

FROM CELL PHONE TO “SELL” PHONE: HIRING THE BEST MOBILE MARKETERS

Jerry Bernhart

Talk with the experts at Forrester Research and they'll tell you mobile marketing has a very bright future. According to Kenneth Hein (2008), who writes for Brandweek, analysts at Forrester Research predict that mobile marketing spending in the United States will grow from \$270 million in 2008 to \$405 million in 2009. After that it goes exponential, becoming a \$2.8 billion market by 2012.

Propelled by the arrival of new technological innovations, the prevalence of personal mobile devices and the continuing business need to do more with less, mobile marketing in the United States is going mainstream. According to Experian, Acuity Mobile found that 89 percent of major brands were planning to market via mobile in 2008, and nearly one-third of those brands were planning to spend greater than 10 percent of their marketing budgets on mobile (Experian Information Solutions, Inc., 2009).

Research by Nielsen Mobile shows the extent of the penetration of mobile devices in American society: In the fourth quarter of 2008 there were 109 million subscribers to the mobile Internet; 44 million of them had used the mobile Internet within the previous 30 days (Nielsen Mobile, 2008). According to The Kelsey Group, U.S. mobile advertising revenues (search and display) will grow to \$3.1 billion in 2013, from \$160 million in 2008, representing a compound annual growth rate of 81.2 percent. During the same period, the firm forecasts mobile local search advertising revenues will increase from \$20 million to \$1.3 billion, a compound annual growth rate of 130.5 percent (The Kelsey Group, 2009).

Unlike the Internet revolution when home computers helped drive the development of online marketing, mobile devices are already in the hands of millions of people in the United States, so a ready market already exists. Attracted by high response rates and the relatively low cost of campaign deployment, early adopters are seeing encouraging results from well-designed and well-executed mobile marketing promotions. These mobile trailblazers represent well known major brands and a wide cross-section of industries, including restaurants, online and offline

retailers, auto manufacturers, consumer electronics, travel and entertainment, casinos, and political campaigns. Brandweek's Hein quotes mywaves' CEO Rajeev Raman, who states that buying movie tickets, fast food and music by way of mobile phones will soon be considered "normal, everyday behavior." (Hein, 2008)

As companies realize the full potential of mobile marketing and expand the size of their mobile marketing budgets accordingly, the need for specialized talent in this young and burgeoning industry will grow. The practice of marketing, as defined by the AMA (2007), is:

The activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners and society at large.

Michael Becker, in *Web Marketing All-in-One for Dummies* (Arnold, Lurie, Dickinson, Marsten & Becker, 2009), defines mobile marketing as:

The set of activities, institutions, and processes that supports marketers in their pursuit to communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large by way of the mobile and mobile-enhanced traditional and new-media channels.

Marketing through the mobile channel can be complex with many moving parts. While technology is the enabler, it is the people who drive the business. Just as the dawn of the Internet age triggered demand for people with online marketing skills, the emergence of mobile marketing will create opportunities for an entirely new breed of marketing talent.

How should an organization go about recruiting this highly specialized talent to fulfill their mobile marketing needs? What type of prior career experience will best prepare someone for success as a mobile marketer? What are the specific skill sets needed in the industry today and in the future to effectively practice mobile marketing, and how will those skills be developed? What certifications are needed and how will universities and industry initiatives help develop those skills and validate the certifications?

This paper addresses these questions. It provides an overview of the sources of hire that generally are most often cited by employers as producing the most number of highest quality applicants: Referrals (direct and employee), online job postings (company and job boards) and executive search firms. Furthermore, it looks at direct marketers as a proxy for the core skills

needed by future mobile marketers and explains how these skills are applicable. Finally, it provides a brief summary of what is needed to develop these skills within our current and future workforce.

A REVIEW OF SOURCES OF TALENT

Companies tap into various sources to help them attract, qualify and hire needed talent. The most widely used sources for external hires by companies in the United States include referrals, online job postings, direct sourcing and executive search firms. According to the latest Source of Hire Study by Career Crossroads, 27 percent of external hires in 2008 came through referrals, 20 percent were attributed to company Web sites, 12 percent came through online job boards and 8 percent represented direct hires. The remaining hires were dispersed among the following sources: college recruiting, career fairs, search engine marketing, rehires, print ads, walk-ins, temp-to-hire, executive search firms and other miscellaneous sources (Crispin & Mehler, 2009).

In the following sections, we will examine in more detail the four hiring sources companies have identified as producing the largest number of highest qualified candidates for their open positions.

