

## **ATS Implementations 101**

*By: Marcelo Mackinlay*

Having been part of over 35 Applicant Tracking System/e-Recruitment implementations throughout Canada and the US since 2000, I have had the opportunity to see some of the best and worst of project implementations. Clients and prospects often ask me – “What are the key success factors for a great implementation?” Based on my experiences, here are some key observations that will help you make the right decisions as you embark on implementing an ATS;

### **Executive Sponsorship**

This requires more than just a signature on the purchase order. Senior Management needs to be on board with this project – and filter the importance/significance of the success of your ATS implementation to the organization. This can be done through different media, depending on what tools your organization currently uses to disseminate information from top-down.

### **Objectives – clearly defined metrics**

What are your reasons for purchasing/implementing a new tool? One of the first steps to a successful implementation is to determine what you want/need to measure – and build processes through tools to enable these measurements. Here’s a good starting point;

Here are some of the most common;

- reduce recruitment cycle times
- reduce “cost per/hire”
- enhance the candidate/applicant experience
- have an enterprise-wide database of applicants

Here are some that are a little less popular, but as we’ve read recently, coming more to the forefront;

- quantifiable and consistent recruitment processes throughout the organization
- become more legally defensible re: applicant lawsuits (statistics show that this is happening more and more in Canada)
- increased Quality of Hire throughout the organization
- ability to report on any information in the recruiting process
- sourcing effectiveness as it relates to Quality of Hire

### **Experienced Project Management Resources**

I have seen many companies try to put a very junior resource or first time Project Manager as the lead for an ATS implementation. Neither of these options works very well. Whether your implementation is to one division or department, or to your global enterprise, this project will have significant visibility (senior management, legal, marketing, employee-base, public <applicants and/or customers>, communications, etc). You want resources involved in the project who have “been there – done that” as part of the risk mitigation process.

### **IT Involvement/Buy-In**

In today's ATS market, it's most typical to have organizations buy software through an Application Service Provider (ASP) model. This means that vendors provide applications (in this case your applicant tracking software) through an internet based solution, and the vendor is responsible for all the hardware and technical components of making the software run efficiently and effectively (which are all line items in the contract). Reading between the lines here, you will need less involvement from your IT department because you no longer need to rely on them for purchasing and maintaining the software and hardware typically required for this type of solution. Nonetheless, you need to have IT on your side – especially if your organization is integrating your ATS with your ERP software or other 3<sup>rd</sup> party vendors. You will need your friends in IT to help you evaluate each vendor from a technical infrastructure and security perspective. Play nice.

### **Understand Change Management Impact**

People are not afraid of change – that is a huge misnomer. The housing market statistics over the past 5 years help to prove this. Other than having a child, moving in to a new house is probably one of the biggest changes you can make in your life. Think of the day to day impact of that change – where you eat your meals is different, how you drive to work is different, people you spend all day with are different, the people living in your neighbourhood are different. People are okay with change if they understand why it is they are changing.

Software industry analysts estimate that approximately 70% of software implementations fail. Assuming the software works (hopefully you did the appropriate amount of due diligence so that this is the case), why do so many projects fail? Project resources get too caught up in “the system” and forget about the people part of the equation. Essentially, every employee in your company is affected by the implementation of an ATS; recruiters, coordinators, HR advisors/generalists, HR management, hiring managers and senior management throughout the organization, and the rest of the employee population – as they are possible candidates for posted positions. Oh yes, let's not forget the impact to your external applicants. Change Management is the “big bucket” that includes training and communications planning.

### **Consulting – System implementation or Consulting implementation**

This is where most companies see a significant difference in the vendors that are out in the market. The majority of vendors offer a “low-cost implementation”, which is a “system implementation”, as opposed to a select few vendors that offer a true “consulting implementation” to help guide you through your implementation. Let's define these;

**System Implementation:** essentially vendors that offer a system implementation will automate your existing processes, and provide you training on your new software. The resources they assign are typically technical resources that will configure your new software to your existing processes.

**Consulting Implementation:** the vendors that provide this type of an implementation typically have resources who are HR/Recruitment professionals – and in most cases, have held management positions in HR. Consulting implementations focus on; industry best practices, process re-engineering and change management.

As we move into a replacement ATS market, a lot of companies have already gone through a process re-engineering effort for recruiting. For these situations, going the System Implementation route is acceptable. But if this is your organizations first ATS, or if you did not have a successful first ATS implementation – I highly recommend engaging in a Consulting Implementation.

I have seen a lot of companies make their ATS/vendor decision based on the cost associated with the implementation. This is not the place to skimp on your budget. If the ATS vendor you choose does not have the appropriate consulting resources to help you re-engineer your process or to consider the change management impacts to your organization, there are consulting companies in the market with the expertise to help you.

To wrap up, most companies do not heed all of the above recommendations when planning and executing their ATS implementation;

- In an effort to fly under the radar, they don't seek executive leadership/support,
- HR may have limited experience working with their IT department
- In an effort to keep the overall price tag down, key success factors such as change management and process re-engineering are left out – resulting in automation of existing recruitment processes.

Michael Hammer, who wrote Re-Engineering the Organization, in the 1990's, came up with this formula;

$$OP + NT = EOP$$

Old Processes + New Technology = Expensive Old Processes

Every company that I have worked with who took this formula to heart has had a successful ATS implementation.

**BIO:**

*Marcelo Mackinlay has over 13 years of experience in the recruiting industry, most notably as the Director of Professional Services for Taleo (formerly Recruitsoft) from 2000 – 2005, where he consulted to Fortune 500 companies throughout North America to develop and enhance their Talent Acquisition strategies. Currently Marcelo is the Managing Director of Mavix Consulting – a Talent Acquisition Consultancy that partners with organizations to identify and implement Talent Acquisition Strategies. With a focus on metrics and analytics, projects include; strategic planning, process review and optimization, and technology vendor evaluation, selection, implementation and optimization. Marcelo has recently completed an Applicant Tracking System needs assessment and vendor evaluation project for one of Canada's largest telecommunications firms, and is currently working with a call centre organization on a staffing transformation project (process, metrics, assessment technology, recruitment infrastructure).  
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