Handshake

The Definitive Guide to Recruiting Early Talent

Introduction

Baby boomers now make up the fastest-growing demographic in the workplace, constituting about 1 in 3 of your current employees. Despite this trend, talent acquisition (TA) practitioners are well aware that this expansion won't last forever—they're not betting on it, they're preparing for it.

In fact, of the 164 million Americans who are employed today, 30 million plan to retire in the next decade, leaving a large gap for recruiters and hiring managers to fill. It should come as no surprise then that the #1 internal challenge C-suite executives anticipate this year continues to be recruiting and retaining top talent, thanks to a tight labor market.

As boomers retire, a growing cohort will shape the future of your workplace.

This cohort—Gen Z—is currently either applying, attending, or graduating college in droves. They are an eager group, proactive, tech-savvy, and relationship-oriented. And they aren't willing to compromise or settle.

Employers increasingly agree that this talent group can boost profit, accelerate digital transformation, and fill the growing gap left by retiring baby boomers. They can also help balance the age, gender, and ethnicity equations of an effective diversity program, leading to higher profitability.

Yet to engage entry level talent, it's no longer sufficient for employers to recruit from just schools in their backyard or schools their executives went to.

Standing out to a generation graduating during historic unemployment will require employers to embrace digital transformation to broaden their early talent recruiting sources and scale their everyday processes.

Hiring these up-and-coming leaders will take an adept, nimble, and proactive strategy that embraces their unique interests and strengths—from personalizing your outreach to delivering on a dynamic employer brand.

More than 500,000 employers, including all 500 of the Fortune 500, already rely on Handshake to do just that, by finding qualified talent from a pool of over 5 million active candidates attending more than 900 partner schools.

This perspective gives us unique leverage into what works when it comes to recruiting early talent, and what doesn't.

In Handshake's Definitive Guide to Recruiting Early Talent, we'll explore the best practices leading early talent employers are adopting, along with ways you can leverage their learnings to fill your early talent pipeline with qualified candidates in the coming years.

Our guide also features snackable tips in the side panel for quick easy wins to incorporate into your program, and employer spotlights to help you visualize how organizations are putting these takeaways into action. Let's get started.

01

Will Early Talent Want to Work for Your Company?

Even if your company has a program in place for recruiting early talent, including interns, co-ops, and entry-level roles, it may be time to revisit your strategy. That's because Gen Z and those graduating alongside them represent the first generation of true digital natives—they've never known a world without technology.

Handshake's Campus to Career report shows how this generation is uniquely equipped with the most in-demand skills of the growing innovation economy: organization, leadership, problem-solving, communication, data analysis, and engineering.

Is your organization ready to embrace this generation's strengths? Ask yourself the seven questions below to determine:

● How to set up your company's early talent recruiting team
● Whether you need recruiters to focus, exclusively, on recent grads
● How to best invest efforts in digital resources

1. What are my company's long-term workforce planning goals?

When it comes to job hunting, students and young talent are all about keeping an open mind. In fact, 60% of Handshake student survey respondents say they are open to finding a job outside of their major.

With today's grads being so open to new career tracks, employers need to be thoughtful about the exact functions for which they are hiring and why. This planning requires a thorough understanding of how, exactly, early talent can fulfill your organization's strategic priorities.

It also requires being agile enough to recruit early talent at-the-ready by having a pool of qualified, engaged candidates in place year-round. Here are a few steps you can take to align early talent-hiring with your organization's goals:

• Gain an understanding of the roles that early talent naturally seeks out by learning about the most popular roles for students and grads.

• Survey managers and leaders to identify teams that would benefit from the fresh perspectives entry level talent brings.

• Host meetings with senior leadership to map out roles they anticipate needing over the next 3-5 years, then plan on building your early talent pipeline now so it's easy to fill these roles later.

With a clear overview of how early talent fits into your organization, you'll empower teams for success—and hires with a smooth transition.

Tip: Collect user-generated content like reviews from interns at the end of their term.

2. What career paths can early talent expect to take at my company?

→ Students and recent grads care about advancing rapidly: 75% believe they should be promoted within a year.[1] But there's a corollary to this story, according to a recent Handshake study. Early talent wants to move up, not out.