Employee Referral Programs

Referrals are the number one external source of new hires. This includes referrals from current employees, former employees (so called “boomerangs”) and vendors. Employee referrals constitute the largest share of this category. Employee referral programs are an effective way to attract high quality candidates at relatively low cost per hire. Employees are unlikely to recommend people who they think are unqualified or unreliable.

Because employees are selling the company to the people they refer, it can reduce the time to hire. It also helps build stronger bonds with existing employees who are often rewarded for their referral efforts and who feel like they are making a valuable contribution to the organization. However, many employees choose not to participate in these programs for several reasons: They don't know anyone suitable for open positions, they are afraid the referral will put them in a negative light if the referred candidate does not succeed, and some view the process as being too much of a hassle. Employee referral programs also must be deployed cautiously. Competing businesses have been known to retaliate against companies that steal happily employed workers. In addition, excessive reliance upon an employee referral program can lead to an inbred organization that lacks a diversity of ideas. Similar to other industries that are relatively young,

the pool of talented candidates within the mobile marketing industry is shallow, so employee referrals may be less effective as a source of hiring compared with other methods. However, a well-designed and highly visible employee referral program should be part of an overall recruiting strategy for companies that need to hire mobile marketers.

Direct Sourcing

Direct sourcing is a company strategy to bring agency and third-party recruiter hiring methods inside an organization, thus bypassing third-party involvement. These methods can produce high quality candidates because they often target individuals who have not actively responded to advertising. Direct sourcing might include the mining of internal resume databases, researching profiles on online social networks, developing search engine candidate lead generation marketing campaigns, or cold calling and emailing individuals identified through internal or external research. As with referral sourcing, companies searching for mobile marketing talent may be disadvantaged using direct sourcing since the process may not lead to an optimized and differentiated pool of qualified candidates from which to choose. In other words, the company may not actually find the best talent for the role with this process.

Internet Job Boards and Company Web Sites

The Internet has transformed corporate recruiting. It is cost effective, it is quick and it is widespread. Monster.com, for example, hosts millions of resumes and there are literally thousands of other online job sites, many of them specialized by industry or location, that offer resumes and job postings. Together, online job boards and company Web sites account for approximately one-third of all hires in the United States (Crispin & Mehler, 2009).

It is easy for an HR department of a smaller organization to become overwhelmed by the sheer volume of resumes received in response to online job postings. To make the process more efficient, companies often use recruiting software, also called applicant tracking systems, to manage the process. Online job boards represent the widest net you can cast and postings are available to anyone regardless of qualifications. For that reason, online job postings for more specialized positions such as mobile marketing can be expected to attract large numbers of unqualified applicants that must be sifted through. Still, online sourcing is an important tool in a

company's recruiting tool box. Companies are also beginning to explore the use of search engine marketing techniques and social media to supplement their job posting efforts.

Executive Search Firms

Employer-paid, third-party search firms, also known as recruiting or executive search firms, as we know them today came into being some thirty years ago as rapid economic growth and high employee turnover fueled the demand for talent. Some firms are more generalized, while others specialize in particular fields, like sales and marketing. Bernhart Associates Executive Search, LLC, for example, concentrates in recruiting and placing direct marketers. The majority of search firms are paid on a contingency basis; that is, the search firm receives a fee only if the employer hires and retains the referred candidate. Other search firms require up front engagement fees, while still others require a full retainer. Full retainers are typical only for searches for the most senior, executive-level positions.

To create a successful recruiting business model in a specific industry there must be an adequate supply and demand for the type of talent being sought. In the case of mobile marketing talent, both supply and demand are currently at levels that are insufficient to sustain a going full-time search and placement practice. As an example, out of more than one thousand resumes received by Bernhart Associates Executive Search, LLC this year, only a few candidates show at least one full year of mobile marketing experience. On the client side of the equation, the hiring of individuals with mobile marketing expertise is being constrained by the deepening recession. The most recent quarterly employment survey by Bernhart Associates Executive Search, LLC, conducted in partnership with the Direct Marketing Association, bears that out. It found that only one in five companies that engage in some form of direct marketing will be hiring during the first quarter of 2009 (Bernhart & Manzitti, 2009). A separate employment survey conducted by Bernhart Associates Executive Search, LLC in partnership with eM+C magazine that focused on ecommerce companies showed very similar results (Bernhart and eM+C, 2009). For many firms stellar mobile marketing talent is on the company wish list but not in the budget, at least not in the current economic environment. However, the tremendous power of the mobile channel as a marketing medium offers a potentially promising future for marketers who are comfortable with

this new technology, and in direct marketing, the adoption of new marketing technologies always translates into new career opportunities.

