20 Plants for a Fresher Office
Why You Should Use e-Verify
5 People for Your Digital Marketing Dream Team
How to Find Employees Using Social Media
35 Sites to Find Freelancers

25 Hiring Mistakes To Avoid

SPOTLIGHT:
Wonolo finds Staff for Hourly or Daily Jobs
An investment in human assets is one of the best investments for small businesses. Good people are everything. Find out how to choose candidates confidently.

How To Use Social Media To Find Employees

Why do you need to look beyond when there is a high possibility that you find the right candidates on social networking sites?

20 Indoor Plants That Can Improve Your Office Environment

Here's a list of 20 indoor plants to consider for your office environment.
There are dozens of online marketplaces that connect small businesses with freelancers. See what each is best for.

Digital marketing is essential to small business growth. But do you know what skills to look for when building your digital marketing team?

E-Verify is an online system that helps you verify whether a potential employee is eligible and authorized to legally work in the U.S.

Sometimes, you need some extra help for an event or busy time. In those cases, being able to find reliable help, quickly, is what’s most important.

"Ban the Box" refers to a growing number of laws that would limit whether or when employers may inquire into arrest or conviction records of job applicants. Here’s what you need to know.
Where would your business be without your team?

I’ll tell you where mine would be. Nowhere.

You know those small business failure statistics you read about? Good people make all the difference between thriving in business and becoming a statistic.

That’s why we decided to make the September issue all about people.

A great team starts with hiring the best you can afford. Avoid committing the hiring mistakes outlined in our cover story. Don’t forget the must-have list of 10 interview questions to ask. And read about the “Ban the Box” movement that may affect whether and when you can inquire into an applicant’s criminal background.

When it comes time to make a job offer, do you use the federal government’s e-Verify service? We have the skinny on what e-Verify is all about.

Need temporary or freelance help? Look no further than our article identifying sites to find freelancers.

This month’s Small Business Spotlight is on Wonolo.com, a site that matches workers for hourly or daily jobs, such as to help out at a tradeshow.

The impact of social media on small businesses has been huge. Make sure you have a digital marketing dream team -- we explain the five people you need on it. And if you’re wondering how to use social media to find people to hire, we have answers.

Finally, our rundown of the 20 best indoor plants will help make your workplace enjoyable. There’s this and much more.

Wishing you much success

Anita Campbell
CEO and Publisher
@Smallbiztrends

PS, check back next month in October for the Marketing Tips and Tools Edition of the Magazine. For a copy of our Editorial Calendar, visit http://sbt.me/3qo.
The Small Business Trends News Report

Snapchat Video is Getting Huge
While YouTube and Facebook duke it out for video supremacy on the Web, a mobile messaging app called Snapchat boasts its videos now receive 4 billion views daily. That's impressive even if the videos on Snapchat, like all other content, can only be viewed for seconds before vanishing.

And Speaking of Mobile Messaging Apps ...
If you're looking for customers you once connected with on social media, a recent report suggests where you might find an increasing number of them. Pew Research Center says 36 percent of smartphone owners use mobile messaging apps like WhatsApp, Kik, and iMessage. And 17 percent say they use temporary messaging apps like Snapchat and Wickr.

Facebook Messenger Becomes the Second Most Popular Mobile App
Facebook's Messenger app has toppled YouTube's mobile app from its former number two status in terms of popularity, according to comScore data. That also means that Facebook has the two most popular mobile apps in the land. The mobile app for Facebook's main site currently occupies the number one popular spot in the United States.

Pinterest Hits 100 Million Monthly Users
It's no Facebook or Twitter, but the image-based social site certainly has its supporters. If your business isn't using this social site, you may want to reconsider. A long list of bigger brands already use the platform, especially eCommerce and retail businesses. But you don't need to be in retail to leverage Pinterest. Find a competitor using it and pick up a few tips to emulate.

