

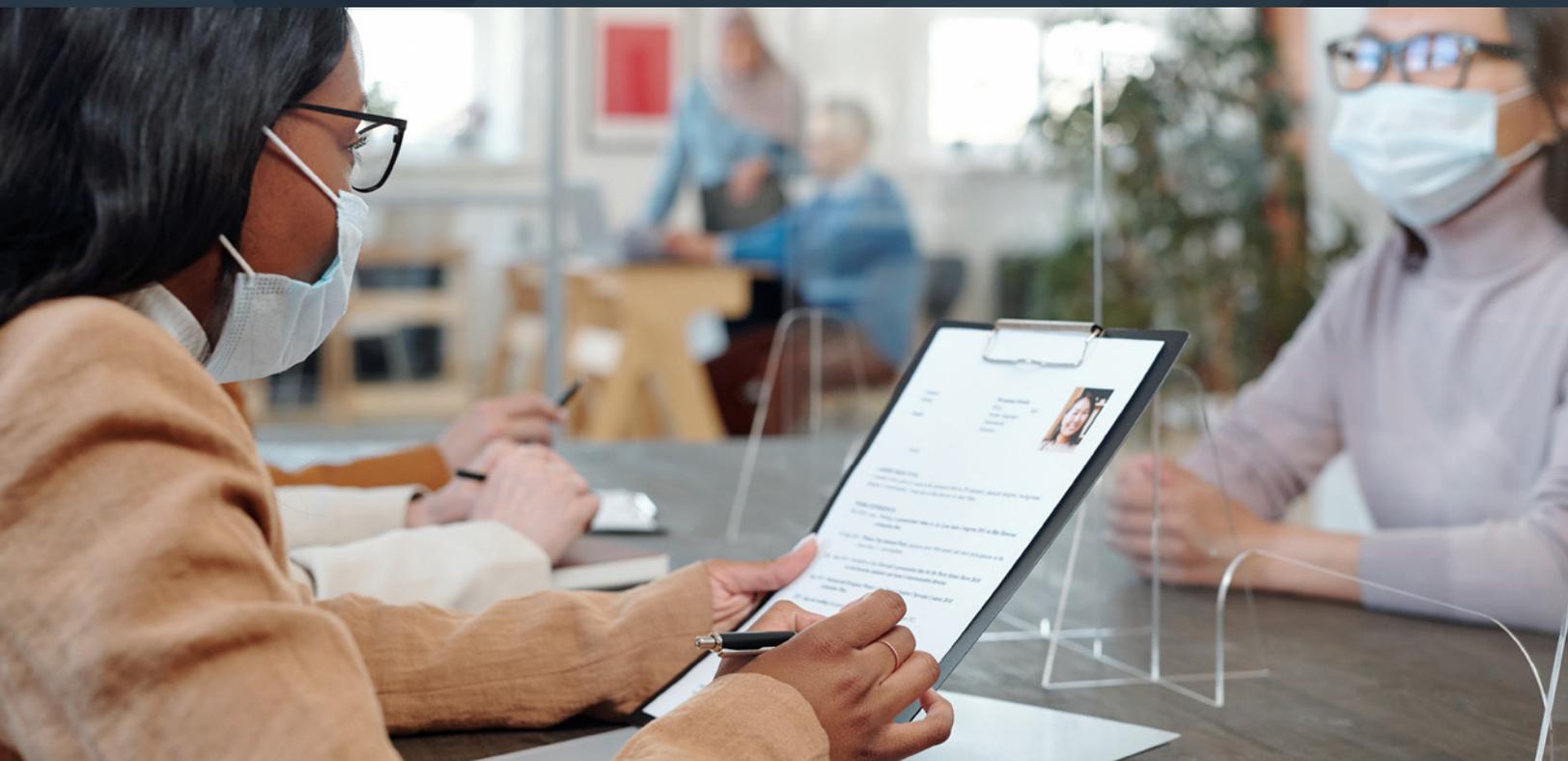


CEPro Commercial **Security Sales**
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7 Vital Tips for Hiring During the 'Great Resignation'

HIRE SPARKS
AV RECRUITING



7 Vital Tips for Hiring During the ‘Great Resignation’

Vaccine policies, remote work, and tighter hiring timeframes are among the key ways manufacturers and integrators can gain an advantage in the market.

Sufficed to say, there has never been a time like the present in the U.S. job market. Millions of jobs are going unfilled from desperate employers as many workers wean themselves off long-term unemployment benefits or reevaluate their priorities looking for new or dramatically different career opportunities. Meanwhile, the beat goes on for integrators and manufacturers in the commercial AV/networking, security and residential custom installation markets with growing backlogs of projects due to high demand.