While new grads may not stay at your company for decades, as was and is typical with the baby boomer generation, they do intend to stick around—and it's up to employers to harness their talents. Follow these steps to communicate career pathways to potential hires:

• In addition to posting your job descriptions, share stories of tenured individuals. Show early talent what it takes, especially for newcomers, to advance.

• Ask interns and early career hires to write reviews and answer Q&As on your Handshake employer profile.

• Ask recent hires (1-2 years) to write and share their perspectives on professional development at your company.

3. What education, training, and support does my company offer early talent?

→ Nearly 30% of students on Handshake say that they are looking for training programs with a clear growth trajectory, and that they would only work for an employer that cares about their professional growth. With their career development needs met, early talent is likely to stick around.

Does your company offer an education stipend? Do you provide benefits such as formal mentorship, access to on-site workshops, or paid training? Be vocal and clear about these opportunities in your job descriptions and profiles.

Employer Spotlight: Intuit

Intuit runs a mentorship-focused rotational program for recent grads, with a goal of facilitating their transition from campus to career. This has led to higher retention.

Learn how your company can build a unique learning and development culture from the ground up by:

• Performing an audit of existing learning, development, and training materials. Investigate which learning programs are gaining in popularity.

• Encourage teams to leverage internal tools to document company knowledge, host webinars, and lunch n' learns. You can aggregate this content into learning materials later.

• Share impactful stories of your people.

Beyond building up programs, ensure your learning and professional development value propositions are clear and visible components of your hiring narrative.

Employer Spotlight: IBM

IBM also offers an apprenticeship program for early career job seekers, where they provide training, mentorship, and learning opportunities on the job.

4. Am I communicating accurate value propositions through my employer brand?

Tip: Handshake Premium employers can dynamically personalize their employer profile, including relevant testimonials, depending on the candidate viewing it.

Early talent cares about transparency and is doing their due diligence by researching employers before applying. We found that 85% of Gen Z talent—and those graduating alongside them—research an employer's website, employee reviews, and social media to understand an employer's people, culture, and mission.

As part of your company's employer branding and storytelling efforts, make sure that your values are visible and clear:

• Audit your careers page to ensure that your values are explicitly referenced and reflect your larger brand story.

• Survey employees to learn how these values influence their work.

• Personalize your employer brand to each talent segment.

Your goal, ultimately, is to create an experience that communicates your company's mission and values in a bold, meaningful, and personalized way. By being clear about your company's values, you'll attract stronger culture fits for your organization.
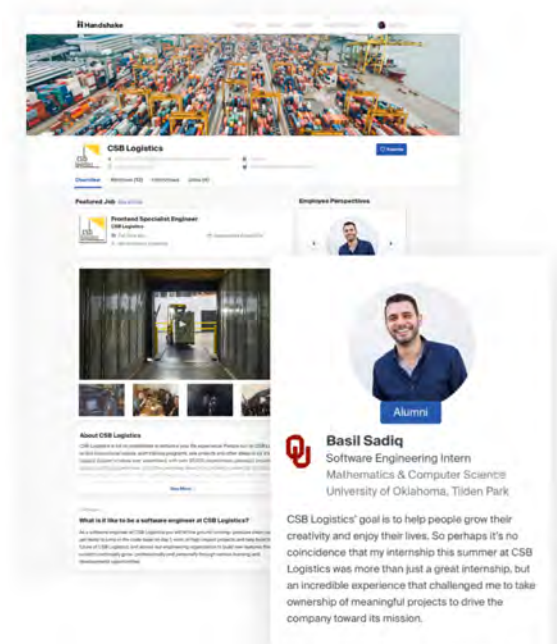
5. Am I reaching early talent early enough?

It's important to reach early talent as early as possible. That's because undergraduate college students start career planning as early as their freshman or sophomore year. These candidates are also open to internships, which are valuable pools through which your company can hire full-time.

It pays off to build long-term relationships with candidates to support your long-term hiring needs. Here are a few steps that your business can take to reach prospective hires in advance of their graduation dates:

• Start identifying profiles of your ideal early talent hires along with what they might be doing earlier on in school.

• Create educational materials tailored to students who still have time before graduating to help inform their career paths.

• Consider attending on-campus career fairs or hosting a virtual event on Handshake for students who are seeking internships.

In addition to helping you find future employees, internships, and fellowships give early talent an opportunity to close the skills gap, foster a sense of leadership in current employees, increase organizational productivity, and more.