Mobile marketing is now being used by companies to sell products and services in virtually every industry, not to mention the growing role of agencies and service providers. Meanwhile, Mobilemarketer.com is publishing articles almost daily of one mobile marketing success story after another. If mobile marketing campaigns can succeed in the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, one can only imagine the possibilities when the economy is in full recovery, and when that happens, the war for talent will re-ignite.

When that happens, the market for executive search in mobile marketing will emerge long before a critical shortage of talent ever develops. Many mobile marketers who have used executive search firms in the past will turn to recruiters once again as soon as needs arise, and for many of the same reasons. Recruiters provide an undistorted and unbiased picture of the talent landscape, they offer confidentiality, they can speed up the hiring process, they play the role of buffer, negotiator and informed intermediary, they can minimize the ramp-up time for a new hire, and perhaps most importantly they can cast a wider net during the recruiting process to tap into the so called “passive” talent pool, i.e., those who are not actively looking but could be convinced to consider an opportunity that might advance their careers. External recruiters play an especially valuable role in industries that are new and where experienced candidates hardly exist. During the birth of the Internet era in the 1990s, dot-com startups turned to outside recruiters to help them perform vital functions of talent management, such as defining required skill sets and position objectives, and locating and qualifying candidates for brand new online marketing and ecommerce roles. Given the current limited supply of individuals with mobile marketing experience, from senior level down to tactical support, third-party search firms could become close partners with companies on the mobile marketing fast track, performing many of the same functions as they did for the pioneers of the World Wide Web.

Balancing these benefits are cost considerations, which will limit the use of third-party recruiters in mobile marketing to mostly mid- to senior-level positions that have a greater impact on an organization, compared with more junior-level roles. Until economic conditions begin to

improve, employers can be expected to rely mostly on Internet job boards and referrals to fill positions, turning to outside help only if those resources fail to produce qualified leads. As demand for mobile marketing talent grows, more search firms will enter the fray and offer up their services for contract and permanent employees. If shortages begin to develop, use of third-party search will become commonplace as it has in other economic sectors where demand for talent has outstripped supply.

When companies ask Bernhart Associates to help them find talented mobile marketers, the first individuals contacted are those who have direct marketing expertise.

DIRECT MARKETING AS A PROXY OF NEEDED SKILLS

Direct marketers have been at the forefront of a paradigm shift in marketing in which companies are reducing spend on mass market advertising and putting those dollars into interactive channels that are more personalized and more measurable. Direct marketers already know how to use technology to identify customer purchase patterns and create highly targeted and effective marketing campaigns through direct mail, email and now, mobile devices. They are at home with the technology that links corporate marketing with customer databases. The best direct marketers can communicate almost as well with IS as they can with PR.

The critical skills that define the best direct marketers are transferrable to mobile marketing. They can be summarized as:

- An understanding of consumer behavior analysis
- Respect for privacy
- Maintenance of a customer-centric focus
- Excellent communicators and motivators
- Know, respect and respond to data and trends with measurable results

Let us examine each of these in detail.

An Understanding of Consumer Behavior

Direct marketers have a deep understanding of consumer behavior. Direct marketers are highly adept with data, analytics and reporting. Intelligent decision making is based on information, not a hunch, and direct marketers know that data is a highly valued asset for any organization. They know how to collect and analyze data to create actionable campaigns that target specific customer groups based on profitability and shopping preferences. In mobile marketing the data gathering process takes on an even more personalized level compared with traditional forms of direct response. The type of cell phone you use, the kind of plan you have (data and/or voice), whether it is a prepaid or postpaid contract, and where you bought the phone all offer valuable clues into your purchasing behavior.

Direct marketers know that gathering data is only the beginning. Direct marketers know how to use that data to understand the unique segments within their customer base, allowing them to customize their messages to the consumer and make it relevant.

Through direct mail, direct marketers learn how to conduct post mortem analyses on their campaigns and test variable inputs to improve response rates and profitability. Direct marketers also understand reporting, and by reporting I am not referring to how many emails were delivered or whether a particular email message was opened. In the direct marketer's world, reporting is an important tool that provides management with valuable customer information because direct marketing is tied directly to the customer database, and the wealth of information it offers.

Respect for Privacy

Direct marketers understand the importance of privacy. How companies use personal information is a concern for mobile phone users. Direct marketers know how to strike a balance between safeguarding private information and executing promotions that sell.

