Appcast™

Selecting a Programmatic Recruitment Advertising Platform: Key Questions to Include in Your RFP

Introduction

There are any number of reasons you may be considering a programmatic recruitment advertising platform, including to save time, control cost, understand market variations, eliminate the "black hole," and/or cast a wider net for candidates.

Programmatic platforms use complex technology that takes your jobs from your applicant tracking system (ATS) or candidate relationship management (CRM) system, organizes them, and distributes them to various places on the Web so you can reach candidates. Every candidate is tracked, allowing the platform to understand which bids at what sites worked to generate candidates and which didn't, so adjustments can be made. In addition, the platform should understand your goals (volume, price, consistency), allow you to create rules (candidate caps or complex budget limitations), and share your down-funnel metrics (qualified candidates and hires), which allow for real-time and appropriate changes.

To match technology to your business, it's important to identify and articulate *your* reasons for leveraging programmatic technology before you look at platforms so that the solution you choose aligns with your objectives and you aren't swayed by features you don't need.

Once you can articulate your goals, you'll want to create a set of questions that will allow you to thoroughly evaluate the platform you are considering. To help you gather the right information, we've compiled the most commonly asked questions from request for information (RFI) and request for proposal (RFP) documents used by top organizations considering programmatic recruitment platforms. We've also provided insight as to why some, if not all, of these questions should be included as part of your own evaluation process.

Take a look at the questions below, and make sure you get definitive answers to the ones most relevant to you. Questions are organized by categories and subcategories to lend structure to the process.

Job Ad Management

A programmatic recruiting advertising platform is perhaps most attractive to hiring organizations because it automates job ad posting while allowing for wider distribution. But not all platforms have the same capabilities. Understanding how a particular platform distributes jobs will help you decide if that platform is a fit for your organization.

Reaching Candidates

▶ How many job sites are in the platform's network?

▶ Does the platform work with non-CPC sites, including slot-based programs, traditional posting sites, social media, and organic sources?

▶ Does the platform give any partner job sites early access to jobs, based on commissions or other factors?

▶ Does a customer have input on which job sites are used or, conversely, which sites should not be used?

▶ What does a typical distribution among job sites look like (number of sites and types of sites) for a hiring organization with similar requirements?

▶ How does the mix of job sites get adjusted?

▶ What is the process for setting and managing rules that determine which jobs get advertised?

▶ Does the platform have the ability to track organic job postings and applications?

▶ In general, what level of human involvement is required by the vendor and the hiring organization?

Why do these questions matter?

→ Each of these questions provides information about a core capability of programmatic platforms: reach.
It's essential to know where your jobs are headed, and if a platform's reach will allow you to meet your goals.

→ Acquiring specifics about reach is crucial, but you also need to make sure you understand the backend of the process.
You want a platform that has true partnerships with job sites, so that data from sites is available in real time on the platform.

Appcast™

Payment

▶ How are costs calculated?

▶ Are you able to pay one invoice for all of your jobs?

▶ What are the payment terms?

▶ If the platform is operating as your agency of record, are the commissions for each job site transparent?

▶ Are there any additional commissions, such as year-end bonuses, that the job sites pay out?

▶ Is the platform job site agnostic?

Why do these questions matter?

→ Each of these questions offers insight into an important component of programmatic platforms: payment.
Needless to say, what you pay for is important, but it is also important to know how a vendor makes money so that you can be confident the company is operating in your best interest.

→ Understanding if and how commissions are paid and whether commissions impact delivery of candidates could prove eye-opening.
Ideally, you want a programmatic vendor that is agnostic, meaning that no particular job site has a financial hold over the company.

Transparency

▶ Does the vendor provide a breakdown of the types of job sites used?

▶ Will the vendor share the job sites where you are getting activity?

▶ Will the vendor allow you to take all relevant data out of the platform for your consumption?

▶ Will the platform break out paid versus organic candidate traffic from vendors that provide both?

Why do these questions matter?

→ Each of these questions addresses a potential concern related to programmatic platforms: access to information.
Transparency is an important component of any business relationship; but with a programmatic vendor there are a number of variables: the job sites the company works with, its payment structure, and the data itself.

→ Ensuring that you have unrestricted access to all your data should help alleviate any potential concern or misunderstanding.
Transparency will allow for a holistic view of what is happening in your recruitment funnel.

