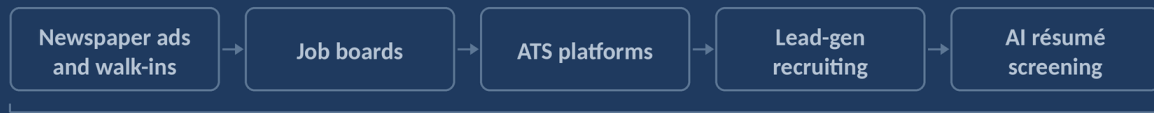


The Recruiting Advantage Is in What Technology Still Doesn't Do



Everyone caught up. Each one became standard.



The lasting edge is in the gap

Design around what the standard technology misses

Eric Galuppo

By Eric Galuppo

THE SHORT VERSION

Every recruiting technology eventually becomes standard. AI is following the same path. **The durable advantage is in what you design around the gap technology leaves behind.**

Every major shift in recruiting creates an advantage.

Then everyone catches up. Then the advantage disappears unless you can do something they can't.

That has happened with almost every major recruiting technology. It's happening again now.

But the real advantage may not be where most companies are looking.

When Recruiting Had Natural Limits

There was a time when recruiting had natural limits. A company ran an ad. Someone saw it, called, walked in, filled out an application or brought in a résumé.

The number of opportunities available to a candidate was limited by what they could find and how much effort it took to pursue each one.

The internet changed that.

Job Boards Gave Candidates the Leverage

Job boards gave employers access to far more candidates. But they gave candidates something equally important: access to far more employers.

That changed the balance.

Today, someone looking for work can find dozens or even hundreds of relevant openings and express interest in multiple jobs within a very short period of time.

For a strong candidate, the result can quickly become overwhelming.

Job alerts. Emails. Text messages. Interview requests. Recruiters calling. Companies asking for additional information.

“The employer may see one application. The candidate may see ten employers competing for attention.”

That changes what recruiting requires.

What I Learned From Real-Time Leads

Years ago, while working in insurance lead generation, I saw a similar shift.

One of the major advances at the time was the real-time lead. Instead of an inquiry sitting somewhere before eventually reaching an agent, the lead could be delivered almost immediately after someone expressed interest.

We taught agents to respond quickly while that interest was still active. Speed created a competitive advantage, because other agents and companies were often competing for the same consumer.

Speed Was Also Service

But speed was also part of service delivery. Someone had just asked for information.

Responding quickly showed that the company was paying attention, while the person was still thinking about the problem they were trying to solve. Waiting hours—or days—created an entirely different experience.

What the Research Showed

Research at the time helped quantify that response window. The 2007 Lead Response Management Study analyzed more than 15,000 web-generated leads and more than 100,000 call attempts.

It found that the likelihood of contacting and qualifying a lead declined significantly as the time between the inquiry and the first attempt increased.

Several years later, research published in Harvard Business Review audited 2,241 U.S. companies and found wide differences in how quickly businesses responded to online inquiries.

In a separate analysis of 1.25 million sales leads, **the researchers found that companies attempting contact within an hour were nearly seven times as likely to qualify a lead as companies that waited even an hour longer.**

The Same Conditions Now Exist in Recruiting

Those studies were about sales leads, not job candidates. But the underlying condition is increasingly present in recruiting.

Someone expresses interest. They have alternatives. Their attention can move quickly.

A company that responds tomorrow may believe it responded promptly. But another employer may already have started a conversation, answered questions and scheduled the next step.

Responding quickly isn't only about getting there first. It communicates something:

We saw your interest. We're interested too.

That makes response time part of the candidate experience, not merely recruiting efficiency.

Candidate acquisition does not end when someone clicks Apply. In some ways, that is when the competition begins.

“Speed is part of the candidate experience, not just recruiting efficiency.”

Technology Keeps Changing the Advantage

Every Edge Became Standard

The move from newspaper ads and walk-ins to online recruiting created an advantage for companies that understood it early. Eventually, everyone posted jobs online.

