar approach, said Crane, who previously worked for Walser Automotive Group and Hireology, a dealership technology recruitment company. One interview strategy is to ask candidates to reply to an email message as if they were an employee responding to a customer.

That approach, however, is not something the industry has done historically, she said.

"As an automotive industry, we tend to have a very fast hiring process, mainly because we're hiring out of desperation and we need to have that seat filled right away," she said. "So we have a candidate come in, we have one conversation with them and we're excited if they show up for the interview. And in my opinion, we have to kind of increase our standards or raise our standards and not just assume that if they show up that they're qualified for the role."

Two-way evaluation

Candidates also increasingly prefer to communicate virtually, said Anil Harjani, senior vice president of product

and growth for Hireology. And, he added, dealerships need to be mindful that prospective hires are assessing their prospective employers, too.

"If you're looking at trying to hire somebody who used to work at Apple, or at any other retail establishment that has a tech-forward culture, dealerships are realizing that in order to attract that profile, you've got to actually demonstrate you're tech-forward on the interview process," he said. "It's becoming, I think, table stakes and, in fact, a competitive advantage to demonstrate this capability."

Whatever communication method dealerships use as part of their customer experience should be incorporated into their interview process, experts said.

For instance, hiring managers could evaluate candidates' written communication skills in an email, but also how promptly they respond. Do they treat text messages like email, writing long paragraphs? Do they showcase their personalities?

If a position requires text messaging, "don't interview them over Zoom and ask them about their text messaging abilities. Just simply use text messaging in your interview process with them and see how responsive they are," Harjani said. "That in and of itself is a mock environment to assess how they're doing."

Online options

Amanda Whiddon, executive and corporate recruiter for Chicago-based Berman Auto Group, said the six-store group uses technology to automate part of its recruiting process, including chatbots that help with initial employee screening. The chatbots also allow Whiddon to tell how quickly job applicants respond.

It's difficult to gauge someone's virtual communication skills in a face-to-face interview, said Ross Berman, the group's vice president.

"It's a lot easier just to have a conversation with them in an interview process and then have somebody with Amanda's background identifying, 'All right, this person can write a really good email and they have good grammar. They know how to say things properly, and I texted them and they got back to me shortly. This is the type of person we want.'"

The pandemic accelerated some dealerships' use of virtual interviews, as concerns about transmitting COVID-19 halted many in-person meetings.

While some interviews have returned to face-to-face, some dealerships say they have kept virtual elements in place.

Rockwall Chrysler-Dodge-Jeep-Ram in Texas began to interview applicants using FaceTime and Zoom in June 2020, said Lloyd Steeves, the store's general manager. A video call with Steeves is still a job candidate's first interview, before coming into the store for an in-person visit, he said.

Steeves said his goal with the video chats is to see if the applicant can navigate the technology and if they show up on time. Being comfortable on camera is important because the dealership requires sales consultants to send introductory videos to nearly all prospective buyers as part of the follow-up process, Steeves said. That establishes a rapport with the customer early and potentially sets the store apart from neighboring dealerships that send a form email or leave a voicemail.

"If they are willing to learn, then yes, we'll move forward, and we may even go to an in-person interview and help them be more comfortable," he said.

"We don't want to ever miss out on a great candidate because of one thing or another. You want to give them the full opportunity to present themselves. Just because somebody's not comfortable in front of a camera today doesn't mean that they're not the best person [sending] introductory videos in three months."

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