Employer Spotlight: Box

Box's Business Fellowship program gives students exposure to different functional roles in tech, including sales, customer success, and recruiting. During the week-long program, Box conducts daily workshops to teach business essentials. Students also receive on-site mentorship, guidance from the company's co-founders and executives, and insight into career opportunities.

6. Am I reaching talent in a way that's personally meaningful to them?

→ In a Handshake student survey, 95% of students and recent grads told us that they engage with employers that send personalized, proactive outreach.

Meaningful, tailored outreach has the potential to make recruiting more effective. Get started by building the right messaging foundations:

• Share content with consistency to provide a sneak peek into life at your employer.

• Consider sharing the behind-the-scenes content of your company.

• Determine what gets high engagement and understand which of your segments are most responsive so you can analyze why certain content performs better than others.

Keep in mind that as the "always-connected" generation, early talent conducts extensive research when seeking professional opportunities.

Employer Spotlight: SAS

SAS' personalized and targeted messaging on Handshake reduces their time to hire, improves SAS's footprint on campuses where it has little-to-no presence, and creates virtual employer brand engagement.

7. Am I impacting core diversity and inclusion (D&I) goals?

Research shows that D&I programs help companies perform better. A Boston Consulting Group study found that companies with more diverse management teams have 19% higher revenues due to innovation.[2]

In addition to being good for business, D&I programs have the potential to make a company's early talent recruiting strategy more effective. Sixty-seven percent of students & grads on Handshake agree that they would only work for an employer that's built an inclusive company culture and provides a sense of belonging to all employees.

Ensure your recruiting materials and channels—including your website, social, job posts, and creatives—are inclusive. Identify unconscious bias in your interviews & hiring process.

Feature employee impact on your employer page, in recruiting materials, and on job and social media posts.

It doesn't stop at first impressions. Ensure your recruiting process is welcoming by incorporating inclusive language thoughout your job descriptions.

[2] https://www.bcg.com/en-us/publications/2018/how-diverse-leadership-teams-boost-innovation.aspx

It doesn't stop at first impressions. Ensure your recruiting process is welcoming by incorporating inclusive language in your job descriptions. Scrape names/schools from application reviews. Use consistent interview questions and rubrics. Have diverse employees repre- sented in your interview process. And effectively communicate the hiring process, who you're looking for, and why to candidates.

Early talent understands that diversity in the workforce isn't just a "nice to have," it's essential for an employer's hiring strategy and longevity. A new wave of talent—61 million people to be exact—is about to enter the workforce over the next several years and make a direct impact on the future economy.

Entities of all types—and people responsi- ble for hiring decisions—need to offer a thoughtful approach to early talent hiring. These questions will help your company build a proactive talent sourcing strategy and provide guidance for how to set up your operations in the years to come.

Download a snapshot of this chapter

02

Building an Employer Brand Early Talent Loves

Nowadays it seems every employer across every industry is recruiting from the same pool of competitive talent. For brands without a well-known consumer brand, the competition is steep. Yet the investment is worth the outcome. A meaningful employer brand has the potential to increase qualified applicants by 50% and cut your cost-per-hire in half.[3]

Like recruiting, employer branding has changed considerably over the last few decades, especially in today's tech-savvy landscape. With early talent recruiting driving how employers achieve both their diversity and strategic hiring goals, how you approach your employer brand in the eyes of Gen Z has arguably never been more important.

This up-and-coming generation is eager to work hard, learn, and grow, but hiring them won't be easy.

When it comes to self-directing their career paths, they're in the driver's seat because their technical skills are exceptionally competitive.

According to Handshake's Head of Employer Marketing, Kristen Ribero, employer brand is a perception based off of established trust—or distrust—in a company. It's inversely related to marketing, yet intangible. It's not your logo, benefits, or founder's clout, nor is it only your careers page, an Instagram takeover, or a highway billboard.

It's a holistic approach that makes promises to inspire candidates on an authentic level.

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https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/employer-branding

1. Identify the values that empower your people.

→ To get started, identify why people love working for your company. The answer to this question is what your employer brand needs to magnify. As the first generation of digital natives, Gen Z is highly discerning about the information they receive online.

This is why the first six months of developing or revisiting your employer brand should be rooted in qualitative and quantitative research—well before activation—and closely followed by opportunities for feedback. Don't limit research internally. Tap into your network and professional groups to help you get those insights. Then consider how you tailor your employer brand to each talent segment, including women and minorities.