Applicant tracking systems created another advantage. They helped companies distribute jobs, organize applications and manage increasing candidate volume. Eventually, those systems became standard.

Applying marketing and lead-generation principles to recruiting created another opportunity. Better messaging, broader distribution, lower-friction applications and attention to conversion could dramatically increase candidate flow.

FROM MY OWN WORK

- For a national security company, I replaced a **\$20,000-a-month** job advertising budget that was still missing hiring targets with about **\$300 a month** in optimized postings, and beat its previous applications and hires.
- During COVID, branches I supported reported up to **48 hires in a single week**.
- For a regional security company, we cut ad spend from \$5,000 to about \$300 a month while reducing unbillable overtime by **about 90%**.

The Bottleneck Moved

“More applicants did not create more recruiter hours. So the bottleneck moved.”

The limitation was never just how many applicants a company could attract. **It was how many people the company could afford to understand.**

Filters Check Boxes. They Miss Potential.

Companies responded by building filters: requirements, questions, résumé reviews, scoring, knockout criteria. Those tools made volume manageable.

But most screening became very good at determining whether someone checked the expected boxes, and much less capable of discovering what might exist underneath them.

A candidate may lack the exact experience listed in the job description but have adjacent experience that translates well. Someone with limited direct experience may demonstrate the communication, judgment or situational understanding the employer actually values.

A company may take pride in developing people and promoting from within. But it cannot develop potential it never recognizes.

Qualification and potential are not always the same thing. Historically, discovering the difference required a conversation. And conversations require time.

Now AI is changing that constraint.

A Résumé Is Not a Conversation

Reading Résumés Is Becoming Infrastructure

AI can read résumés quickly, compare qualifications against requirements and help prioritize applicants. Those capabilities are useful.

But as more companies use similar AI to read the same résumés against similar requirements, that capability becomes less of a competitive advantage. It starts becoming infrastructure.

The more interesting question is: **What can the technology do that we have not fully designed the recruiting process around yet?**

Conversation at Scale

A résumé shows where someone worked. It doesn't tell you what you might learn if you actually spoke with them.

A recruiter can ask a question, hear the answer, recognize something interesting and ask another. The problem has always been scale. Hundreds of applicants require hundreds of conversations.

Conversational AI is already changing that constraint. **Not because it can read another résumé, but because it can begin the initial conversation through text.**

Tools that handle chat-first screening, text-to-apply and automated follow-up are already in production at large employers. That capability is real, and it is quickly becoming standard.

A candidate can receive a text immediately after applying and begin a structured conversation without waiting for a recruiter.

The system can ask questions, respond to answers and ask relevant follow-ups. It can clarify something ambiguous on the résumé, explore adjacent experience and give someone who doesn't perfectly match a conventional profile a chance to provide context.

Why Text, Not Voice (For Now)

For now, I think text is the better environment for that interaction. AI voice technology is advancing quickly, but an unexpected automated voice interview can create friction and undermine the responsiveness the technology was supposed to improve.

Text gives the candidate control over the pace while still letting the employer begin meaningful engagement immediately.

“The objective isn’t to make recruiting feel more automated. It is to use automation to make the process feel more responsive.”

Speed and Understanding No Longer Have to Be Opposites

Historically, there was a practical tension between speed and depth. A company could acknowledge an application immediately, but learning something meaningful about the candidate required human time.

Conversational AI begins to separate meaningful engagement from recruiter availability.

A Candidate Applies at 6:39 p.m.

At 6:39, the candidate can receive a text and begin the initial screening conversation.

Not an automated message saying:

Thanks for applying. Someone will contact you.

A real exchange of information relevant to the position.

The timing, communication window and follow-up rules can still be designed around the employer’s needs and the candidate’s experience.

The Recruiter Still Decides

The résumé, the conversation and the candidate’s responses can then be evaluated against defined, job-related criteria and organized into a structured report for the recruiter.

Those criteria matter. They should be tied to the actual requirements of the job, reviewed for fairness and consistent with the growing rules on automated hiring tools.

