

EMPLOYER BRAND STUDY



Employer Brand Study

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BACKGROUND

This study is part of Hinge's ongoing commitment to conduct and publish the most advanced research on the latest challenges facing professional services firms today.

We recognized the importance of recruiting and retaining top talent, and decided to focus this study on an emerging trend in the professional services marketplace: employer branding.

This study aims to answer questions like:

- What challenges are professional services firms faced with today?
- What is employer branding?
- What is marketing's role in employer branding?
- Where do candidates search for opportunities?
- Are there generational differences among employee-candidates?
- What do candidates consider when evaluating opportunities?
- What do candidates care most about?
- How do firms evaluate candidates?



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following five organizations. Without their support, this study would not have been possible.



METHODOLOGY

801 professionals responded to our extensive survey instrument. Based on their role in the recruiting process, participants were asked questions from one of two perspectives:

Talent-Evaluators

Professionals involved in their firm’s recruiting and hiring process. This group responded to questions about how they search for and evaluate potential employees.

Employee-Candidates

Professionals rarely involved in the recruiting process. This group responded to questions about how they search for and evaluate potential career opportunities in professional services.

THE SAMPLE

Fig A. Sample Composition by Respondent Role in the Recruiting Process

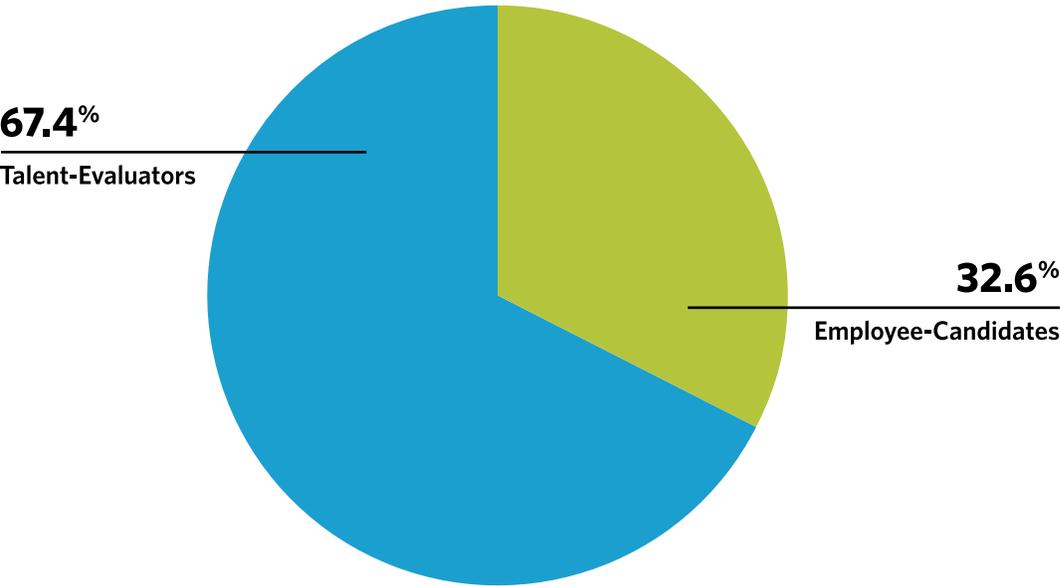
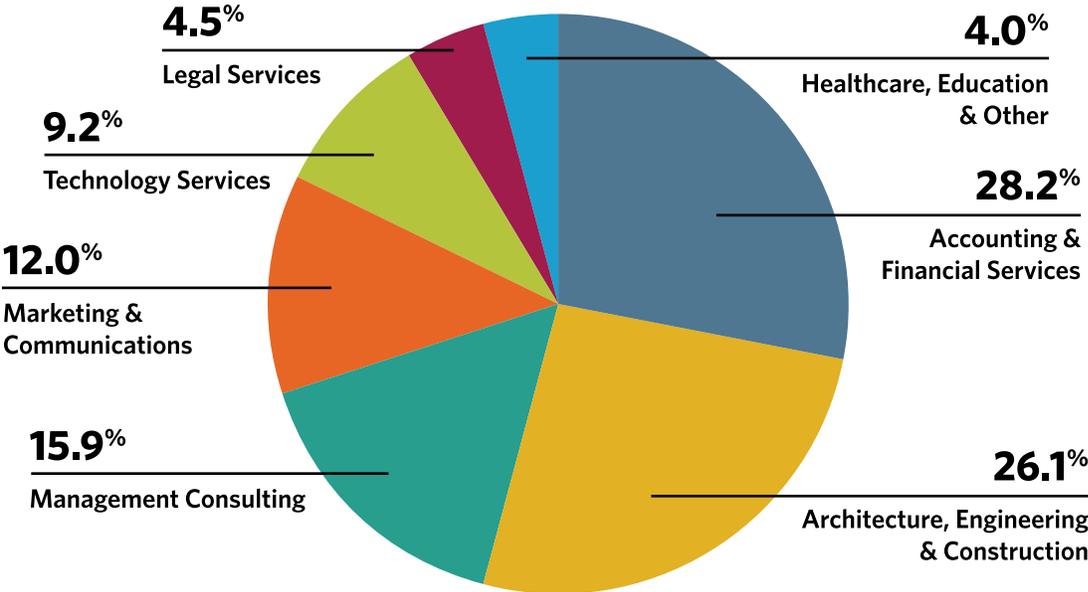


Fig B. Sample Composition by Industries Represented



Where applicable, this report will show the breakdown between generational cohorts — the demographic representation of individuals sharing birth years, history and a collective “persona” as a result of their defining experiences. Below are brief descriptions of each cohort represented in this sample:

Baby Boomers

Born between 1941 and 1961, this cohort follows the Silent Generation and precedes Gen-X.

