



Keep Your Candidates Engaged:

How designing a candidate-centric screening process
can help you win the war for talent

JazzHR

Wonderlic.

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Introduction

In an age with record low unemployment, more job openings, and intense competition in seemingly every sector, every talent acquisition professional is in the candidate experience business.

The term “candidate screening” is usually perceived as a negative part of the candidate experience. It doesn’t have to be that way. It shouldn’t be that way. The following sections will help you delight candidates with a screening process that helps the top individuals shine while helping less-qualified candidates move on to other opportunities.

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Make Your Job Analysis More Strategic

Making a new hire isn't as simple as writing up a job description, identifying and interviewing the top candidates, and extending an offer. A strategic job analysis before your opening hits the market can help excite and engage the right candidates before they even touch the application.



Your job analysis needs to go beyond the needs of the specific role to answer a key question: **"How does this job fit into the strategic direction of the organization?"**

In the new hiring landscape, your job analysis needs to go beyond the needs of the specific role to answer a key question: "How does this job fit into the strategic direction of the organization?"

Before you kick off any recruiting efforts, you must identify a need for new team members. Whether the need stems from organizational growth or turnover, you've been tasked with finding the best candidate – and the hiring manager probably wants the position filled yesterday.

Building a job analysis involves collecting information on characteristics that differentiate jobs. If done correctly, the job analysis will represent what the role needs – not what individuals that may have held that title previously brought to the position. You must identify the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) – the baseline qualifications your new hire will need to succeed. Ask the following questions when conducting your analysis.

1. Why was there an opening in the first place?

- **Was the individual a bad fit?** If so, think about why that person wasn't right for the role, and consider how that will impact your new search. What can you put in the job description so it doesn't happen again?
- **Was the situation a bad fit?** Perhaps the person who left was a strong performer, but wasn't getting the support necessary from above to excel in the role. Between that employee's exit interview and subsequent talks with their manager and co-workers, you should have a better understanding of where things went awry.
- **Was it just time to move on?** Maybe a new position internally or externally came along and it was a growth opportunity for the individual.
- **Are you hiring due to organizational growth?** If your company is expanding, that's exciting. It means there's a story to why you're growing, and a great opportunity to communicate that to a prospective hire. How will that be woven into the job description?

2. What does "fit" mean to this position and our organization?

Defining what makes a candidate a good fit is critical to making a great hire. Pre-employment assessments can go a long way in determining if the person you're hiring will thrive on your team – more on that later – but there are a few things to keep in mind in the job analysis stage. You must:

- **Understand the KSAs needed to be successful.** These are the baseline qualifications you want so that your new hire will be able to meet the demands of the job.
- **Understand how someone will align to the strategic framework** you established while answering the "why." Will this person buy into the vision of our organization? Will they be excited to get out of bed for this role?
- **Determine how you'll capture each key element of fit** throughout the hiring process. Delineate between the absolutes and the nice-to-haves.
- **Collaborate.** All of this should be done in a joint session between HR and the hiring manager. Hiring isn't done in a vacuum, and the process of putting together the job description shouldn't be either.



Job analysis? **Check.** Job description? **Done.**

Now you'll post the opening on your company's careers page, Indeed, ZipRecruiter, and perhaps even some niche job boards. You'll put the word out within the organization to drive referrals. You'll hit up your social media channels to let followers know you're hiring. You'll go back in your applicant tracking system to see if any previous candidates are worth a reconnect.

It's time to start the screening funnel.

Design Candidate Screening to Match the Job

Screening Out vs. Screening In

There's no time – and no reason – to talk to every person who submits an application. If you get 250 applicants for a job, perhaps four to six of those will make it to the interview stage.

The first step in whittling down your resumes is screening out.

Screening Out

This hiring process started with a job analysis, and you're about to see why. Doing the legwork to analyze the job you're hiring for provides a certain set of requirements you're not willing to live without.

Perhaps you're hiring an accountant and you're only looking for licensed CPAs. Maybe you're hiring someone to operate heavy machinery and need to see a clean driving record. You might be hiring an educator and aren't willing to settle for anyone without a Master's degree.

This is also where factors such as salary expectations or location can be valuable. If you have \$70,000 earmarked for your new hire and an applicant suggests they're looking for at least six figures, you've just screened out a candidate. If you have an applicant that looks good on paper but lives four hours away, there goes another.



Screening In

The screening out process eliminated those that don't meet some base requirements you have for the job you're looking to fill.