SAS CHRO, Jenn Mann, emphasizes that your employer brand shows prospects what makes you special and why they should want to work for you.[4] Get smart about exploring the types of content that convert different candidates.

And invite marketing, hiring managers, and colleagues to the table to weigh in.

Explore employer brands that inspire you. And observe how they approach a dynamic, holistic, and personal approach to their employer brand.

[4] https://medium.com/authority-magazine/how-to-identify-and-retain-fantastic-talent-with-jenn-mann-of-sas-and-kage-spatz-2193c75eafb3

2. Highlight opportunities for learning and professional growth.

→ Early talent may be kicking off their careers, but that doesn't mean they aren't thinking about their future. Gen Z wants to get ahead in the workforce, and they are all about advancing rapidly. According to Handshake's Campus to Career report, 75% of students and young alumni believe that they should be promoted within a year.

One of the best ways to speak to Gen Z's values is to meet them on their terms. Understand that the time during and after college graduation tends to be vulnerable: new grads want to make sure that they're taking the right next steps in life. Speak to their ambition. Show them what a career at your company looks like. And be clear about the details that they will need to make the right decision.

Early talent, just like their more experienced predecessors, care about job stability, earning an income, and receiving top-notch benefits such as tuition reimbursement, commuter benefits, 401(k) plans, and stock options. They also care about mentoring opportunities.

"Generation Z is the first fully digital generation, and yet, they yearn for human interaction at work," writes career coach Ashley Stahl for Forbes. In fact, 9 in 10 Gen Zs report wanting an element of humanization woven into their team fabric and interactions.[5] The most racially and ethnically diverse generation yet also craves a sense of inclusion and belonging from their workplace.[6]

The challenge busy recruiters face, however, is that there isn't enough time in the day to invest in tailored communication with each and every person they engage. A simple way to overcome this is through your employer brand.

Your employer brand should reinforce the message that new grads will get a healthy jumpstart on their careers. Gen Z takes these details personally.

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https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/failure-drives-innovation-according-to-ey-survey-on-gen-z-300714436.html
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https://www.npr.org/2018/11/15/668106376/generation-z-is-the-most-racially-and-ethnically-diverse-yet

3. Connect your unique value propositions to the big picture.

A survey from Handshake's network, where 30% of early career talent reported that they would only work for an employer that takes a public position on social issues such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, validates this finding.

Show early talent that your culture is a space where employees can bring their full selves to work, so that they can focus on impact and contributing in positive ways:

• Share photos from employee resource groups or photos from service.

• Showcase videos explaining how you improve the community around you.

• Explain how your company contributes to specific causes that Gen Z cares about in your company description and through employee reviews.

Make sure that these value propositions are visible to early talent applicants—especially in the outreach you send them. We'll cover this in depth in chapter IV.

→ Undeniably, today's early career talent cares about working for companies that commit to making a big impact with their contributions.

A study from BridgeWorks confirms numerous research findings that Gen Z cares about making a difference at work, working for a company that gives back to the community, and staying with a company that isn't afraid to take a stand on social issues.[7]

7
http://www.generations.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/2017-BridgeWorks-3G-Report.pdf

4. Humanize the people behind your employer brand.

→ The most impactful way to capture your audience's attention is to reach people on their terms and align your interests with theirs. Being transparent about your values is not only important for appeasing early talent—it's important for your bottom line, according to research from Gallup.[8]

Make people excited to want to work for your company. Don't just walk the talk. Provide a behind-the-scenes window into your culture, and ensure that every meaningful point of interaction communicates your hiring narrative.

Tip: Let's say your team is looking to recruit engineers. One way to build a personalized, relatable employer brand is to share stories, FAQs, and reviews that prospects majoring in computer science, math, or data-focused disciplines would find insightful.

Handshake Premium partners can dynamically tailor the information they share to a viewer's desired career path.

Employer Spotlight: IBM

Most candidates still perceive IBM as a maker of personal computers, when they've led tech breakthroughs for more than 100 years. As part of their employer brand, IBM shares it's defining history through Q&As that are relevant to its early talent segments.

Employer Spotlight: Hubspot

On Handshake and through their early career portal, HubSpot shares insight that helps early talent uncover employer values and benefits that are important to them.

