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FIRM MANAGEMENT

6 Tips for Recruiting Today's Top Accounting Students

What does your firm do to stand out as a great place for new accounting grads to land? Is your online presence fresh and engaging? Do you show entry-level employees the money? Do you give them room to grow as they progress in their careers?

Paul McDonald • Mar. 01, 2018

Hiring recent graduates has long been a vital part of accounting firms' recruitment strategies. But it's also one that's consistently challenging. Talented college students frequently find they have their pick of employers when they enter the job market. The onus, then, falls on employers to woo them away from the competition.

What does your firm do to stand out as a great place for new accounting grads to land? Is your online presence fresh and engaging? Do you show entry-level employees the money? Do you give them room to grow as they progress in their careers?

Today's workers have different expectations and sensibilities than in the past. If you don't have a game plan tailored to attract the top talent of the graduating class, you risk having your pipeline of new accountants, auditors and analysts run dry or ending up with potentially **bad hires**.

Here's advice to help keep the talent flow going strong:

1. Boost your social media identity. [Generation Z](#), the latest entrants into the job market, grew up in a digitized world with a smartphone in their hands. To catch the eye of this group, your accounting firm should be on the social media networks they use — and engage with them. And don't stop at Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. Continue on to YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat.

2. Take control of your reviews. Don't forget about websites that rate employers. Your future auditors and analysts grew up reading reviews on everything from earbuds to college professors — and you better believe they pay attention to what past and current employees say about you.

Rather than leaving your reputation to unknown reviewers, actively cultivate your brand on these sites. Upload photos showing your office and employees at work and play. Respond thoughtfully to reviews — positive and negative. Make these sites extensions of your company that appeal to potential job candidates.

3. Network the old-fashioned way. Don't believe the myth that [Gen Zers](#) prefer phones over people. They actually put a lot of stock in face-to-face interactions, and they pay attention to who [shows up at their campus](#).

Accept invitations to be guest speakers. Participate in job fairs. Collect phone numbers, and call promising candidates. Sponsor events put on by student groups. Over pizza or tacos, talk up your internships, conferences and competitions for everyone from freshmen to grad students. The more active and visible you are, the more opportunities you have for building relationships — a top value for this generation.

4. Streamline your hiring. Many accounting firms miss out on top-notch graduates because they wait too long to make a formal offer. But how do you retool your processes and accelerate recruiting? Look for individuals who demonstrate strong work ethic and nontechnical skills, know Generally Accepted Accounting Principles, and fit your [corporate culture](#). Almost everything else can be taught after they're hired.

Make sure your internship opportunities work as a recruiting tool, too. A strong program draws talented, ambitious students. You can evaluate their performance and potential fit firsthand and extend a full-time offer while they're still working for your firm. If interns do leave, stay in contact in case a position opens that would be a match for their skills and interests.

(If you don't have an internship program, consider implementing one soon. Students look for firms offering attractive internships, and your lack of opportunities may be putting you at a disadvantage.)

5. Provide opportunities for growth. Yes, job hopping is a reality, and chances are you'll lose some employees to corporate accounting after a year or so. But graduates don't look for disposable jobs; most of them seek an employer who will allow them to advance. Show potential candidates what their career path could look like. This can involve helping them attain their CPA and providing professional development and mentoring along the way.

6. Offer an attractive compensation package. With top accountants in short supply, you won't get the workers you need without a tempting job offer. This includes above-average base salary, benefits, bonuses and incentives. Use resources like the [2018 Robert Half Salary Guide for Accounting and Finance Professionals](#) to find the latest on compensation trends and starting pay for entry-level employees in tax and audit.

But what if you can't offer high-end compensation? Graduates will often accept a lower salary if the overall package is right. Smaller accounting firms can compete mightily in areas such as flexible scheduling, remote work and community involvement — all of which resonate strongly with Gen Z.

From a student's perspective, it's exciting but also daunting to leave academia for the professional world. Today's entry-level workers are looking for an employer who can help them find their way. To successfully recruit upcoming accounting grads, show them you offer the support and compensation they seek.

Paul McDonald is senior executive director at [Robert Half](#), the world's first and largest specialized staffing firm. He writes and speaks frequently on hiring, workplace and career-management topics. Over the course of more than 30 years in the recruiting field, McDonald has advised thousands of company leaders and job seekers on how to hire and get hired.

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