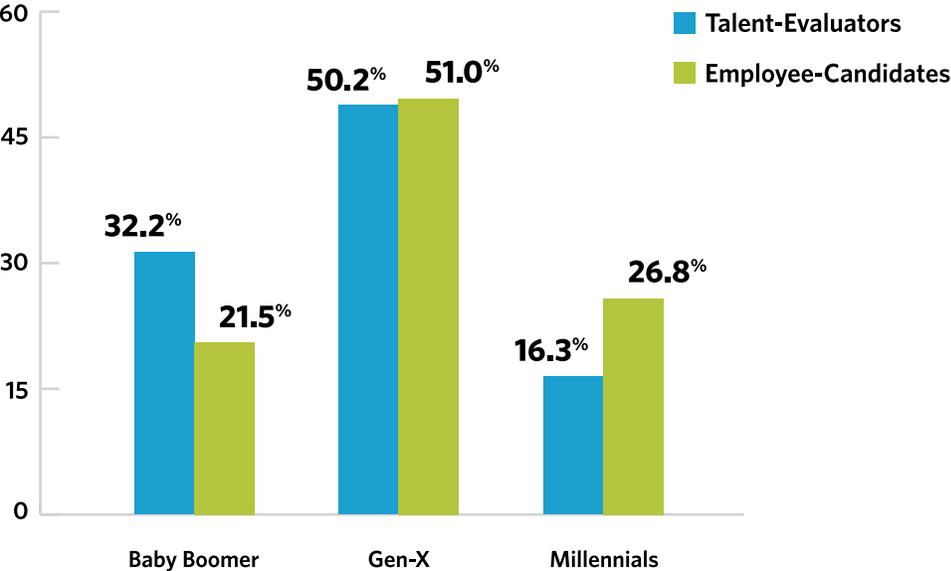
Generation-X (Gen-X)

Born between 1961 and 1981, this cohort follows the Baby Boomers and precedes Millennials.

Generation-Y (Millennials)

Born between 1981 and 2001, this cohort follows Gen-X.

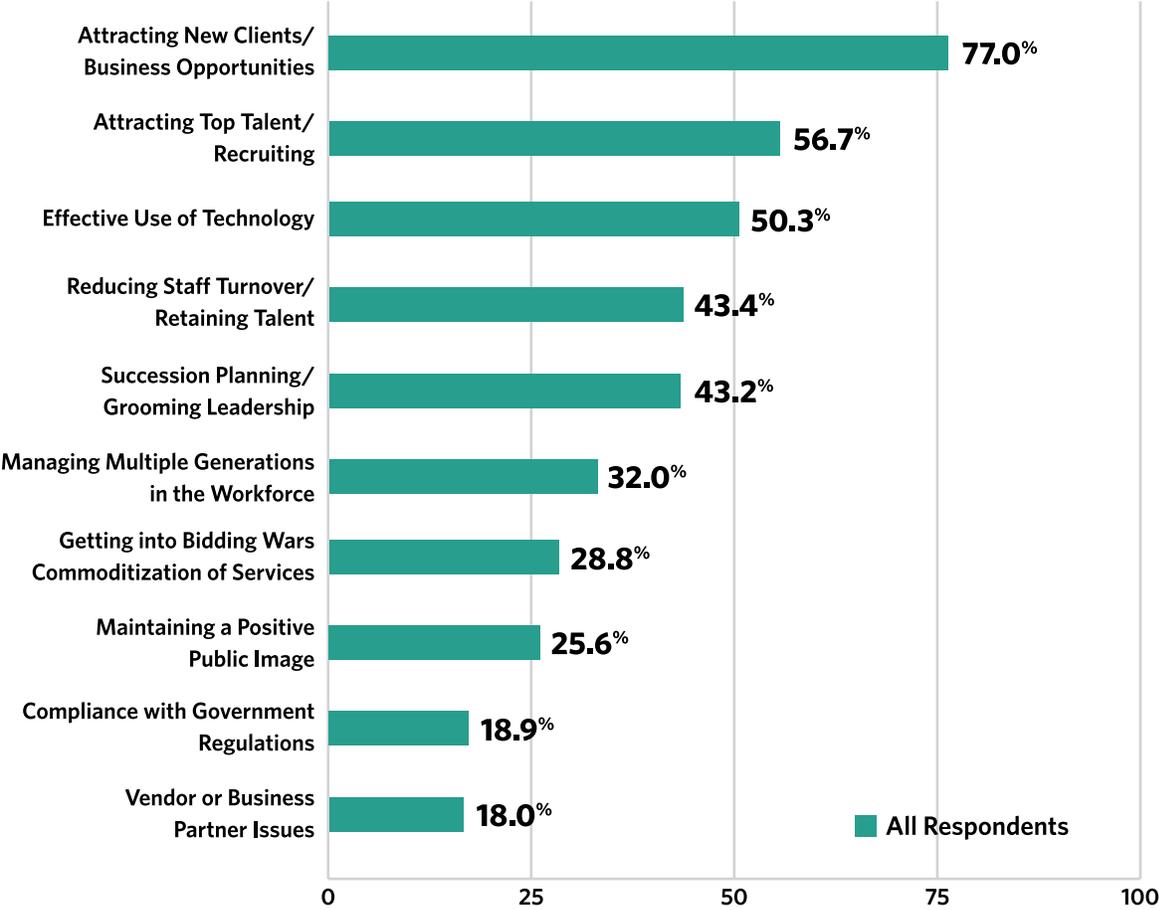
Fig C. Sample Composition by Generational Cohort



What challenges are professional services firms faced with today?