[8]
https://www.gallup.com/workplace/245480/why-need-compete-employees-customers.aspx

On Handshake, a current student or young alumni, for example, can see insights from current IBM employees along with fellow early career professionals who have held or are seeking similar roles. This information gives potential job seekers an inside look into the experiences of someone just like them.

This form of engagement provides a level of transparency others can't, and helps convert undecided job seekers into applicants by giving them the information they need to make better-informed decisions. IBM also shares testimonials from early career professionals in technical roles, incorporating scannable and personable videos that shed insight into what life is like at the company.

Other employers on Handshake tailor their employer brand to engage unique talent segments with content relevant to their skills, interests, and future career trajectories. As a result, their employees' stories become a pillar of their recruiting experience.

How do you evaluate the success of your employer brand? Industry experts believe there's one key metric you need to look at, and that's the quality of your applicants or hires.

Secondary metrics should include how your holistic employer brand supports key employer and recruiting initiatives. On Handshake, for example, are your profile and job views converting?

Make every interaction with early career talent count. This generation of college graduates and young alumni understands tech in ways that their more experienced counterparts don't, and are looking for guidance and human connection.

It's critical to invest in research early on to get the insights you need to accomplish the efforts that follow. Don't feel the need to take this on your own—find a partner or executive co-sponsor to help you do this. And finally, leverage external resources to help you build and evaluate your holistic early talent employer brand.

03

Preparing for On-Campus Recruiting

Does this sound familiar? You've been successful recruiting at your core schools in the past, so you prepare to return on campus with the same on-brand tablecloth and turnkey swag.

You spend the afternoon waiting for candidates to stop by your table, and while you've managed to get a few resumes in hand, you know there could've been better ways to pass the time. To make matters more complicated, your leaders decide to join for the ride, and they're beginning to notice the minimal interview slots you've filled.

Heading on campus without a strategy not only results in lower quality hires, but can also be destructive to your employer brand. Keep in mind from the previous chapter that one bad impression from a single student can affect how many students see you.

It doesn't have to be this way. There are effective and proven ways to maximize your on-campus return-on-investment (ROI), boost your employer brand, and fill your job openings with qualified early career talent who are eager to help you succeed in your mission.

1. Identify your goals and talent pipeline needs.

Maybe your goal this recruiting season is to hire a few good entry-level salespeople? Or perhaps you're finding it challenging to fill 12 open roles with engineers from underserved populations, like historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs)?

What if you receive more requests for early career candidates throughout the year? How do you start building your qualified talent pool today?

Whatever your goals might be, take a moment to assess your talent needs. By now, you should have talent personas of your ideal hires defined, including the competencies, skills, and behavior they require to navigate and succeed in your open roles.

Once you've identified these unique characteristics, use those attributes to fuel your ideal talent persona profile. If you're looking to fill multiple entry-level roles, you might define a persona for each job opening.

With concrete goals and talent personas in mind, connect with schools on Handshake that meet your talent profiles, then learn about any upcoming on-campus events or career fairs they're hosting and register to attend.

2. Ramp up your qualified candidate pipeline

→ Next comes the most critical step in your career fair and on-campus event planning process. Remember that scenario of our university recruiter receiving the occasional resume in hand? How do you ensure your presence stands out?

The answer is pretty simple–leverage technology to help you promote and scale your efforts before stepping foot on campus.

Even though students will be able to see their career fair roster, a powerful step that will be pivotal to your on-campus success is shifting your strategy to be more proactive. Tell the students you want to meet with you're coming.

Define and save your hiring criteria, then tap into the most engaged student audience to drive interest in your funnel and engagement while you're on campus. By doing this, you can plan ahead and send your campaign emails before attending a career fair, and schedule automated reminders without any added work.

Employer Spotlight: M&T Bank

Headquarter in Buffalo, NY, M&T Bank leverages Handshake to proactively tap into early talent who have demonstrated a desire or interest in working in Upstate New York, leading to a 161% increase in applications and 20 qualified hires in one recruiting season.

3. Opportunities to boost employer brand.

→ How do prospects currently see your organization? Are candidates aware of the different types of roles your company offers? And do they know about your values and impact?

On-campus career fairs are a great way to demonstrate the unique value propositions your organization brings to the table. Shed insight into the diverse and inclusive practices that make your company stand out from the talent competition by highlighting the employee resource groups (ERGs), corporate volunteering activities, or nonprofit partners you work with at your table.

