



Telecom Provider Reduces Call Center Cost-per-hire by 80%

One of the most significant challenges facing services organizations today is the need to identify and deploy talent quickly. For SaskTel, a major Canadian telecommunications service provider about to roll out a brand new technology to its client base, the demand for qualified personnel in its Customer Relationship Center was urgent.

“Our Customer Relationship Center (CRC) needed call center service representatives, and it needed them quickly,” says Kevan McBeth. As HR Manager of Recruitment Solutions for the company’s Strategic Planning and Staffing department, McBeth is responsible for filling that need.

“We were about to launch an important new product,” he explains, “and the sales and marketing support of the CRC would be crucial in the success of that launch. The challenge is that every person we hire for the CRC requires three weeks of training. In the past, the CRC would come to us with its hiring requirements and say ‘give us this many candidates by this training date.’ We would then scramble to come up with the people. It was completely reactive, and we had to change that process.”

In 2002, when he started working with Strategic Planning and Staffing to fix the hiring problem, McBeth began by examining the candidate screening process—one that caused recruiters to spend the majority of their time with candidates who proved to be unqualified for the job. He saw an opportunity to address this issue with an online skills assessment system provided by leading skills measurement company Brainbench.

“We needed a solution that would identify potential top performers earlier in the process, boost our hiring success rate, and give us a proactive jump on CRC’s recruiting needs,” he says. “Not only did we achieve what we were looking for, but we were able to deliver and capture value for everyone involved in the process.”

Online Assessment Reduces Screening Burden for Recruiters

SaskTel’s old screening process required recruiters to evaluate a candidate with a role-playing simulation. One recruiter would play the caller, and the other recruiter would proctor the simulation. This required 10 to 15 minutes of preparation and the simulation itself took approximately 30 minutes. On a typical day, two recruiters would be able to accommodate seven to eight time slots for interviews. Of those time slots, typically two or three candidates would be qualified—a success rate of approximately 30%.

Solution at a Glance: Online Skills Assessment for Call Center Candidate Pre-Screening

Problem:

Recruiter-intensive candidate screening process limits organization’s ability to fill call center positions.

Solution:

Automate candidate pre-screening with online assessment of key skills. Advance top performers to interview and hiring process.

Result:

Online pre-screening solution with objective skills metrics delivers improvements across the recruitment process:

- Cost-per-hire reduced from \$420 to \$80 (80%)
- Candidate interview-to-hire ratio rises from 37% to 80%
- Significant drop in post-hire attrition
- A 400% improvement in recruiting production

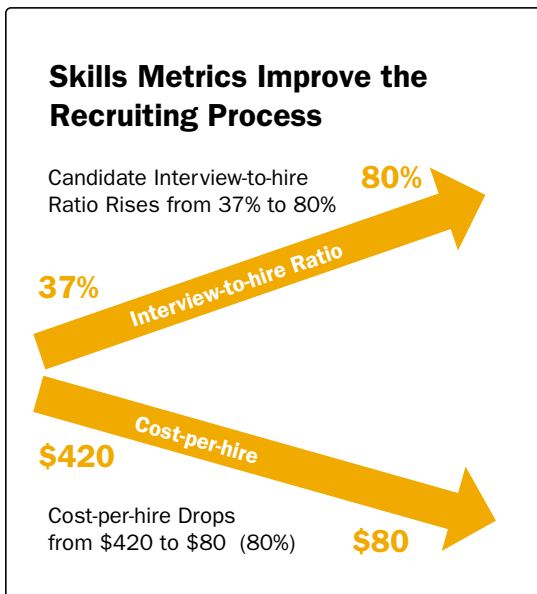


“Recruiters actually spent the majority of their time with unsuccessful candidates,” says McBeth. “By replacing that simulation with an online skills test, we could give them a way to identify and interview only pre-qualified candidates. The difference was amazing.” Instead of going directly through a simulation, the candidate would be assigned an online SaskTel call center skills assessment. The candidate would complete the assessment, with immediate results delivered online to the recruiter.