Consumer-Centric

Direct marketers are customer-centric. They think like their customers think because they know that the behavior of their customers can be influenced by recognition, relationships and rewards. Through their expertise in database marketing, direct marketers know how to recognize and build relationships with tens of thousands or even millions of customers, individually. And when you think about it, mobile devices truly represent the ultimate in one-to-one marketing.

Excellence in Communication and Motivation

Direct marketers have the ability to engage and motivate others. Great direct marketers have an exceptional talent for communicating. They know how to build feelings of mutual support, they create enthusiasm, and they have the ability to persuade others logically. Direct marketers are also creative thinkers. A curious mind begins with the ability to ask good questions. Detectives would make good direct marketers because they know how to ask good questions. Similarly, direct marketers are always asking probing questions: What would happen if I changed the wording of my offer, or make the same offer to a different customer segment, or changed the timing of the offer? Direct marketers are always looking to test the message and the way it is phrased.

Respond to Data and Trends

Finally, direct marketers study data and know the trends. Direct marketers have done more than just put products out for sale, they have been the trendsetters. Think of all the products over the years that first came to us through direct response, from mail order clubs selling books and collectibles to the latest exercise fads. Who can forget the Clapper and the Ginsu Knife? Countless other iconic products were brought to you by direct marketers. Direct marketers have also been trained to look for new ways to engage their customers, and they often find trends through the predictive power of consumer purchase and behavioral analysis. All of these skills will prepare a mobile marketer for success.

PREPARING FOR FUTURE TALENT NEEDS

In 1966, the Direct Marketing Association established the Direct Marketing Educational Foundation. Its mission is to bring together teachers and students in the thriving business of direct marketing, and now, interactive marketing. The DMEF's programs are designed to equip college and university professors with the most up-to-date educational resources, prepare students for exciting careers in direct and interactive marketing, and place students into entry level positions. In the same way that the DMEF and DMA have successfully opened doors for gifted college students pursuing careers in direct and interactive marketing, the Mobile Marketing Association (MMA), arguably the leading force of mobile marketing in the industry worldwide, should engage in research at this early stage of mobile marketing's existence to develop similar professional education and certification programs, along with and in parallel to organizations like the DMA and the DMEF, to prepare mobile marketing's future leaders for success.

CONCLUSION

Mobile marketing is ripe with promise. Its growth prospects are enormous, and that means someday there will be a growing demand for mobile marketing talent. Because the industry is still in its infancy, talent management resources such as recruiting strategies, job descriptions and employee retention programs scarcely exist. Many companies operating in the mobile marketing industry do not even have an in-house human resources department. The information contained

in this article will help hiring authorities identify the critical skills they should be looking for in filling mobile marketing positions, what hiring sources to use to attract those candidates, and a call to action for trade organizations such as the Mobile Marketing Association to follow the lead of the DMEF and DMA to develop professional certification programs, and to reach out to U.S. colleges and universities to introduce students to exciting career opportunities in the mobile marketing industry.

Jerry Bernhart, President*
Bernhart Associates Executive Search, LLC
United States
jerry@bernhart.com

*Corresponding author

References:

Arnold, J., Lurie, I., Dickinson, M., Marsten, E., & Becker, M. (2009). *Web Marketing All-in-One for Dummies*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley Publishing, Inc.

Bernhart, J. (2009). February's eM+C/Bernhart Associates Employment Survey Shows Signs of a Bottom. eM+C. Retrieved March 19, 2009 from: <http://www.emarketingandcommerce.com/story/februarys-emc-bernhart-associates-employment-survey-shows-signs-bottom>.
Add AMA Reference

Bernhart, J., & Manzitti, E. (2009). *Direct Marketing Employment Overview Report*. Direct Marketing Association. New York.

Crispin, G. (2009). CareerXroads 8th Annual Source of Hire Study: What Happened in 2008 and What it Means for 2009. CareerXRoads. Retrieved February 1, 2009 from: <http://www.careerxroads.com/news/articles.asp>

Hein, K. (2008). *Mobile Marketing Fantasy Vs. Reality*. Brandweek. Retrieved April 2, 2009 from: http://www.brandweek.com/bw/news/spotlight/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1003784143

Steve Snyder (2008). *The Power of Mobile Marketing - The Ultimate in Customer Contact*. Experian Marketing Services. A customer sales presentation.

Nielsen Mobile. (2008). Mobile Media View Q4 2008. Nielsenmobile.com.

The Kelsey Group (2009). BIA's The Kelsey Group Forecasts U.S. Mobile Local Search Advertising Revenues to Reach \$1.3B in 2013. The Kelsey Group. Retrieved February 24, 2009 from: <http://www.kelseygroup.com/press/pr090224.asp>.