So what can you do? Michael Sparks, owner of HireSparks, a nationwide recruiting service dedicated specifically to the integration industry, says there are 7 clear steps dealers and manufacturers can take to ease the hiring process dramatically.

HireSparks was launched 6 years ago and has never looked back.

“We’ve established ourselves as the leading brand in the industry for recruiting on the manufacturing and integrator sides,” says Sparks. “We’ve got great relationships, long-

time relationships with some of the best logos in the business from small 20-person integrators on up to the very largest and manufacturers. It also gives us an advantage in knowing what's going on the manufacturing side as well as what's going on the dealer integrator side, and how they relate putting these products into the marketplace."

Like everyone, the recruitment agency hit a bump in the road in early 2020 when the entire world's economy was shut down due to the coronavirus outbreak, but since that initial lockdown, the need for hiring employees has been at a feverish level.

"We've done more in transactions this year than we did in our busiest previous year, which was 2019. It's looking very good for the industry," he notes. "One of the things I've learned in the past six years of this industry is that the current state is always in flux. There are constantly ropes being pulled in different directions. March through August of this year was really the biggest boon I had ever seen in hiring. But starting in September, there was a bit of a breather."

The majority of the HireSparks' clientele is in the commercial AV space, but in 2021 the company found itself serving more manufacturers and integrators in both the security and custom residential installation fields. That means the market is extremely competitive for any firm that wants to find the best possible employees.

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HireSparks is a direct-hire recruiting agency that utilizes best practices, conventional terms with no retainer. Its clients typically have their own recruiting efforts, whether it's a small business owner or manager shaking the trees to find referrals, or a larger company with an internal human resources manager, or even a team of recruiters with a talent acquisition manager. HireSparks acts as an extension of its clients by putting the employers in front of additional tiers of potential candidates. Sparks says typically he will double or triple the size of potential talent pool for the hiring company using its internal database of more than 75,000 individual profiles of business professionals in the field.

From there, HireSparks will work with the hiring managers with the management team to schedule the interviews, do the follow-ups, get the debriefs after the interviews, check the references, and complement the existing hiring processes

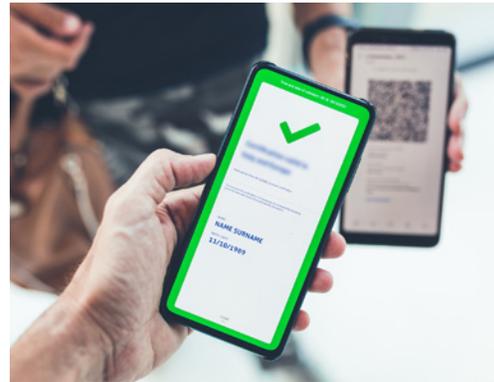
So what can a dealer or manufacturer do? Sparks offers these seven vital tips that can help prospective employers set themselves apart right now.

1. Clearly State Your Vaccination Policy

It is a sad and unfortunate sign of the times, but manufacturers and integrators need to clearly state their COVID-19 vaccination policy for all open positions. Sparks says many employers are now putting vaccine requirements specifically in the job descriptions.

Sparks says for many companies, the employer/employee bond was strengthened during COVID-19 if the employee was not let or furloughed. That bond has built tremendous loyalty and less transience for many employees.

“The loyalty factor is not to be underestimated,” he says. “We think that has resulted in a lot fewer people responding to recruiting calls, not fishing around the job market, testing the waters, and not taking interviews. The AV world is a small world.”



Ultimately the hiring market is going to be divided into two camps: those requiring vaccinations and those that are not.

“I think there’s going to definitely be some pushback as a result of vaccine requirements,” he predicts. And that pushback, along with the end of the enhanced unemployment benefits from the government, will force more people to suddenly be seeking employment.

He believes that a “tipping point” is coming to the market soon and will mean there is even more potential mobility coming within the talent pool.

Ultimately, the market is going to be divided into two camps among both employees and employers: those that require vaccines seeking vaccinated employees, and companies that are not requiring vaccinations satisfied with unvaccinated employees. If there is mass firings due to vaccination requirements among companies with more than 100 employees, he speculates it will ultimately end up in the courts. For now, many companies are requiring vaccine passports or weekly testing instead of requiring vaccines.

“We’ve got different states having different philosophies or politics about lockdowns, and extreme vaccine requirements in New York City, San Francisco and Los Angeles, you’ve got pretty extreme requirements. These requirements affect integrators being able to get their people to the clients. We’re seeing vaccine requirements in job descriptions for the first time in the last couple of weeks,” he notes.