Shopify May Gain From Amazon Webstores' Demise
All those merchants on Amazon Webstores will have to take their business elsewhere when the eCommerce giant shuts down the service next year. And it looks like one of those places might be Shopify. The eCommerce hosting platform recently revealed it had been named Amazon's preferred migration partner.

Shawn Hessinger
Executive Editor
@Shawn_Hessinger
An investment in human assets is one of the best investments for small businesses. Good people are everything. Find out how to choose candidates confidently.
Talent search company Caliper estimates that hiring the wrong person could cost a company on average $20,000 a year. Some would put that estimate much higher.

Increase your chances of making your next hire a great match for your small business, by avoiding these 25 hiring mistakes:

RECRUITING MISTAKES

1. Not Writing or Updating a Job Description
   How can you know if you've found what you're looking for in a candidate, if you haven't clearly defined it? Write down the main duties and the skills needed. The act of writing it down clarifies your own thinking. A clear job description also helps the candidate decide if the role is right. And it helps co-workers understand what's needed in the role (they may not be aware of everything required, and that can lead to workplace tensions especially if someone internally was passed over).

2. Ignoring Previous Mistakes
   So, the last employee didn't work out. Figure out what went wrong before hiring again. Was the last person not up to the job? Perhaps you need to look for more experience. Or was the problem the inability to get along with co-workers? If so, you might want to emphasize team interviewing this time. Whatever happened, avoid repeating the same hiring mistakes.

3. Not Knowing Market Compensation
   Recruiting will be a frustrating exercise if you are wildly out of the ballpark on pay. Ask other business owners what they pay. Check out salary surveys and advertised positions on job boards.

4. Failing to "Sell" Your Advantages
   Small business owners sometimes feel they can't compete with larger employers. Get over that. Soft benefits like flexible hours or a friendly environment can make a difference. Emphasize every advantage.

5. Sugarcoating the Job
   Persuasively "sell" your company and the career potential -- yes. But don't sugarcoat job challenges. For instance, if your startup has zero procedures in place and you expect the new hire to create those, point it out. Some people aren't comfortable in such an unstructured environment. It's better that he or she discover key challenges ahead of time.

6. Not Considering Internal Candidates
   The quickest way to demotivate employees is to never promote from within. Employees
assume they have no career path. If you must go outside to recruit for a position, take the time to explain why. Emphasize your willingness to promote from within when the situation is right.

7. Not Casting a Wide Enough Net
Online job boards, LinkedIn, even old-fashioned print classifieds can be fantastic ways to find people. Don’t overlook your website, either. Ask around to your contacts in industry groups and the chamber of commerce. And consider whether it might be faster and easier to hire a recruiter to find good candidates.

8. Overlooking Employee Referrals
Get employees engaged in the company’s future by inviting them to refer candidates.

Make sure your job description is updated. Be aware of pay levels in the market. Encourage internal candidates by considering them for promotions.

Employees who refer a new hire feel invested in that person’s success. Consider paying employees a bonus if their referral is hired. Typical referral bonuses in a small business are a few hundred dollars. Make the bonus payable after the probationary period successfully ends.

INTERVIEWING MISTAKES

9. Neglecting to Phone Screen
Hold a phone interview (or Skype interview) first. It saves time by narrowing the interview pool. Spend 15 minutes talking and if the candidate seems like a possible fit, invite him or her to a full interview.

10. Free-styling the Interview Process
This assumes you have an interview process, of course. Is there a written skills test involved? Will you give a tour? How many people from your company will do the interviewing and in what order? Will you have second interviews? Prepare by re-reviewing the candidate’s resume just before starting the interview. Jot down interview questions so you don’t forget something important.

11. Doing All the Talking
Get the interviewee talking. You’ll learn more and get glimpses into personality and character. Does the person convey a sense of responsible competence? Or is he or she a complainer with a tendency to blame others? To help the candidate relax and open
up, find a conversation starter from his or her resume, like a hobby. Ask open-ended questions like "What did you like least about your last job, and why?" not "So you worked for XYZ Company for 3 years, correct?".