Screening in, as the names suggests, takes an opposite approach. Your job analysis may have yielded 15-20 essential skills, and while it's unlikely you're going to find a candidate that ticks each one of those boxes, someone who covers most of those bases is likely going to emerge as a strong contender.

In some companies, a person who comes up short on the essential skills you listed might be screened out. But screening in is betting on potential.

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Are there skills that, while they may seem a bit outside the box, can ultimately transfer to the role for which you're hiring? Imagine a theater actor who was an economics major applying for a sales role. That person might lack the measurable success of some other applicants, but are they likely to be good at talking to potential customers? Are they going to be persuasive in selling your products?

What if a person has only three years of experience instead of the five to seven your job description stated you're looking for, but you're convinced there are intangibles that make them worth a second look?

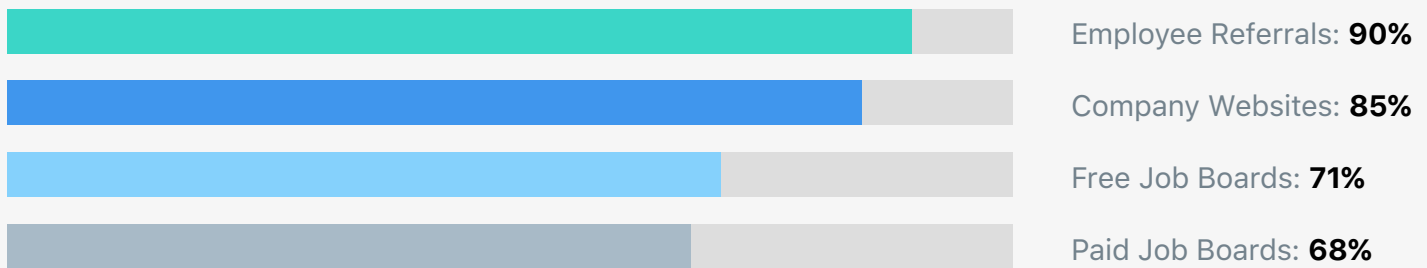
So how do you identify that potential?

Fortunately, the most effective way to identify potential is also the easiest. And, you've probably already collected the data earlier in the process. The answer: Pre-employment assessments. Pre-employment assessments like [Wonscore®](#) offer data-driven, objective insights that can help you screen in the candidates most likely to thrive in your organization.

High-Volume vs. Low-Volume Positions

Let's go back for a second to our introduction to screening. We mentioned posting your opening on job boards – internal and external – as the first step between your job analysis and the beginning of your screening process.

Most Common Tools to Source Candidates



For most positions within many companies, that's the correct move. Employee referrals (90%) were the most common tool to source candidates according to [SHRM's 2017 Talent Acquisition Benchmark Report](#), but company websites (85%) were second and both free (71%) and paid (68%) job boards were third and fourth.

One issue: Using job boards – particularly one where you've invested financial resources – can be like lighting up the bat signal in Gotham City. For certain lower- and mid-level positions, you might get more resumes than you bargained for.

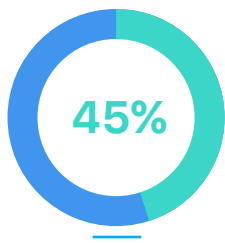
That's OK. You have your screening process in place for those positions. We'll talk later about how [assessments](#) and [technology](#) can and should be included in your process. Ultimately, when you're facing the challenges created for high-volume candidate openings, it's about collecting and using data intelligently.

For **specialized** roles or **executive-level** roles, however, a different approach might work better. If the role you're hiring for requires a less localized search, the screening process takes a different approach.

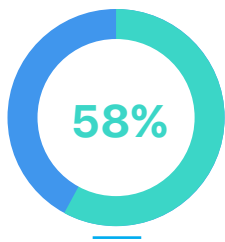
Search firms, or headhunters, are the second-most popular tool to source executive candidates, with 49% of companies using them. That's behind only professional contacts/networking (61%).

With any position – particularly a specialized or executive-level position – any time wasted can cost a company dearly. Even if it seems like a C-level position will yield a shallow pool of candidates to begin with, doing the homework early in the talent acquisition process – either by having a professional contact in mind or using a search firm – can be a very valuable screening tool in the end.