You can also leverage career fairs as an opportunity to provide real-world examples of the practices your business leads. If you're at the forefront of breakthrough industry research or working towards sustainability goals, bring copies of those reports to the table with you. Consider providing tablets, too, for students to read stories and watch videos that feature early talent employees who are like them.

Employer Spotlight: CDW

B2B technology solutions provider, <u>CDW</u>, leveraged powerful segmentation to find students and alumni with skills that would allow them to succeed in their roles. By upgrading to Handshake Premium, they reached 3 million more students at more than 500 schools, compared to 50 before, resulting in a 23x growth in their sales intern program.

4. Bringing it all together

→ Let's revisit our earlier scenario one last time: after exhausting your budget on travel, lodging, swag, and entertainment, you're struggling to quantify results to your VP and articulate what worked and what did not.

Start by tabulating your on-campus conversion rate. To do this, collect the number of contacts you messaged before going on campus and compare that to the number of students who RSVPed to your event. Comparing your student applications to hires also allows you to report directly on ROI.

Don't miss unique insight into how you can improve on future career fairs. Follow up with students who attend your event with a sincere thank you and short survey. Consider including questions around how their perceptions changed after stopping by, if they're likelier to apply, and whether they have any feedback they'd be open to sharing with you.

You can also leverage follow-up surveys as an opportunity to invite students to remain connected to your organization by signing up for your newsletter.

This is a great way to keep students engaged long after on-campus events are over by sending them updates about your work and promoting new job openings they may be qualified for.

Employer Spotlight: Denso

When global automotive components manufacturer, DENSO, approached Handshake, they were looking to move away from posting jobs to individual schools and processing paper-based resumes. By upgrading to Handshake Premium, DENSO collected 3X the quality resumes and saw a 53% increase in qualified applicants compared to the recruiting season before.

Download a snapshot of this chapter

04

Writing a Personalized Recruiting Message to Students

Do you remember the contents of the last spam email you received? If it was impersonal, probably not. It's also possible you unsubscribed. More than likely, you ignored it. If you're not personalizing your recruiting message to entry level talent in a meaningful way, candidates may react to your outreach similarly.

Let's visualize a different scenario. Consider the last consumer or marketing email that persuaded you to take action. How did this email stand out—was it directed toward you, and did it offer relevant, timely, and useful solutions to help optimize your strategy?

Marketing and recruiting represent two separate business functions, but they share best practices around messaging in the same vein. And for Gen Z—the "always connected" generation—email is their preferred method of engaging with companies.[9]

Handshake findings confirm that 95% of college students and young alumni prefer engaging with employers that send personalized, proactive messages.

To effectively engage your ideal talent segments, be sure to read through these five effective strategies for personalizing your outreach.

[9]
https://www.prdaily.com/study-gen-z-likely-to-buoy-email-as-a-favored-channel/

1. Do your research.

→ Today's early talent is already doing their due diligence by researching you. It's only fair you spend some time learning about them.

First, identify who your ideal talent segments are, then tap into their profiles to map a bird's-eye view of their interests, extracurriculars, and student organizations or affiliations. Handshake can help uncover much of this information, since students complete their profiles and university career centers confirm entries with their system of record.

Complement your research with data around what motivates Gen Z through assets like Handshake's Women in Tech report. This thorough collection of information allows you to create a rich profile of who your perfect candidate is and what they crave out of their next role, enabling you to customize your messaging and lean in on specific student attributes.

Let's explore another example: say you're tasked with building an early talent pipeline to fill your summer internship program.

You want all-star students with business degrees, and while the competition for top early talent remains competitive, you know your employer's strong wellness culture is one of your best kept recruiting secrets.

With this information in mind, find relevant talent that might be interested in what you have to offer by zeroing in on candidate interests like athletics or extracurriculars like wellness. Then set yourself apart by speaking that candidate's language.

See this in action by reading Claremont McKenna student Robert Cain's success story. Cain landed his first internship on Handshake after receiving a message to intern as a brand ambassador. Since the program fit his interests in marketing and social media, he immediately responded and was extended an option to interview before landing the job.

2. Start with a personal introduction.

→ Begin your email with context around who you are and why you're reaching out.