12. Not Involving the Team
The final hiring decision is yours. But you’d be wise to consider input from key team members. Others may spot things you missed. Besides, existing employees may resist a new hire they feel was foisted on them with no input.

13. Looking for Another You
The person you’re interviewing across the desk reminds you of a younger you. This, experts say, is not the right person for your company. You may call yourself your harshest critic, but when he or she is right across from you, you’re more likely to be a little biased. Worse yet, JetBlue CEO and Stanford University professor Joel Peterson says, "An unchecked tendency to hire people just like you can be discriminatory; if it means you’re excluding people because they’re different, that can spell legal trouble."

JOB OFFER MISTAKES

14. Not Checking References
One of the most common hiring mistakes is discounting references. It’s true today that some former employers are reluctant to say much due to legal reasons. But other references may be candid – or reveal more than they intend. Ask questions about the candidate’s work ethic, accomplishments, duties and reasons for leaving prior jobs. You might just get revealing answers.

15. Failing to Do a Background Check
Everyone deserves a fresh start, sure. But know who you’re bringing into your company. And don’t ignore red flags just because the person is likable. If a background check raises issues such as long gaps in work history, or discrepancies about education and experience, seek explanations until you’re satisfied.

16. Wearing Social Media Blinders
Check the candidate’s social profiles. How would you like to discover, belatedly, that your shiny new hire makes snide remarks about customers on Twitter, barely disguising their identities? (Customers read social media, too!)

17. Choosing a Paper Tiger
An impressive resume does not necessarily equal a great employee. You don’t hire the resume, you hire the person handing it to you. Follow your gut. A niggling uncertainty may be your subconscious speaking. If you’re not sure, bring the person in for another interview.

18. Hiring Unqualified Relatives
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a critical role, such as sales, it can be costly to hire a relative who’s not qualified. It could even jeopardize your company. Nor is it fair to relatives to put them into high-pressure roles they’re not ready for. If you’re committed to hiring green family members, slot them into less crucial roles. Then they can learn the ropes over time.

**19. Thinking You Can Train ANYone**

Hiring an inexperienced candidate may save money near term. But can your company afford a long learning curve? Besides, some people may never perform satisfactorily no matter how much training they get.

**20. Hiring Someone Unenthusiastic About the Job**

Your prospect should want, really want, one job ... the one you’re filling. David Finkel, the founder and CEO of Maui Mastermind wrote for The Huffington Post, "Ask them, ‘Before we do this final round of interviews with our top three candidates, I want to protect your time and our time, is this a position that you definitely want?’"

**21. Hiring Too Fast**

Managers sometimes rush to hire out of a feeling of desperation. In the long run it’s better to go with temporary help or limp along short-handed until you are confident you’ve found the right person.

**22. Taking Too Long**

On the other hand, one of the biggest hiring mistakes is taking an unreasonable time to decide. Don’t let months go by. You’ll lose that candidate.

**23. Not Issuing a Job Offer in Writing**

Always put the job offer in writing. It avoids misunderstandings and legal problems. The offer letter should be based on standard language approved by an attorney familiar with employment law in your state. The job offer also should state any required contingencies such as passing a background check or drug test.

**24. Having a Weak Onboarding Process**

You’ve invested a lot of time and money to bring on a new person (in terms of recruiting fees, interviewing time, pay). Take the time to onboard the person properly. Introduce him or her around. Don’t overwhelm with HR paperwork the first day. Don’t use company-speak or internal jargon without explaining it. Encourage existing employees to help the person get acclimated to your company culture.

**25. Not Communicating Enough**

Your business is not the same as every other business. Do not assume that because a person has experience that he or she needs no training in what THIS particular job involves. Your company’s circumstances may be night-and-day different from the person’s last job. Your new employee can’t magically read your mind to understand your expectations or important company goals. Spend time talking with your new hire to pave the way toward success.
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How to Use Social Media to Find Employees

Why do you need to look beyond when there is a high possibility that you find the right candidates on social networking sites?