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Can't find qualified talent



Jobs stay open for 12+ weeks

Screening with Unemployment at All-Time Low

The unemployment rate in the United States was 4.1 percent to begin 2018, and the dip from that already record-low number has continued. The rate was 3.7 percent in September, the lowest jobless rate since 2000.

That's enough to make hiring anyone, let alone a quality candidate, a challenge. Forty-five percent of HR managers have openings they can't fill because they can't find qualified talent, and 58 percent say they have jobs that stay open for 12 weeks or longer.

So perhaps that job posting from 2015 that produced dozens of qualified candidates within a few hours is no longer replicable. It's up to your company to be proactive.

Rather than screening out from a qualified pool of contenders, try these techniques to screen in for your position with some unconventional candidates – and some who may not know they're candidates at all.

- **Passive candidates.** Make connections and nurture them. Whether it's joining a Facebook or LinkedIn group that connects you with candidates for a particular position, or attending networking events to scout talent, it's worth having a Rolodex of those who might not be looking – but might jump in if the opportunity is right.
- **Make better use of referrals.** Remember how we said employee referrals were the No. 1 way employers source candidates on a general level? There's a reason – it's a great, cost-effective resource! Not only may a trusted, current employee be able to vouch for a candidate's professional skills and abilities – they could have a good idea if that person is a cultural fit.

- **Look for potential – both in house and out.** Career fairs at college campuses are a great resource for sizing up talent, and even if you find students who are about to enter the workforce lacking in hard or soft skills, don't worry. You're betting on them growing into their role, and with proper onboarding and a mentorship program, that's a bet that's likely to pay off. And don't forget your current employees when you're screening. Only four in 10 corporations are currently investing in reskilling in-house, but those that do may find valuable candidates with cross-functional capabilities.

Screening for the Next Hire

Even if you've found the ideal candidate, the game isn't over and the funnel will start again. No matter the size of your organization, there's likely going to be another opening sooner rather than later. You want to be ready.

Every action your company takes between hires is screening for the next one. So what's the most important step you can implement in the interim?

Nurture your brand.

Carefully cultivating both the internal and external reputation of your organization will make attracting quality candidates that much easier when you're ready to screen prospective fits for your next hire. Put these plans into action.

- **Promote your culture.** This one helps both inside your walls and outside. Internally, it drives employee engagement. An engaged employee is more likely to champion the company's culture to those outside the organization, which increases awareness and could land you a referral down the road. Sharing your company's picnic or softball game on social media makes the culture look attractive to those that follow you and are at least somewhat aware of your brand. And, finally, there's the good old bottom line. One study found that companies with strong cultures saw a 400 percent increase in revenue growth over those without performance-enhancing cultures.
- **Learn from negativity.** Employee review sites are getting more and more popular, and millennials in particular are using destinations like Glassdoor and Indeed to do a background check on a company prior to applying. Nearly 80 percent of people check a company's Glassdoor listing before accepting a job offer. Some bad reviews can sink your reputation in the eyes of job seekers. The important thing to remember: Take the high road. If you respond, acknowledge what went

wrong and explain what the company is doing to fix the issue. More important than a public response, though, is going from reactive to proactive. Investigate the grievance, but reach out to current and former employees you think will offer a more favorable assessment and ask them to write one. Don't dwell on the negative reviews. Take action to encourage more positive ones.

- **Try to tell stories.** Whether it's social media or, in certain cases, your company's blog, create the narrative you want for your organization. Talk about employee recognition programs and show that you put employee feedback into action. Take it a step further when you're thinking of future job descriptions. After you've done your job analysis and written a description that highlights all the necessary background and requirements for the position, include a "Why this position matters" section. A prospective employee doesn't want to feel like a cog in a wheel. They want to feel like they can come into an organization and know when and where they can add value from Day 1.



One way to sort through large quantities of resumes is to use recruiting software with features like **knockout questions**.

Automate Activities for You and Your Applicants

The Application Process

Because organizations can receive upwards of 250 resumes per open role, it can be difficult to respond to every applicant. Having an automated response in place to alert candidates that you've received their resume and will be reviewing it should be mandatory in your recruiting process. If you're leveraging recruiting software with resume parsing, ensure that you have

some form of communication set up to automatically send a notification to those who did not make it to a phone screen.

One way to sort through large quantities of resumes is to use recruiting software with features like knockout questions. Knockout questions will auto-flag any candidates that have answered incorrectly to your disqualifying criteria, and you can also set them up to auto-reject any candidates to remove them immediately.