We asked all respondents in the sample to identify the hot-button issues or emerging trends within their industry. This allows us to put the employer branding issue in a larger business context. Figure 1 shows the top 10 business challenges facing these professional services firms.

Fig 1. Top 10 Business Challenges Facing Professional Services Firms



Three of the top five business challenges facing professional services firms had to do with recruiting and talent retention:

- Attracting top talent/recruiting
- Reducing staff turnover/retaining talent
- Succession planning/grooming leadership

In addition, two more of the top 10 business challenges are also related to employer branding:

- Managing multiple generations in the workforce
- Maintaining a positive public image

**3 of the
top 5**
business
challenges
were related to
recruiting and
talent retention.

What is employer branding?

Your **employer brand** is simply your reputation as a place to work. It can have general elements (for example, “a great place to work”) and very specific attributes (for example, “they have a very high-pressure culture” or “they have the most family-friendly benefits in the state”).

An employer brand provides a window into a firm’s culture and shows candidates what it would be like to be part of it. Just like a client-facing brand, an employer brand must differentiate your firm from the competition.

On a more technical level, an employer brand consists of two elements, your firm’s reputation as an employer and its visibility to potential employees. The first element, the quality of your reputation as an employer, is a measure of how attractive your firm is to candidates. The visibility factor, is a measure of how widely known that reputation is within your target group of potential employees. An unknown firm will struggle to find quality candidates despite its sterling reputation with a very limited group of candidates. Consequently, you can strengthen your brand by enhancing your reputation or increasing the visibility of your firm.

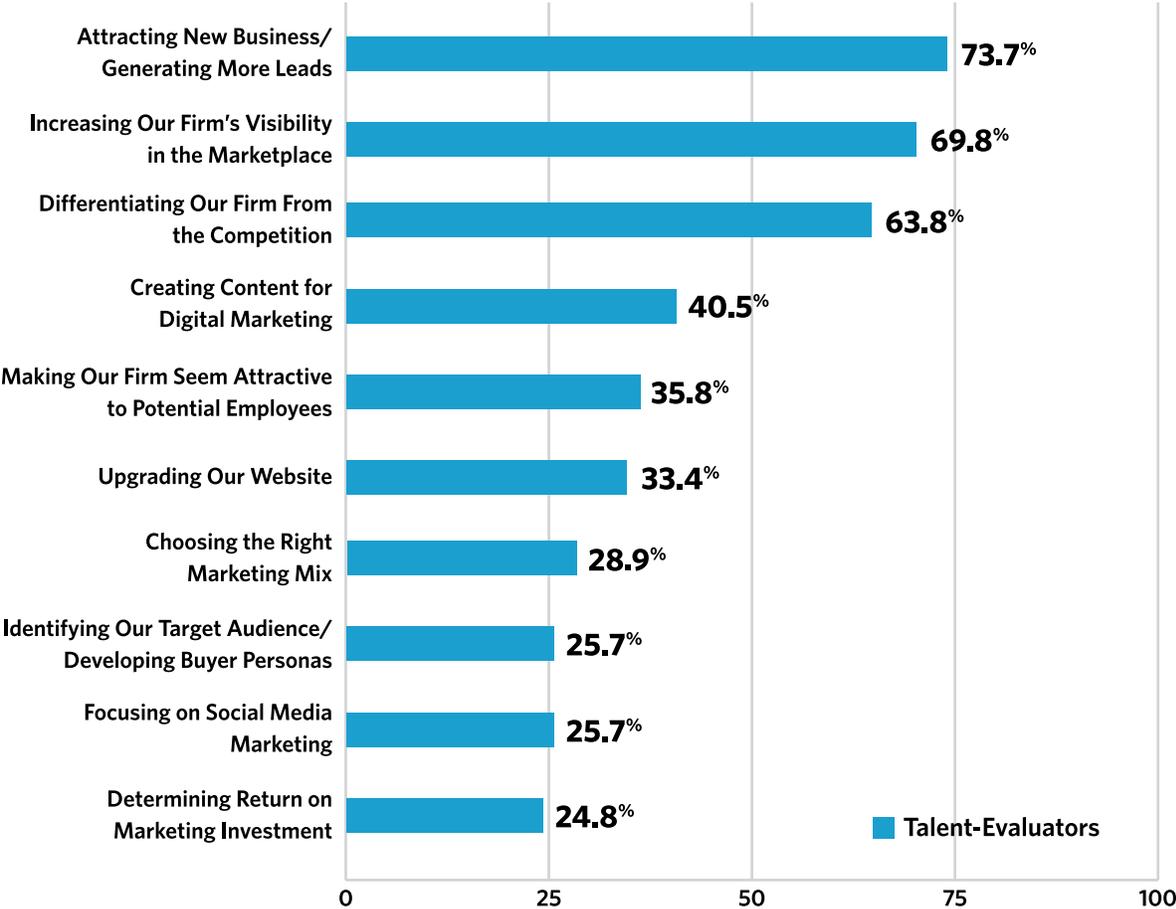
Firms that focus on strengthening their employer brand are able to position themselves not only to attract talented professionals, but also to attract a very important audience: the future leaders of their firm.