Include how you think this candidate can thrive at your organization, and why your employer is the best place for them to launch their career. This is also where you'll want to reference any of their relevant interests, along with ways your company's culture can help nurture them.

Calling out specific student attributes, like a student's first name, major and institution name, and referencing your search criteria can go a long way in personalizing your recruiting message.

Finding commonality is another great way to establish rapport. Students are receptive to companies that have hired other students from their school, location, or age demographic. If you have that information handy, use it in your outreach. If you're reaching out to a student at one of your core schools, imagine how much more likely they are to respond if you reference their peers' experience. It feels less scary for students to join a company that's already welcomed their peers.

Your recruiting message should ultimately answer why your company is a great place for that candidate to work, and reference how their interests align with your key value propositions.

Employer Spotlight: Raymond James

When financial services firm, Raymond James, recruits for technical roles in information technology, their employer brand is FinTech. When they tap into equity capital talent, they brand themselves as the premier alternative to Wall Street. They leverage Handshake Premium's Campaigns to deliver a personalized recruiting experience to students depending on their interests.

3. Communicate authentically and honestly.

→ Career services centers are coaching students to ask about an employer's culture during their interviews. As they graduate from nearly two decades of schooling and move into their first or second job after college, grads are nervous about the change. They're trying to figure out your culture the entire time. And in the same way you're screening for fit, they are too.

Students are invited to study your office environment the moment they walk in for an interview. They dissect the language in your outreach—is the message positive and hopeful, or impersonal and terse? Students are even encouraged to look at your email signature for clues on inclusivity, and evaluate when and how calls are scheduled. Essentially every single point of communication provides input into how a student sees the relationship.

If a student demonstrates interest in working at a company with a flexible work environment and that's something you offer, mention it! Illustrate how flexible work is a key tenet, and how it's helped your colleagues better accommodate their early careers. When you start to consider these components, your hiring narrative shifts quickly.

4. Close with a call to action.

Gen Z, and those graduating alongside them, want to feel like they are the center of your attention. It's the "about me" party, and they want to be the first to get an invite. Your job as an early talent recruiter is to prepare that party for students to arrive. But what's the point of hosting a party if you don't send any invites?

Always round out your recruiting message with a clear and persuasive call to action (CTA) that directs students to take action. Including a personal note at the end like, "I look forward to reviewing your application!" goes a long way. You might also consider bolding information you want students to pay close attention to, like your employer's benefits and your CTA.

What's in a CTA? It could direct candidates to RSVP for an upcoming career fair or event, apply to an open job or internship program, or simply learn more about you as an employer of choice. Wherever it leads, it should be focused—don't overwhelm your candidates with multiple CTAs.

Your communication with a candidate also shouldn't dissolve after one message. In fact, your first point of outreach should set the foundations for an ongoing, two-way relationship. Human connection begins the very moment a potential hire learns about your company. It shouldn't end there either.

Finally, keep in mind that most candidates won't respond to their first email. Don't get discouraged. Following up just once has the ability to convert 22% more replies, according to industry sources.[10] And sometimes it can take up to three emails or more to really get your audience's attention.

[10]
https://learn.g2crowd.com/follow-up-email

5. Review, review, review.

→ Actionable emails succeed because they're hyper-relevant to the receiver. They're curated by carefully mapping content to the reader's persona. Does your message address a student directly? Does it sound genuine and personal? Does it have an actionable CTA?

The more a student feels like they're talking to a real person and not a robot, the more likely they are to respond and apply to your open roles.

Also, students might get over your company receiving negative coverage in the press, but one surefire way to ensure you never hear from them again is to send a generic, impersonal message. Misplacing your variables, such as your name with theirs, or disclosing inaccurate information can have equally harmful effects on your reputation if not worse.

Like any writer, it's essential to review your recruiting message a few times before hitting send. If you're messaging a large list, invite a colleague to proofread your message.

Whether you're building your early talent recruiting program from scratch or rethinking how you approach your current one, continue exploring ways of iterating and optimizing your messaging.

Review message data, such as open and engagement rates, to reveal trends around language that outperforms. And identify opportunities to collect qualitative data about your candidate's experience, like sharing questions around message relevance and engagement in your feedback surveys.

Finally, continue to be curious about who your ideal talent segments are—the more you know them, the higher engagement you're likely to see.