These types of questions can include:

- Highest Education Attained
- Citizen/Employment Status
- Age 18/or older
- Work Weekends
- Work Evenings
- Work Overtime
- Willing to Relocate
- Valid Driver's License/Commercial Driver's license

While these are basic knockouts, many times they can be completely customized to ensure you only see the candidates who fit your ideal of an employee.

Why (and When) to Use Assessments

Hiring costs time and money. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, the average cost per hire in 2015 was \$4,129 and the average time it took to fill a position was 42 days.

Combine that with a 19% annual turnover rate, and it makes a mistake in the hiring process even harder to swallow. That's where assessments start to make a whole lot of sense.

When used properly, pre-employment assessments provide an unbiased, legally sound method to screen candidates in and out of the process. And the data says they're rising in popularity.

Talent Board's 2016 **Candidate Experience Research** report finds 82 percent of companies use some form of pre-employment assessment. Once largely used for executive and other leadership positions, assessments are now commonly used across all levels of hiring.



\$4,129

Average cost per hire



42 days

Average time to fill a position



Wait the six weeks of the average time to hire and you'll likely find yourself **picking from leftovers.**

Tests that measure cognitive ability – the top predictor of on-the-job success – are the most common, but employers are expanding their repertoire. The Talent Board report finds that 51 percent of companies are using assessments that evaluate cultural fit – such as Wonderlic's Wonscore, which measures candidates based on cognitive ability, motivation and personality. Two years ago, just 29 percent of companies were evaluating for fit.

Assessments can be used early in the hiring process to compare candidates (screening in) or later in the process to weed out (screening out), offering a pretty clear value to HR departments and hiring managers.

But they also need to be candidate-friendly. With unemployment at record lows, top talent is at a premium, with data showing the best of the best tend to come off the market within 10 to 15 days in many industries. Wait the six weeks of the average time to hire that we referenced earlier and you'll likely find yourself picking from leftovers. Providing candidates the option to take

the test on their terms, rather than immediately upon applying, can decrease drop-out rates that some see as a negative stigma with assessments.

At the end of the day, you're probably not going to choose a new hire solely based on their assessment score. But let's crunch one more number: A 2014 study appearing in the *Harvard Business Review* analyzed 17 studies of applicant evaluation, showing that a simple algorithm outperforms human decisions by **at least 25%**. That effect stays the same in any situation with a large number of candidates, whether they're entry level, middle management or executives.

Using a machine to screen keywords in resumes might still work in some instances, but pre-employment assessments can help you get a fuller, clearer picture of candidate competencies and narrow your pool of applicants significantly.

Keeping candidates engaged

Once you've narrowed down your pool to the handful of qualified candidates you'd like to move forward with, it's time to set up your first round of outreach. While doing this, it's key to be conscious of the candidate's time. In today's job market, there's a good chance some of your candidates are currently still employed and extremely



busy. Be sure to get back to them in a timely manner and try your best to work around their current schedules as much as possible.

Keeping candidates engaged is a very real challenge. To combat this, recruiters need to rely on technology to get more personal. Lately, we've seen new trends arise such as candidate texting and video. While a short message service (SMS) isn't new by any means, it's certainly the majority's preferred method of communication. If your candidates opt into texting, it could greatly increase engagement and ensure they never miss your outreach.

Video is also becoming increasingly popular during the recruiting process. It helps boost your brand, speed up the screening process, and remove barriers. Some newer video technologies also have the capability to analyze a candidate's body language and give you a better read on them if you're conducting interviews remotely.

As the rest of the hiring team starts to get involved, clear and consistent communication between everyone will be extremely important. Providing the hiring team with a set of canned questions post-interview can streamline the collection of candidate feedback and make sure everyone's getting the information they need to make an informed decision.



Newer video technologies also have the capability to **analyze a candidate's body language** and give you a better read on them.

How to Choose the Best Technology

While having recruiting software can be a huge advantage, it's important to understand that the technology isn't appropriate for every business. Companies that experience very little turnover and don't do much hiring, for example, aren't likely to derive much value from an applicant tracking system (ATS). But high-growth, high-change organizations that are consistently adding new staff, on the other hand, invariably will.