What is marketing's role in employer branding?

To determine this, we asked talent-evaluators to identify their firm's marketing challenges or priorities for 2017. The top 10 challenges facing professional services firms are shown in Figure 2.

Fig 2. Top 10 Marketing Priorities Identified by Talent-Evaluators



The marketing function of a business can address many challenges. But talent-evaluators do not appear to prioritize employer branding as high as other marketing priorities.

While recruiting, retention and succession planning were top business challenges, making their firms seem attractive to potential employees was viewed as a *marketing* priority by only one-third (36%) of talent-evaluators.

However, increasing marketplace visibility and differentiation were viewed by a majority of talent-evaluators as marketing initiatives. These marketing priorities can be useful not only in growing a firm's business, but also to support its recruiting and retention efforts. This digital marketing infrastructure can be used to target potential clients as well as potential employees.

Making their firms seem attractive to potential employees was viewed as a marketing priority by **only one-third (36%)** of talent-evaluators.

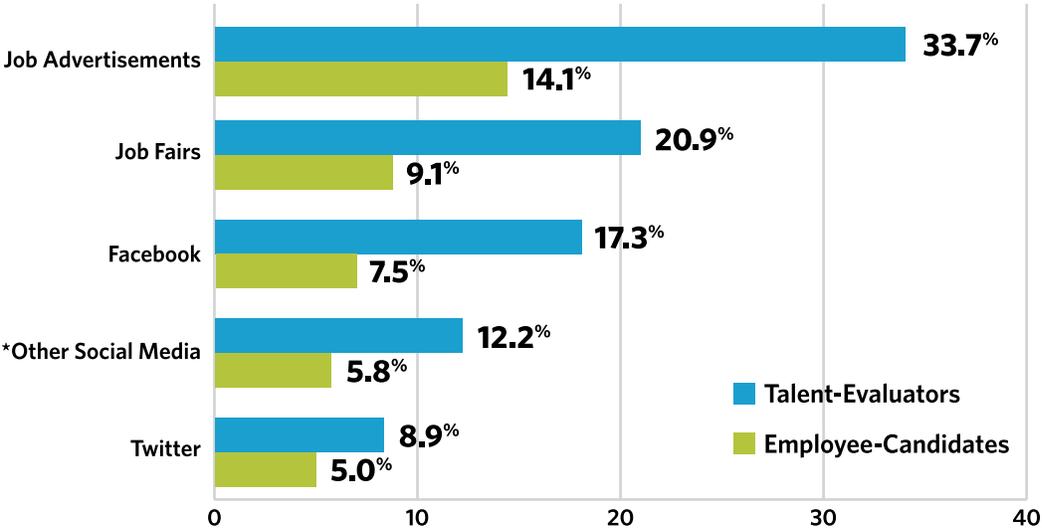


Where do candidates search for opportunities?

We asked employee-candidates where they would go to search for career opportunities in professional services. We also asked talent-evaluators where they would search for talented professionals if their firm were hiring.

We looked at the data to determine which channels the talent-evaluators and employee-candidates were more focused on. Figure 3 shows the channels that talent-evaluators were more inclined to use than the candidates themselves.

Fig 3. Over-Utilized Channels by Firms



*Social media outside of LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter. Includes Pinterest, Google+, Instagram, etc.

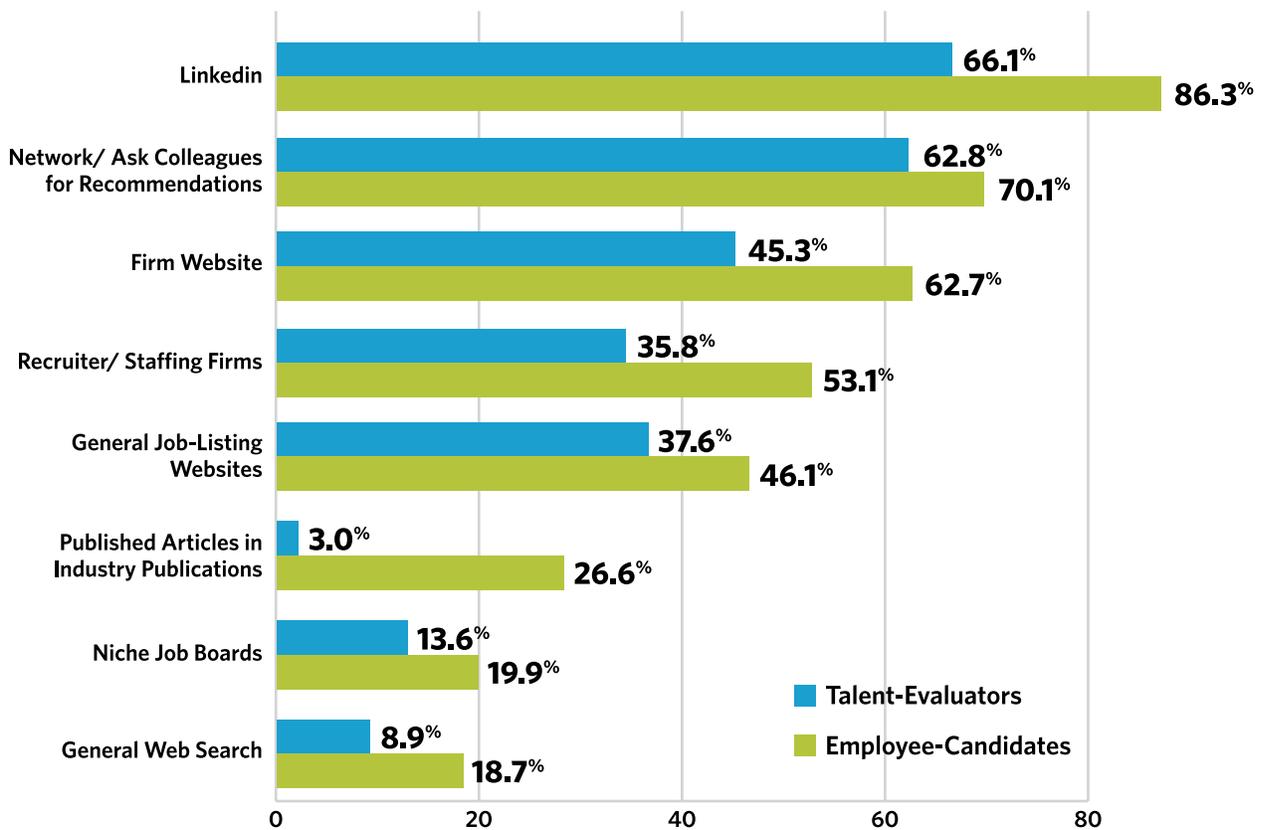
One-third (33.7%) of talent-evaluators indicated that apart from searching, they would advertise a job opening. Meanwhile only 14% of employee-candidates would seek out job advertisements.