The skills assessment score would help determine the candidate’s suitability for an interview. With pre-qualified candidates, the interviews were shorter and more candidates could be evaluated. As a result, two recruiters are now able to evaluate up to 30 pre-screened and qualified candidates in one day. Of those, 25 would go on to become successful hires. The success rate of candidates interviewed soared from 30% to more than 80%.

“Our success in speeding up the recruiting process was great,” says McBeth, “but to achieve that success, we needed to get everyone to agree to replace the simulation with an online test. We needed to prove that the test was challenging, difficult to cheat, fair, and relevant to our unique needs.”

“By replacing that simulation with an online skills test, we could give recruiters a way to identify and interview only pre-qualified candidates. The difference was amazing.”



Computer Adaptive Testing Technology Ensures Integrity of Solution

“As with any new solution, gaining buy-in was crucial. At the outset of our implementation process, everyone involved had several concerns,” explains McBeth. “First, there was the issue of security. We didn’t want a test that someone could duplicate or otherwise abuse to gain an unfair advantage. If a conventional test template gets out in public, it may not only compromise our recruiting effort, but it would also hurt our image as an innovative e-business.”

The online assessment system gave SaskTel a solution for ensuring test integrity through Computer Adaptive Testing technology. This technology enables the online testing engine to dynamically select each question, determining difficulty based on the test-taker’s answer to the previous question. “With Computer Adaptive Testing, we didn’t have to worry about keeping a template secure, because we were not delivering duplicate tests,” says McBeth.

“The questions are designed to provide a challenge in an open-book format, so security and fairness were ensured without requiring us to implement cumbersome procedures.”

Once Strategic Planning and Staffing established that the security issue was being addressed, the group set out to win the approval of employees and of the employee union, a process that required validation. The assessment’s Computer Adaptive Technology and ISO 9001-2000 certification helped gain the confidence of these groups. To gain final acceptance, however, McBeth’s group had to run the new screening process side-by-side with the old simulation system.



Refinement and Validation: Assessment System Wins Confidence of Candidates and Recruiters Alike

The test that SaskTel initially adopted for its screening process was a standard Brainbench Outbound Sales Skills assessment. To gain support for the test and the online assessment process, McBeth's group met with the CRC and laid out a proposal. They would screen 50 candidates with both the online Outbound Sales Skills assessment and the old system, keeping the results of each process separate to ensure validity.

They found that the online skills assessment qualified candidates with the same level of predictability as the old screening process. With the test producing quantifiable and parallel results, the CRC and the Strategic Planning and Staffing department agreed on a phased-in approach, slowly eliminating the old process and replacing it with the online skills assessment. "We saw that we were qualifying the right people with the online solution, and we were doing it much faster," says McBeth. "We spent less time recruiting. We achieved more success, and we used fewer recruiters."

Decision-makers Capture Value of Improved Business Process

One of the most important and difficult challenges facing a company as it implements any human capital solution is the task of capturing value. For McBeth's group, however, the recruiting process left room for identifying a considerable source of value to the company. To capture that value, McBeth quantified the recruiter time and expense needed to identify a candidate, and then used those metrics to make the business case. He calculated the total cost-per-hire of the old system at approximately \$480 per hire. The new system reduced that cost to approximately \$80 per hire.

"Getting the business case down on paper is very important in an implementation such as this," he explains. "Fortunately, the case for us was very clear. An online skills assessment system dramatically improved our recruiting process." Today, McBeth's team is applying the process to recruiting for other departments within the company, including the company's Service Technician Group. In this implementation, managers are also taking advantage of the system's flexibility to create a customized test that addresses SaskTel's unique needs

"It's a winning solution," he says. "We have now achieved the proactive stance that we need to identify the right people, in time, to meet the demands of our service. It makes us a better company."

"An online skills assessment system dramatically improved our recruiting process."