As your business grows, you're also required to produce different types of reporting. Any business with more than 100 or more employees, for example, must file an EEO-1 Report with the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. (Reference: <https://www.eeoc.gov/employers/eeo1survey/whomustfile.cfm>) Other common reporting requirements include Form 5500, Forms 1094 and 1095 A, B, and C, W4s, W2s, and I9s, among others. Keeping the records you need to complete such filings can be a cumbersome and time-consuming process when done manually with Excel spreadsheets or an Access database. But with an ATS, you can easily automate much of that work, saving time and money.

A good way to tell if an ATS is needed is to think through how you're currently conducting recruiting. If you're using an inbox or spreadsheet to manage candidates, an ATS is the right tool for you.

The right fit recruiting software should meet the following criteria:

- **Easy to use.** The software should be user-friendly and have a user interface that's both intuitive and well thought out.
- **Collaborative.** Your ATS should promote teamwork and good communication to help ensure that your hiring teams stay in sync. It should promote transparency and good workflows to ensure the free flow of information in real time.
- **Connected.** Data management is only one part of the application tracking process. The right system will also allow you to access syndicated job boards with just a few clicks to maximize the efficiency and exposure of every position you're looking to fill.
- **Secure.** Protecting confidential data has never been more important, or under greater scrutiny, than it is today. For that reason, you want to make sure that your ATS is not only secure, but that you're able to manage your own data.



Beyond those basic requirements, there are a few other things to consider. To support your own growth objectives, it's important to find software that includes or integrates any other tools that you're offering as part of your HR tech stack, including:



- Data management solutions
- Candidate sourcing solutions
- Calendaring & scheduling systems
- Job syndication sites

You've already made sure that you're bringing great candidates to the table – now make sure you can identify and hire the best.

Choose the Best High Touch Activities

When your initial processes help identify potential early, you can spend more time with the candidates most likely to thrive in the job. Don't waste your time or theirs. Whether you're meeting remotely or on-site, speaking one-on-one or with a group, digging into past experience or evaluating skill in the moment, this part of the process requires a lot of time (for you, your team and the candidates). You've already made sure that you're bringing great candidates to the table – now make sure you can identify and hire the best.



2. Behavioral vs. Situational. Past performance is the best predictor of future success. That's the theory behind a behavioral interview, where you're asking a candidate to "Tell me about a time when..." Those KSAs you defined in the job analysis phase? They'll be critical in a behavioral setting. The competencies you determined as must-haves when first designing the job description will be prescriptive in deciding the behavioral tendencies you want to uncover. Those same KSAs will apply to situational interviews, which bring the hypothetical into the equation. Instead of looking back at past performance, you ask the candidate how they would deal with a theoretical situation in the future. But it's not just "How would you deal with an angry customer?" You can address real pain points within your own organization here. "What changes would you make if you ran our website?" might be a good question for a designer. "How would you pitch our product to the consumer?" could be the perfect question to ask a marketer.



The competencies you determined as must-haves when first designing the job description will be prescriptive in deciding the behavioral tendencies you want to uncover.

Pro tip: For a long period of time, researchers thought behavioral interviews were the most effective window into how a candidate would handle future outcomes by leaning on past behaviors. Recent, interview-specific research shows the opposite. Situational interviews require quick and effective problem-solving from the candidate that tends to be a better predictor of future success. It's still possible for an interviewee to leverage past experiences in situational interviews, but the thinking-on-your-feet requirement gives a better window into the future.

The verdict. Don't associate behavioral as a bad technique, but situational wins the day.

Interviewing is a Two-Way Street

Interviewing can be a stressful process for both the person conducting the interview as well as the prospective employee. So it's important to make the person you might be hiring feel comfortable. Limit your distractions. Use a welcoming tone and let them know you're excited to be having this conversation. If you're interviewing on site, offer them a beverage.

Most importantly, leave time for them to ask questions. You want to make sure you're a good fit for them just as much as they're a good fit for you. Be honest. If your company has negative reviews online, address them and what you're doing to stem the tide. Let them know that culture is important to your company. Being up front will help both you and the prospective employee avoid a bad fit that will cause problems down the road.

Also, make sure you're on the same page as an organization. With multiple rounds of interviews spanning different departments and different voices, consistency is key. Whether it's an HR representative, the hiring manager or prospective co-workers, keep the same tone and you'll create both a more welcoming candidate experience and a better structure to pick the right person.