Outside of LinkedIn, very few employee-candidates would use social media to search for career opportunities.

So where are employee-candidates searching for careers?

Figure 4 shows the channels that employee-candidates were more likely to use in their search for career opportunities than talent-evaluators. These represent under-utilized resources the firm could emphasize more.

Fig 4. Under-Utilized Channels by Firms



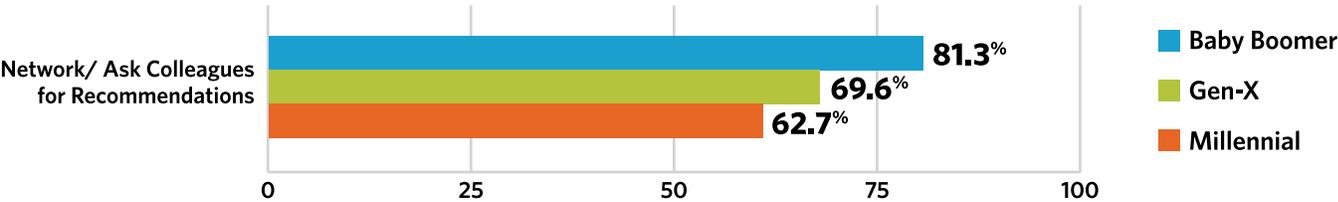
Employee-candidates indicated using four resources on average when searching for career opportunities. While LinkedIn and networking with colleagues were the top resources employee-candidates would turn to, nearly two-thirds (63%) would visit a firm's website directly. Meanwhile, less than half (45%) of talent-evaluators indicated having a section of their website dedicated to recruiting.

While most professional services firms have a careers page on their website, it may not be getting the attention it deserves. If a career section of a firm's website isn't consistent with its employer brand, it could fail to attract the right type of candidate. Or worse — it could be turning talented professionals away.

Are there generational differences among employee-candidates?

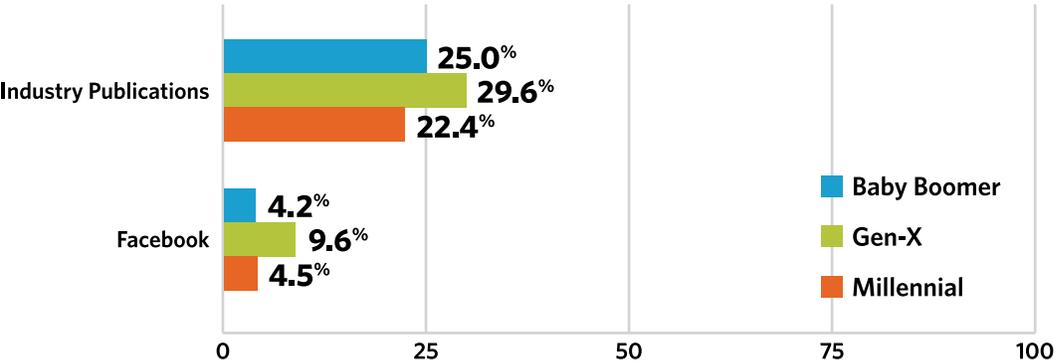
We noticed slight nuances between employee-candidates of different generations in how they search for career opportunities. Figures 5, 6 and 7 show the meaningful differences between Baby Boomers, Gen-X and Millennials, respectively.