Down-Funnel Metrics

One of the advantages that programmatic platforms have is the ability to tie what is happening at the top of the recruitment funnel to activity down the funnel. By connecting these two parts of the process, candidate acquisition strategies can be adjusted to increase the number of qualified applicants and minimize the number of non-qualified candidates, saving time and reducing expense.

Down-funnel metrics may include anything that occurs after a posting or a click, all the way to a hire. The more granular and further down funnel a programmatic platform's capabilities, the greater the access to data that improves performance.

Key Metrics & KPIs

▶ Does the platform provide cost per click (CPC)?

▶ Does it provide cost per application (CPA)?

▶ Does it provide conversion rate information, such as apply rate?

▶ Does it split your data by desktop and mobile?

▶ Does it show how long it takes candidates to complete an application by job?

▶ Does it track qualified candidates and cost per qualified candidate?

▶ Does it allow for configuration to track to the source of hire?

▶ Does it show the price paid for a hire?

▶ Does it show volume attained (clicks, applications, qualified candidates) at each step of the funnel?

Why do these questions matter?

→ Each of these questions addresses the foundation of programmatic platforms: the ability to measure.
You can't improve what you don't measure. You want to be able to track as many data points as possible in order to identify where and how you can make improvements. Tracking past the applicant phase allows you to measure from click to qualified applicant and hire, two metrics that are more indicative of success.

→ Measuring helps you understand conversion rates.
This is important because conversion rates speak to the health of your recruiting operation how many of x does it take to get to y. This information allows you to account for seasonal, economic or other shifts in your business.

Optimization

▶ Does the platform understand your goals (cost savings, volume, velocity, consistency)?

▶ Does it allow for customized optimization, such as budget, volume or price?

▶ Does it allow for customized optimization points in the funnel, such as cost per application, cost per qualified candidate or cost per hire?

▶ Does it consume optimization data real-time and make bidding and source-based adjustments?

Why do these questions matter?

Each of these questions focuses on a key feature of programmatic platforms: the ability to optimize at a particular, measurable point in the recruitment funnel.
Optimization can mean different things to different organizations; for example, one organization may want more volume overall, while another may want more candidates on harder to fill positions, and still another may want a lower cost per applicant.

Reviewing optimization capabilities will help you determine if the platform can optimize at the right point in the funnel so that your organization can meet its goals.
While other data is still valuable, if an essential metric for your organization is, for example, cost per qualified candidate or cost per hire, make sure this information is available.

Delivery

▶ Does the platform increase the percentage of qualified candidates, by your definition?

▶ Does it increase volume from sources that provide qualified applicants?

▶ Does it allow you to set parameters to increase candidate coverage on your jobs?

▶ Does it provide transparency as to where candidate activity is being generated from?

Why do these questions matter?

→ Each of these questions addresses a primary objective of programmatic platforms: delivery of candidates.
While optimizing for cost may be a goal, you want to make sure you don't optimize so low that you end up with few or no candidates.

→ Remaining focused on delivery of candidates will help you balance your objectives.
Programmatic platforms have the reach to deliver the candidates you seek, so you want to leverage the technology to turn candidate activity into results: qualified candidates and, ultimately, hires.

Technology

A programmatic recruiting advertising platform is perhaps most attractive to hiring organizations because it automates job ad posting while allowing for wider distribution. But not all platforms have the same capabilities. Understanding how a particular platform distributes jobs will help you decide if that platform is a fit for your organization.

This said, the underlying technology can be difficult to evaluate. However, the technology can also be the difference between success and failure.

Ease of Use

▶ Is it easy to find jobs in the platform, in order to establish rules and budgets?

▶ Has the platform been built with attention to ease of implementation?

▶ Does the platform give you the reports you need?

▶ Can you easily stop spending if you need to?

▶ Can you easily set up jobs to run in the future?

▶ Has the platform been tried and tested?

▶ How often does the platform release enhancements or updates?

▶ Does the platform have customers with jobs models similar to yours?

▶ Has the platform handled other projects of a similar size and scope?

Why do these questions matter?

➔ Each of these questions addresses a sometimes-overlooked feature of programmatic platforms: usability.
Ease of use is directly related to technology adoption and success.

➔ Looking at usability from the standpoint of implementation, budget management, and controlling spend will help with your evaluation process.
Platforms that have customers with similar business challenges to yours are likely a good fit.

Compatibility

▶ How does the platform collect data from your ATS or CRM? Does it use tags, pixels, API or some other data collection method?