The recruiter still makes the judgment. But the recruiter begins with substantially more information, and the candidate has already experienced the company as responsive.

The company that engages first is not guaranteed to hire the candidate. But it has entered the candidate’s attention while the interest that caused the application is still active.

Just as with real-time leads years ago, speed becomes part of service delivery. The candidate is forming an impression of the company while the company is evaluating the candidate.

That is a very different use of AI than simply reading résumés faster.

Customization Changes the Equation

Many of today's platforms already do impressive things. An ATS can distribute jobs, provide landing pages, collect applications, automate communication and manage workflows. AI can read résumés and help prioritize applicants.

But there is a fundamental limitation to anything that comes out of the box:

“Everyone else can buy the same box.”

Capability Isn't the Same as Fit

An ATS may provide a landing page. That doesn't mean the landing page converts well for a particular position.

It may provide an application form. That doesn't mean the questions, length or sequence are right for the candidates the company is trying to attract.

It may provide automated communication. That doesn't mean the communication creates engagement.

Different Problems Need Different Processes

A difficult-to-fill position may require a different candidate experience than one receiving hundreds of qualified applicants.

One company may be losing candidates during the application. Another may generate plenty of applicants but take too long to engage them. Another may have enough candidates and enough speed but still struggle to identify which people deserve recruiter attention.

Those are different problems. They should not automatically have the same recruiting process.

Design Begins After the Candidate Responds

An out-of-the-box system may also be able to send a candidate a text. That isn't the advantage. What happens after the candidate responds is where design begins.

What questions are asked? What changes based on the candidate's answer? What experience deserves another question rather than an automatic rejection?

When should the conversation move to a recruiter, and what should the recruiter receive?

The technology provides the ability to have the conversation. Customization determines whether it is the right conversation.

The Candidate Is Evaluating You, Too

The process also has to be considered from the candidate's side. How easy is it to express interest? Does the interaction feel relevant to the job they actually applied for?

Can they explain something that doesn't fit neatly into a checkbox? Do they understand what happens next?

Recruiting is not only a company evaluating a candidate. The candidate is experiencing the company at the same time.

The Gap Is Where the Advantage Lives

That is why I don't think the next recruiting advantage will come simply from adopting AI.

Everyone will have AI.

The same thing happened with job boards.

The same thing happened with applicant tracking systems.

The same thing happened with automation.

Technology eventually levels the playing field.

"Capability is becoming standard. Judgment is not."

Qualify for This Job, or Fit Best Somewhere?

Today's tools can hold the conversation. Most are built to answer one question: does this candidate qualify for this job? Knockout questions, minimum qualifications, a yes or no.

That's filling a position. **The better question is: where does this candidate fit best?**

Why Matching Matters

Security shows why. A single company may staff a hospital emergency room, a corporate lobby, a retail store and an overnight patrol. Each post asks for something different: calm under pressure, polish with the public, a sharp eye, steady reliability.

A candidate who isn't right for one post may be ideal for another. A process built to fill one requisition never sees that.

Rigid rules also screen out people who could have been a strong fit, like the hotel worker whose night shifts translate to security, or the warehouse lead who managed a crew and handled drivers at the gate. **In an industry moving toward customer service, those are often the hidden gems.**

Not every role works this way. Some have qualifications that can't flex, like a required license or certification, and a standard screen is the right tool. But wherever the work varies by site and talent comes from many backgrounds, matching beats filtering.

Judgment Is the Design Layer

The tool gives you the ability to have the conversation. **Judgment decides what the conversation should be:**

What to ask, and what to skip.

When a gap deserves one neutral question, and when it deserves none.

What counts as evidence, and what stays unknown.

Which open role this person is actually best suited for.

Where the AI stops and the recruiter begins.

The recruiter gets a recommendation, not a verdict.

That's not a software problem. It's a structural one.

Early adopters gain an advantage by getting to new technology before everyone else.

A more durable advantage comes from seeing the gaps the technology leaves behind—and designing around them.

Because eventually, everyone catches up.

And once everyone has the same technology, the advantage isn't having it.

It's the judgment you bring to it.