Fig 5. Channels Favored by Baby Boomers



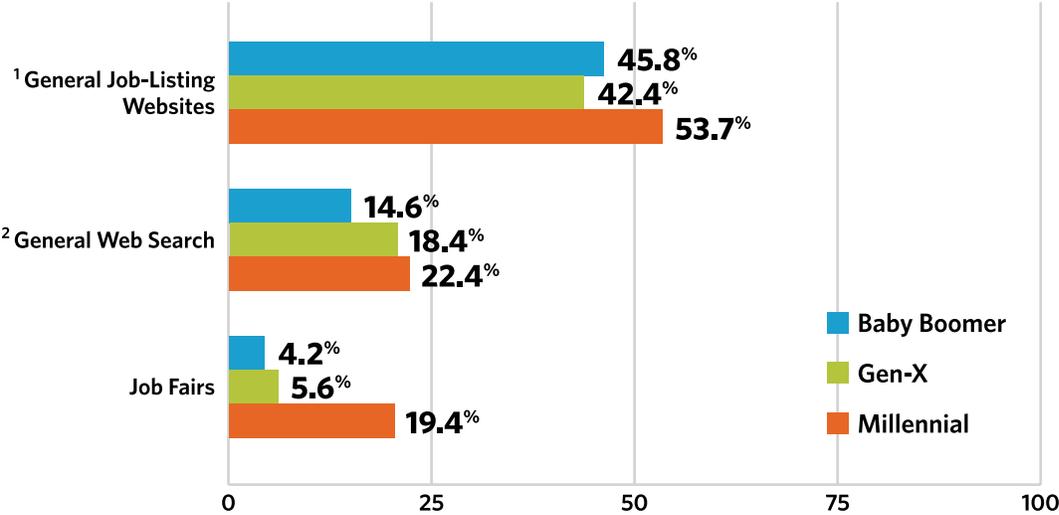
Baby Boomer candidates were more likely to turn to their network of peers and colleagues.

Fig 6. Channels Favored by Gen-X



Gen-X candidates favored articles published in industry magazines and Facebook as a way to find possible employers.

Fig 7. Channels Favored by Millennials



¹Including Monster, CareerBuilder, Indeed, etc.

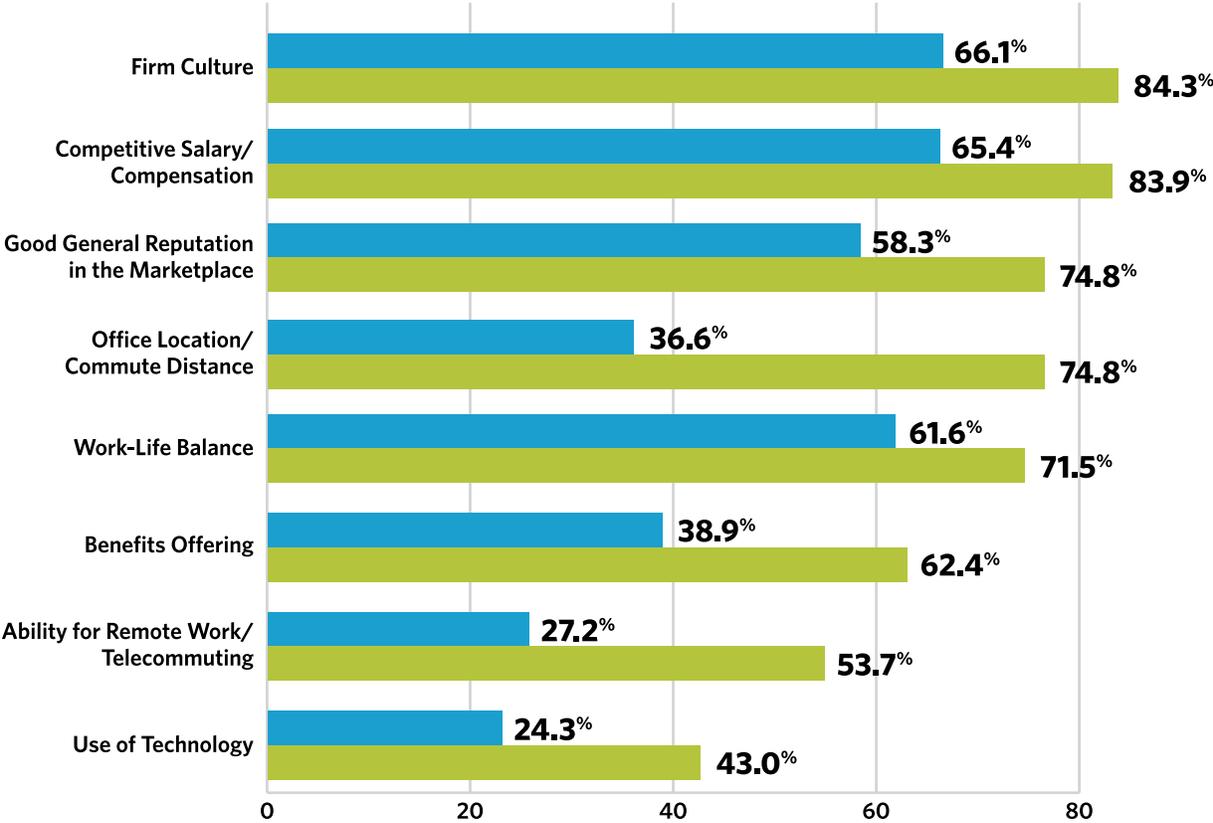
²Including Google, Bing, Yahoo, etc.

Millennial candidates favored other digital approaches. They were more likely to use job-listing websites, general web searches and job fairs.

What do candidates consider when evaluating opportunities?

We asked employee-candidates what criteria they would use to evaluate a career opportunity in professional services. We also asked talent-evaluators what criteria they believe prospective employees would use to evaluate their firm. These perspectives are shown in Figure 8.