Download a snapshot of this chapter

05

Measuring your Program ROI

When your recruiting season comes to a close, you may be wondering how your efforts stack up. Work through this guide to evaluate your success—both on campus and online—gauge candidate engagement, and ultimately, report on applicants.

Each section below helps you track an early talent recruiting key performance indicator (KPI). Before we get started, record the start and end of your recruiting season. We'll reference this date range later on. [MM/DD/YY]–[MM/DD/YY]

Budget alignment	
How much did you budget for this recruiting season?	
How much did you end up spending in total?	
How much did you spend on events?	
Budget Δ	

According to industry benchmarks, the average cost-per-hire for early talent is $6,110.[11] Depending on hiring demand, was your spend higher or lower than what you planned for? Consider why and what can you replicate or try a new next season to remain on budget.

11
https://www.naceweb.org/talent-acquisition/trends-and-predic-
tions/cost-per-hire-varies-by-way-employers-calculate-budget/#:~:targetText=Among%20employers%20responding%20to%20NACE's,%2Dper%2Dhire%20was%20%246%2C110.

Depending on the demand for specialist or technical skills, cost-per-hire can vary significantly across roles. For more accurate reporting purposes, it can be conducive to split out budgets and analyze all of your metrics, including cost-per-hire, separately for different types of roles.

Early talent pipeline and hires	
How many applicants did you receive during this period?	
How many candidates did you interview during this period?	
How many candidates did you hire during this period?	
Average cost per applicant	

Weighing the total number of applicants year-over-year is one of the most important indicators of your program's success. How have your unique applicants changed compared to your last recruiting season? Even if your hiring goals haven't changed, more applicants means your employer brand is stronger, leaving you with a larger pool from which to select ideal talent.

If it's useful, you may also want to review how many candidates you followed up with after your on-campus events, and whether you noticed a direct correlation between candidate follow up and an uptick in applicants.

Recruiting events	
How many schools did you visit?	
How many events, including career fairs, did you attend?	
Average spend per event	
Average applicants per event	

Employers typically attend an average of 40 career fairs during the recruiting year, or about 20 each recruiting season.[12] Consider how your program fares by identifying how many virtual or on-campus events you hosted or attended.

The results differ depending on your needs, so the takeaway to note is how your average spend per event correlates to your average applicants per event YOY. If your expenditure is going up yet your number of applicants is falling, you may want to revisit what you did—or didn't do.

[12] https://www.naceweb.org/talent-acquisition/branding-and-marke-ting/number-of-career-fairs-attended-holds-steady/#:~:targetText=Employers%20attended%20an%20average%20of,the%202018%2D19%20recruiting%20year.

Event engagement	
How many candidates RSVPed to all of your events?	
How many candidates attended or checked in to your events?	
Average engagement per event	
Cost per engaged candidate	

Candidate engagement is important to consider when evaluating the success of your proactive digital and on-campus efforts—what steps are you taking to ensure that candidates remain engaged while learning about your employer brand?

Digital impact	
How many candidates viewed your employer page this recruiting season?	
How many views, in total, did your job posts generate?	
Job views to applicants	

When evaluating the success of your employer brand, did candidate views convert? If your job-views-to-applicants conversion rate is high, that indicates your prowess for engaging your ideal talent candidates in wanting to work for your company.

If your results are less than promising, learn more about what today's early talent candidates look for in their next role by downloading a copy of Handshake's latest Campus to Career and Women in Tech reports.

Success stories and learnings	
Which event(s) generated the highest number of applicants?	
Which event(s) generated the lowest number of applicants?	

Now that you know your highlights and lowlights, what are somewhat some aspects that differentiate your highest performing events from the lowest performing ones?

Closing Thoughts

Whether you're building out your early talent recruiting program from scratch or looking for creative solutions for sourcing hard-to-fill roles, we hope this definitive guide serves as a strong foundation to your early talent recruiting success.

To recap, we explored thoughtful questions to consider on whether your company is set up to embrace early talent, building an employer brand Gen Z loves, getting a leg up on your competition on-campus, writing candidate messages that get responses, and metrics to measure your program's ROI.

As you keep a pulse on these strategies, feel free to revisit chapters or bookmark lessons learned from this guide to help you put these approaches into practice.

There's no reason you have to implement these learnings on your own. Request a consultation to learn how Handshake can help you automate many of these tactics, serve as an efficient, extra team member, and scale your efforts as early as today.