Social media has transformed how businesses recruit today. Consider that, on a monthly basis, more than 288 million people use Twitter and 300 million use Instagram. Even more, about 890 million a day, use Facebook.

Social platforms are marketing platforms, but hiring managers and recruiters are increasingly turning to them to find talent too. You, the small business owner, should be using social media to find employees as well.

It’s one solution to cutting the costs associated with more traditional methods of finding and hiring candidates. If you visit campuses and career fairs, you, of course, will need to pay for your travel and other expenses. Also the price of advertising (via digital and print vehicles) is growing costlier.

In addition, you can spend an enormous amount of it screening people via phone and in-person interviews. So social media recruiting can help you reduce those costs and also save lots of time — provided you do it right.

To help you save money as you search online for job candidates, you might consider the following when it comes to using social media to find employees.

1. Find Where Potential Employees Are
Find out which social media sites are the ones used by your potential hires. This requires that you do some research. Maybe you should consider asking your own employees, formally or informally which social media sites they prefer. Focus on the larger sites like LinkedIn as well as industry-specific social networks.

2. Don’t Forget Your Own Social Media Accounts
Social media is all about staying in touch with friends, as well as meeting new people. Remember to share with your own personal
network that you are looking for candidates. The larger your personal network is the better. So be sure to connect with the proper influencers to expand your reach.

3. Social Media Is A Two-Way Street
When using social media to find employees, don’t sit back and wait for job seekers to knock on your online door. Instead, make sure your profiles are updated and fresh. Also remember, corporate culture is what the new generation of employees wants to know about — so give them their fill. Communicate in a clear, honest way what it’s like to work at your company. Furthermore, the best approach is to constantly work on building relationships so you can access a pool of great candidates.

4. Create Social Media Value
Create a robust company profile and systematically tweet and post new job openings, as well as news about your company and industry. If you make your tweets and posts of genuine value to players in your industry, more people will follow you — and apply to openings about which you tweet.

5. Enlist Your Workforce
Allow your employees to share their experiences at your company with their friends via social media. Your employees can aid your recruiting efforts and help spread the word your company is a great place to work. Insight into the organization provided by your actual employees tends to be a powerful way to reach job seekers. Know it helps to learn about the differences between the “big three” – meaning LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter – so you know how to best utilize each.

6. LinkedIn Is The Most Professional-Oriented Of The Big Three
On this site, alone, you can find and meet and collaborate with qualified professionals. The site boasts more than 380 million members in over 200 countries and territories and claims that two new members join per second. Also, more than 39 million students and recent college graduates use LinkedIn, which is perhaps the most direct pipeline to new hires.

7. Facebook Is The Largest
Of the social networking sites, Facebook is the biggest, with more than 1.5 billion users. It is intended to connect friends, family, and business associates. The model has expanded to include connections to organizations, businesses, and interests, which is worth noting. You can find where the passion resides for your business by spending time on Facebook. Once you gather some names, maybe a closer looker at their LinkedIn profile would help you to better evaluate potential hires.

8. The Strength Of The Tweet
Twitter, the “microblogging” social networking service, is known for its 140-character
tweets. Twitter is a handy way to spread the word in a multitude of ways. Tweeting needs to be done frequently, and the tweets need to be engaging enough to attract attention.

Now that you have the basics, the next step is how to better leverage each channel.

9. The Most Obvious Ways To Use LinkedIn
You can post job openings and search for candidates. You also can purchase job credits and pay less per job posting. You can sign up for LinkedIn Talent Advantage, which will provide you with tools specific for recruiting on LinkedIn, and you can use the LinkedIn Job feature. If you don’t have the budget to pay for job postings or join the Talent Advantage, you can still use the free services.