Fig 8. Top Criteria Candidates Consider When Evaluating Opportunities



A comparison of each group’s responses reveals that talent-evaluators underestimated the criteria many employee-candidates use to evaluate career opportunities. Firm culture and a competitive salary were the most common criteria. The criteria with the widest gap between candidates and talent-evaluators included:

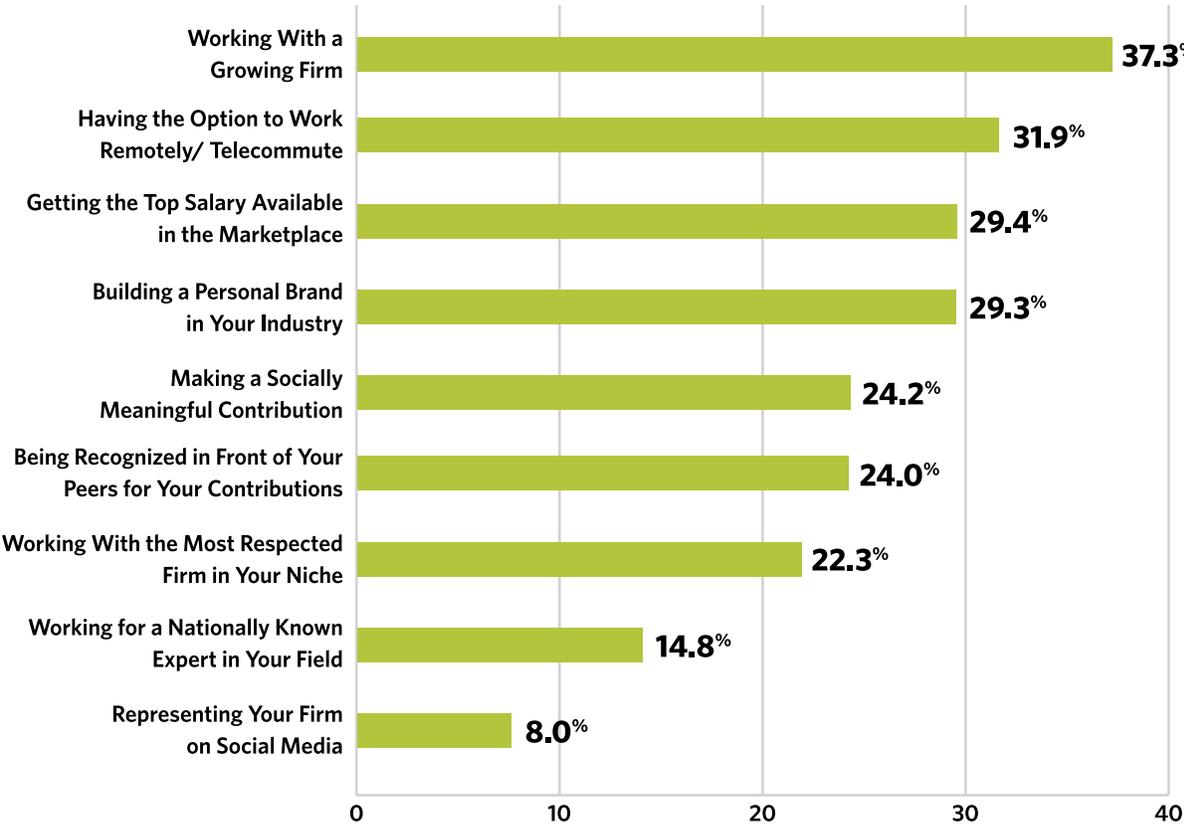
- Office location/commute distance
- Ability for remote work/telecommuting
- Benefits

■ What talent-evaluators believe employees consider
■ What employee-candidates really consider

What do candidates care most about?

We presented candidates with several scenarios relevant to evaluating career opportunities. We then asked candidates to rate each scenario on a scale from 0-10 on how important each scenario is to them when evaluating a firm they'd like to work for. Fig 9 depicts respondents with a strong endorsement (a rating of 9 or 10) for each scenario.

Fig 9. What's Most Important to Employee-Candidates

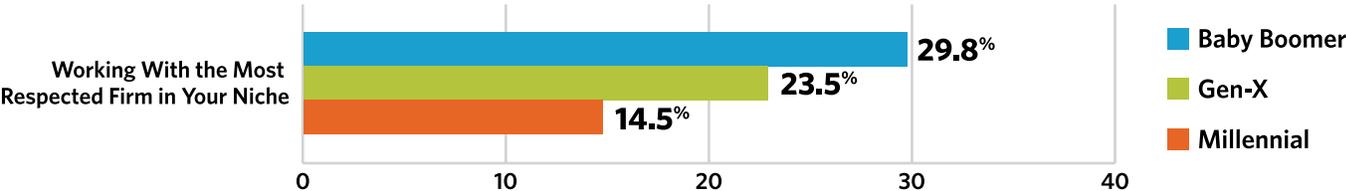


Working with a growing firm and the ability to work remotely were more important to candidates than getting the top salary in the marketplace, while building a personal brand was just as important.

Are there generational differences in what's most important to employee-candidates?

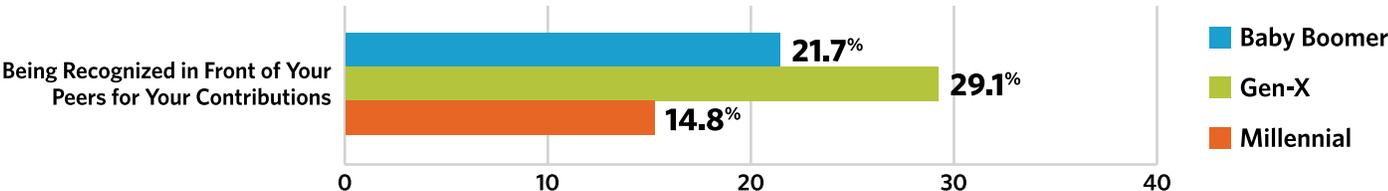
Of the scenarios listed in Figure 9, each generational cohort had one scenario stand out from the others. These biggest differences are shown in Figures 10, 11 and 12.