▶ Is the platform compatible with your existing infrastructure, including and especially your applicant tracking system (ATS) or candidate relationship management (CRM) system?

▶ Does the platform require that you use its own application process outside of your ATS or CRM?

▶ Can the platform track quick applies from various job sites?

▶ What technology is used to track sources of applicants? Is it proprietary or dependent on a third party?

▶ Can the platform operate internationally, including in countries where the use of pixels or tags is banned or tightly controlled?

▶ Can the platform work with job sites and other sources of candidates that have varying business models (postings, slots, performance) and technology (feeds/XML, APIs, etc.)?

Why do these questions matter?

→ Each of these questions looks at an essential component of programmatic platforms: interaction with other technology.
Programmatic platforms interact with ATS and CRM platforms, as well as job sites and other media, so a high-level of technical compatibility is essential.

→ Focusing on the various nuances of your ATS or CRM, along with your apply process as it relates to job sites, will allow you to look closely at any possible constraints.
Understanding how your existing technology will work with the platform, and if constraints exists, as well as what workarounds may be required and why, is essential, as compatibility could impact metrics you track.

Handles Complexity

▶ Does the platform continue to evolve, to meet hiring organizations' needs as times change?

▶ Does the platform allow for complex strategies, such as waterfalling based on outcomes and/or A/B testing?

▶ Is the platform flexible? Can it handle multiple divisions or groups within your business?

▶ Can the platform handle job expansions?

▶ Can the platform refresh posting dates without losing tracking to the original job?

▶ Are platform metrics customizable?

Why do these questions matter?

→ Each of these questions considers a necessary component of programmatic platforms: the ability to accommodate an evolving recruitment strategy.
The time from initial adoption to sophisticated use of programmatic technology can be short, so it's important to consider the future now.

→ Focusing on the metrics that are most important to your business will help you evaluate platform capabilities.
You want a programmatic platform that has the ability to track custom metrics so that you grow into the platform.

Security

▶ Does the platform meet your internal security requirements?

▶ Does the collection of candidate data, assessment of data, and delivery of results comply with all privacy laws?

▶ Does the platform require candidates to enter information in order to optimize?

▶ Does the platform collect IP addresses?

▶ Does the platform rely on cookies to track metrics?

▶ Does the platform address any and all potential internal IT security issues?

Why do these questions matter?

→ Each of these questions addresses on an all-important consideration with regard to programmatic platforms: data security.
Platforms that don't need to collect and store candidates' personal identifiable information (PII) or IP addresses are far less of a security concern.

→ Understanding all potential security issues will help you determine if a platform will serve you now and in the future.
As an example, legislation is increasingly focused on how IP addresses and cookies are handled; consequently, it's important to know if a platform can operate without them.

Data

A programmatic recruitment advertising platform offers incredible possibilities in terms of measuring and achieving results. The platform you choose should readily provide the data you need to make informed decisions – decisions that will deliver qualified candidates, while maximizing your spend.

Availability

▶ Has the platform been built with attention to data-driven decision-making?

▶ Is data easily accessible, in the form you require (UI, report, CSV, API, etc.)?

▶ Is the data interactive?

▶ Are you able to connect your data warehouse / data lake to the platform?

▶ Can you apply various filters to understand different slices of your data?

▶ Does the platform provide reliable, valid reporting of results that are easy to interpret and communicate?

▶ Do reports provide key insights and analysis of job results?

▶ Is customized reporting available?

▶ Can the platform consume data that has been generated in other systems, such as your down-funnel data?

Why do these questions matter?

→ Each of these questions focuses on what programmatic platforms promise to provide: access to your data.
It's important to remember that the data is yours, not the vendor's; as such, you should be able to access it any time, in any way you want. If data access is limited to the user interface or a handful of reports, consider this a red flag.

→ Determining if access to data is limited will help you evaluate a platform.
For example, can you move your data to a data warehouse or data lake for further analysis, and are custom reports available?

Integrity

▶ Does the vendor ensure accuracy of its data?

▶ Does the vendor provide detailed information about how data is stored, how access will be permitted over a period of time, and any restrictions to the data?

Why do these questions matter?

→ Each of these questions addresses a critical aspect of programmatic platforms: system integrity.
Without data accuracy, a platform is basically shooting in the dark.

→ Understanding how a platform verifies accuracy, and what sort of monitoring controls it has, is necessary, because data accuracy is directly tied to billing.
If a platform is guessing (or "calculating"), it is spending blindly.