Remote vs in-person consideration

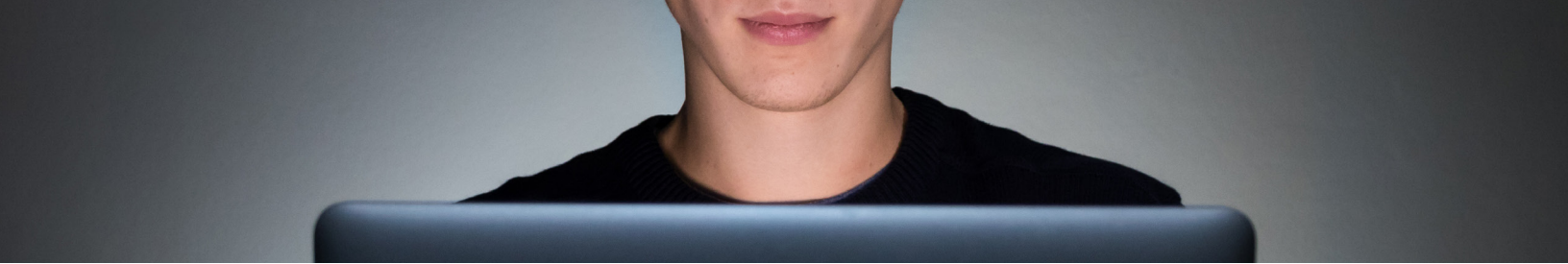
While most hiring teams would love to be able to conduct all interviews in-person, this is no longer realistic in today's digital world. With over 4.3 million employees (3.2% of the workforce) now working remotely, it's essential to have a different strategy for virtual interviews. If you're an organization with teams spread across multiple locations, there's going to be some element of video interviewing necessary.

When conducting virtual interviews, communication and presence will be the number one thing to look for. Because the candidate is in a different location, it's critical to see how well they articulate their answers. This will help you understand how they will interact with team members and other departments while not physically in the office.

If the candidate will be working remote full time, strong writing skills should be required. Ask for writing samples prior to or after the interview to ensure you're seeing the candidate's full set of skills. It's also important to ask questions that will speak to their time and project management skills, as they will work largely unsupervised.



With multiple rounds of interviews spanning different departments and different voices, **consistency is key.**



To best prep for a remote interview, find a quiet, comfortable place where you can conduct it. Be sure to test all of your technology thoroughly so you do not encounter any issues the day of. If your candidate has never interviewed remotely before, recommend they try a test run with family or friends to practice and help settle their nerves before the big day.

Monitor and Improve

Setting the Right KPIs for your Organization

Tracking against milestones is essential to the health of your recruiting pipeline. Doing so also provides you with key insights such as the availability of talent, the position of your candidates within the pipeline, and the impact your workflows have on resource management. According to a study from LinkedIn, only 25% of organizations analyze all of the data gathered through their recruiting efforts. Without leveraging the data available, how can you accurately prove the ROI of your efforts?

To build your talent pool and control your costs at the same time, having concrete goals and tracking your processes is the foundation to success. An efficient recruiting pipeline should include the following:

- Milestone tracking from applied to hired
- Standard and custom reporting
- A robust candidate database
- Workflow reporting such as time to fill, time to hire, and attrition
- Internal resource KPIs

Data-powered recruiting is the key to your recruitment team's success, allowing you to make better hiring decisions and continually improve internal workflows.

Review Regularly

Advanced recruiting software gives you the power to create custom reports and save them for continued use. A detailed level of customization is ideal for HR leaders who want to glean new insights from their recruiting pipeline on a regular basis. Generating reports to track your desired metrics within the candidate pipeline leverages a huge amount of useful data. The ability to search this database using keywords provides you with even more power to use this information to your full advantage.

By being able to show your ROI, your executive team will better understand the level of effort and resources needed to source quality talent. In turn, this will help position your department as a revenue driver instead of a cost center.



Website: www.jazzhr.com

Phone: 888-885-5299

E-mail: hello@jazzhr.com

About JazzHR

Since 2009, JazzHR has raised the bar in the recruiting software industry, with many of our innovations becoming industry-standard. We're the first company to put powerful, yet easy-to-use recruiting software in the hands of startups, growing companies, and even presidential campaigns.



Website: www.wonderlic.com

Phone: 1-877-605-9496

E-mail: marketing@wonderlic.com

About Wonderlic

Since 1937, Wonderlic has been helping organizations hire smarter and grow faster. Wonscore is the latest, most innovative platform among Wonderlic's highly regarded pre-employment assessment library, using a scientifically proven formula to help businesses easily identify who to interview and who to hire.