Fig 10. What Baby Boomer's Care Most About



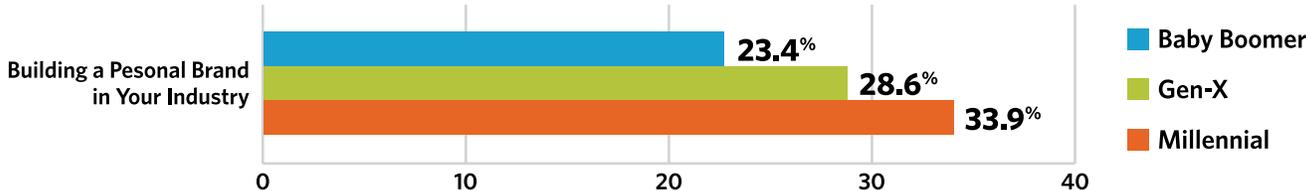
Baby Boomers were more likely to prioritize working with the most respected firm in their niche.

Fig 11. What Gen-X Cares Most About



Gen-X employee-candidates placed a higher importance on being recognized in front of peers for their contributions.

Fig 12. What Millennials Care Most About

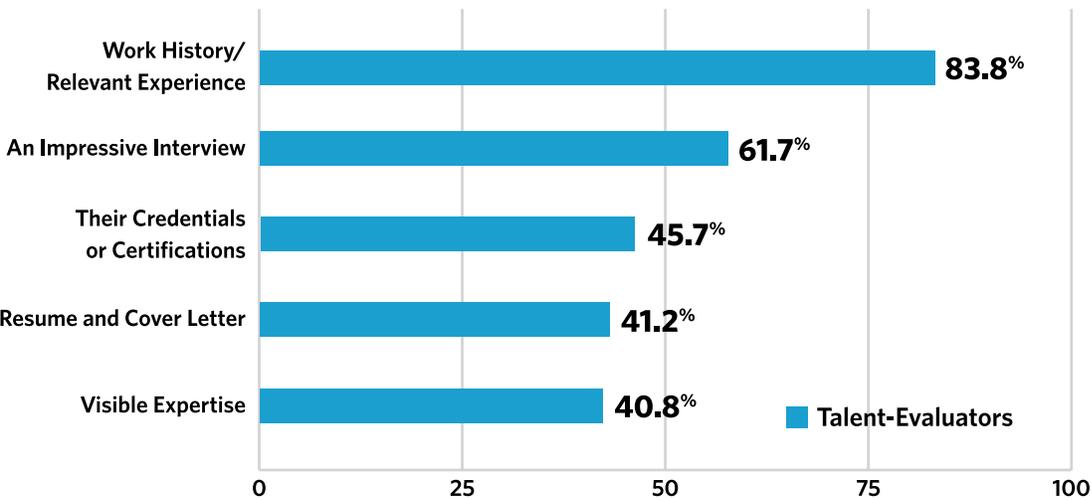


Millennials were more likely to focus on building a personal brand in their industry.

How do firms evaluate candidates?

We asked talent-evaluators to identify the criteria they use to evaluate potential employees. Figure 13 shows the top criteria used.

Fig 13. Top 5 Criteria Firms Use to Evaluate Talent



Talent-evaluators used four criteria on average to assess potential employees. The majority evaluated candidates by their work history and relevant experience and how well they came across in an interview.

Credentials or certifications and a resume and cover letter were significantly less important to talent-evaluators.

41% of firms evaluate candidates based on visible examples of subject matter expertise — like speaking engagements, social media presence, networking ability and published articles and books.

SUMMARY

To put the findings from this study into action, firms need to follow an employer branding process, which is similar to a traditional firm branding process and can be undertaken in tandem with one. These concepts are outlined in detail in [this article](#).

THE EMPLOYER BRANDING PROCESS

- 1. Consider your firm's overall growth strategy.** This will determine your need for talent and how high a priority having the right talent is.
- 2. Research your prospects and competitors.** Your specific situation will be different from others. Understanding your strengths and uncovering hidden weaknesses will allow you to develop a more effective recruiting strategy.
- 3. Develop your employer brand strategy.** A brand strategy includes your differentiators, positioning statement and employer brand promotional plan. These three elements capture your overall strategy and allow you to build the tools you will need to put it into action.
- 4. Build the tools to communicate the brand.** Based on our research, this includes your website and your website social media presence. Don't forget search engine optimization of your website.
- 5. Launch the new brand.** For this, you will use your brand promotional plan. The research you did on your competitors and prospects (see #2) will tell you which channels are likely to be most productive for your firm.
- 6. Optimize for visibility and impact.** Track the implementation and the impact of your efforts. Use this information to make adjustments as you gain experience and market conditions evolve.

A strong employer brand can be an asset to recruiting and retention efforts, positioning employers to attract talented professionals that best fit their firm culture. It bridges the gap between what employee-candidates really care about and what makes your firm truly different.

ABOUT HINGE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The [Hinge Research Institute](#) is a division of Hinge dedicated to studying high-growth professional services firms and their clients. We collect data and analyze marketplace trends to discover why some firms grow much faster than average while spending less on marketing. Our mission is to share this knowledge so that every professional services firm can prosper.

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