Benchmarks

▶ Does the vendor share market information from its larger pool of data?

▶ Does the vendor provide industry benchmark comparisons?

▶ Does the platform provide real-time market rates?

Why do these questions matter?

→ Each of these questions provides insight into a valuable aspect of programmatic platforms: collective data.
Access to a larger pool of data allows your organization to know where to start when tracking performance, and to later compare itself to others in the industry and the overall employment marketplace.

→ Using benchmark data can help you know where to focus.
Benchmarks provide context, in that they show you where you are relatively successful and identify areas for improvement.

::: Appcast™

Best Practices

▸ Does the vendor provide guidance on best practices?

▸ Does the vendor help hiring organizations use data to drive overall business improvement?

▸ Will you have access to the vendor's industry information and best practices?

Why do these questions matter?

→ Each of these questions offers insight into a valuable aspect of programmatic platforms: the ability to identify and leverage best practices.
The vendor and platform you select should have a solid understanding of industry best practices, how to implement them, and what outcomes will result from those changes.

→ Understanding how a vendor and platform establish best practices will help with your evaluation process.
Ideally, you want data to be the primary factor, but best practices are also rooted in experience.

Responsiveness

Although you would not necessarily include these questions in an RFP, it's worth asking some or all of them to gain insight into a potential relationship with a programmatic recruitment vendor.

Keep in mind that the programmatic recruitment space is fairly complex and relatively new in comparison to the job site space. Therefore, you want to enter into a true partnership, as opposed to a vendor-customer relationship where you are treated as one of many clients. This is less about the size of a company; it's more about customer-centric attitude.

Knowledge

▸ Will the programmatic recruitment advertising vendor develop, propose, and deliver a solution that aligns with your hiring organization's needs?

▸ Are vendor representatives knowledgeable?

▸ Are vendor representatives consultative?

▸ Do vendor representative understand your challenges, and are they able to present various approaches and/or solutions for your specific situation?

▸ Will vendor representatives recommend a communication and training strategy?

Support

▸ Will the vendor assign a dedicated account manager or a single point of contact, who understands your goals and strategy, to assist with day-to-day management?

▸ Will vendor reps conduct training sessions for recruiting teams and other key stakeholders?

▸ Will the account managers work as an extension of your team?

▸ Will the vendor provide troubleshooting and technical support?

▸ Will vendor reps help the hiring organization manage and report data?

Providing Prospective Vendors with Necessary Information

As you use the information in this paper to research programmatic recruitment advertising platforms and get answers to your questions from prospective vendors, you'll also want to make sure you provide vendors with enough details so they can determine how to best meet your needs.

To this end, it is helpful if you have answers to these questions ready.

▶ Will your programmatic advertising campaigns be centralized or decentralized?

▶ What is your total annual job volume projection?

▶ How many candidates do you intend to hire in the coming year?

▶ Are there geographic or regional considerations or challenges?

▶ How many applicants do you need to get a hire?

▶ What is your current cost per hire by job type?

▶ What is your current cost per application?

▶ What are your key performance indicators (KPIs)?

▶ What is your budget for job sites?

▶ What applicant tracking system (ATS) and other technology do you currently utilize?

▶ What data do you currently have access to, and how do you leverage it?

▶ What job sites are you currently using?

▶ Do you have specific recruitment marketing goals (e.g., high volume needs, diversity objectives)?

▶ Do you have ongoing recruitment challenges (e.g., high-volume seasonal hiring)?

▶ What is your overall employer brand marketing strategy?

▶ Do you have any employer branding initiatives that may impact job advertising?

▶ Do you have relationships with any recruitment marketing vendors?

Moving Forward

When you sign an agreement with a programmatic recruitment advertising platform vendor, you are buying a software solution. At the same time, you are entering into a partnership arrangement where the solution provider and its staff will help you manage one of the most critical components of your business: finding and acquiring talent.

It is therefore important to 1) do your homework and 2) communicate clearly from the onset. Doing both will help you make the choice that best serves your organization.

Appcast™

Appcast is a leading provider of recruitment advertising technology and related managed services. We help businesses of all sizes find the right job candidates fast with our advanced programmatic technology and easy-to-use, data-driven analytics.

Appcast helps you to be agile and effective in uncertain times. To learn how we can help make job ads work for your company and get the recruiting results you need, **sign up for a demo** of our programmatic recruiting solutions!