2. Consider More Remote Work Situations

COVID-19 has opened the door for employees to work from home more often. Of course, that is not possible for in-the-field positions but it is possible for some jobs like design engineers, customer service personnel, and programmers.

“Geographic restriction is by far the biggest restriction in recruiting,” says Sparks. “I’ve been evangelizing remote employees from the beginning. In certain roles, it’s possible. In certain roles, it’s not. If you can take geographic restriction out of the job description, you’re going to get the cream of the crop. You’re going to get the perfect candidate. We are seeing some expansion of remote roles vs what we’ve seen in the past.”

Remote employment opens up an immense talent pool. HireSparks is seeing more remote workers who still fly out to visit particular jobsites or come into the office on particular days or weeks for meetings, but even a lot of that has shifted to Zoom calls.

Sparks says among the most common areas that employees are looking to migrate to are North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida and Colorado, while they are looking to flee from the Washington, D.C metro area, New York, and New Jersey.

3. Reduce Travel Requirements for Sales Roles

Our industry’s sales positions historically have required employees to be road warriors, with constant travel. But again, the coronavirus has shifted that as people become hesitant to travel so much and increase their exposure to the virus.

“Major companies that we work with are saying, ‘It used to be 70% personal travel to client sites maybe now it’s 50% less,’ which is great because obviously then it appeals to a larger candidate pool,” says Sparks.

As for clients, they are respecting the decision to have more remote employees so there has been little to no pushback.

4. Act Quickly

In this hiring environment, employers cannot act slowly.

“Number one greatest mistake is taking their sweet time... I don’t know how to put it in nicer terms,” comments Sparks. “Everyone wants to be judicial and make good decisions, and do your due diligence. I’m all for that. When you’ve got multiple companies vying for the same talent or the same potential hires, the fleet are strongly favored to get the prize.”

The pre-2020 approach to recruiting was to go slowly, but in this environment, that likely means you are going to lose the best candidate to another company that can move more quickly. That does not mean you should sacrifice quality or take shortcuts, but employers should compress their hiring steps.

That means instead of saying on a Monday, ‘We’ll look at scheduling you in for a first-round interview next week,’ companies need to get the candidates on the phone tomorrow or risk losing them.



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Sparks says that also means possibly eliminating the “panel interview” in which multiple people from the company are jointly interviewing the candidate at the same time because the time it takes to coordinate multiple schedules is wasted time. If you want to beat your competition, you have to beat them at the game of hiring the best talent. If employers really want to get the best employees, they must be willing to do those interviews during non-business hours if necessary.

5. Boost Salaries

Of course, salary levels are always important, but in an environment where there are few available employees, manufacturers and integration companies need to be prepared to pay more.

“It’s not rocket science. When everybody wants something bad enough, the price goes up. It’s really simple. It’s Economics 101... supply and demand. Salaries are not what they

were in 2019. We call them market rates. Market salaries are not what they were in 2019. They've gone up substantially," explains Sparks.

Lead technicians are the biggest bottleneck for hiring across the country right now, according to Sparks. He says in 2019 the market rate for lead technicians was \$65,000 to \$75,00 with benefits. Today it is between \$85,000 and \$100,000, or \$48 per hour. Sparks says salaries for lead technicians have risen by 50% in some markets this year alone.

Yet, despite the inflationary element to salaries, HireSparks is still seeing some employers unwilling to boost their wages "and they're not interviewing anyone," he quips.

6. Enhance Benefits

Employee benefits is another area where employers can look to improve to make their company more attractive. In particular, increasing the percentage of the health insurance premium paid by the company is beneficial. Sparks says employers today are offering to pay 100% of an individual employee's health insurance premium costs and 50% of their family's costs. Enhanced vision, vacation, 401K matching are also on the table from more robust firms.

"Companies adapting to pay 100% of an individual's health insurance is probably one of the most impressive things I've seen evolve this year. Those are the companies that are getting the new hires," says Sparks.

7. Improve Company Culture

The security and AV worlds are relatively small... everyone knows what the culture is like at a particular company. A company with a reputation for having a great company culture is going to have a leg up in the market because candidates will want to work for that firm.

Companies that have strong ethics, pay their staff on time, train and educate their teams, and make the work environment fun will attract more employees. Employee retention is one of the most important metrics a company can have for its business right now, according to Sparks.

"Employee retention is a clear sign of a healthy company culture. Employees look for companies where the current employees stick with the company for four, five or six years at minimum," he says. ▲

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