10. Join A Social Group
Aside from constantly building your LinkedIn connections, you can join groups that will expose you to potential candidates. For example, if you are always looking for writers, find a group that would have professional writers as members. Once you join relevant groups find ways to reach out to others by posting content or responding to what others post. Also try to watch people active in the group. They will usually ask interesting questions, as well as provide their answers to questions posted by others. Doing this could help you find good candidates.

11. Use Your Status Box
If you use your network activity box (or status box) to craft a post that says you are looking to hire people, you have yourself a free ad. Don’t forget to include contact info so interested parties can follow through.

12. Once You Find Someone Who Looks Promising
Once you find someone who looks promising, then you should review their profile, paying attention to how complete it is, for example. Also see if they have recommendations, noting how recent some of them are and whether they have reviews from peers, managers and colleagues versus only friends. Do they belong to the right groups — or do they belong to some that you weren’t aware of?

13. With Facebook, Turn To The Directory
Use it to search for users, pages, groups and applications. You can post job ads at a range of prices based on how long you want the ad to run, among other things. You need to provide basic information such as location, job category, subcategory, title, and description.

14. Facebook Pages: Free And Effective
A Facebook Page is a public platform that enables you to share your business and products with Facebook users. You can share that you are seeking to fill a position right on the page and then analyze those who reply to you.

15. Post A Facebook Ad
In creating such an ad, you can choose the exact audience to target. You can set the characteristics required of the people who will view your ad. This can be based on a group’s age, sex and specific keywords. Facebook will then calculate different options for you, as well as a range of prices based on duration and ultimate reach. As an example of how Leveraging social media to find the right talent is a way to cut costs which otherwise need to be spent on costlier methods of finding people.
Using social media to recruit has two sides to it. We’ve mentioned the benefits. Now, here are the hiring mistakes to avoid:

**1. Discriminate**
State and Federal laws prohibit discriminatory hiring decisions based on color, religion, race, and more. Then, you need to be mindful of the hot-button issues like sexual harassment. Don’t inadvertently generate a problem, and do all you can to not discriminate.

**2. Believe Everything**
How do you know if what you read about someone on social media is true? Maybe the information is fraudulent or incorrect on some level, and this could be either intentionally or unintentionally on the poster’s part. Remember to check references and call past employers, even if only to confirm work history.

**3. Forget A Hard Copy**
It is wise to print out all the pages of social media content related to a hiring decision. In case of rejection, you also should print out that page as well in the event that your decision is challenged in some way.

**4. Ignore Laws**
Laws linked to social media recruiting processes are on the books. Even on social media, for example, companies that provide credit reports to employers—and employers using these reports also must comply with the Fair Credit Reporting Act. Be familiar with all the laws governing social media hiring so you can defend yourself if you have to.

**5. Get Too Much Information**
There is a lot of good information out there that will help you get to know your candidates. There is a double-pronged meaning to the word “good” in this sense. As a rule of thumb, it’s better not to sift too deeply through someone’s social media account, as you may learn answers to questions that would never arise during the typical hiring process.

What you know can hurt you. Many sites advise that you stay away from social media sites that provide more data than is needed to make a hiring decision. This will reduce, if not eliminate, the risk of a discrimination lawsuit.

To benefit from Facebook’s fine-tuning, if you seek to fill an entry-level position, you can target the ad to a younger age demographic. Just don’t make the criteria too specific or you may not get the applicants you want.

**16. Tweet Your Job Openings**
For example: “Seeking a Sales Rep in NYC. Salary is very competitive, apply at (your shortened url).”

You also can run a quick search on Twitter (search.twitter.com) to find if someone is discussing a keyword of interest. Searches also can be conducted by location, by industry or interest and more.

**17. Use #Hashtags To Filter Searches**
When using social media to find employees, include the hashtag with a keyword in your tweet and it will be instantly searchable.
Examples of hashtags you might consider using: #job, #jobpost, #employment, #recruiting, #hiring, #career, #staffing, #salesjob, #NAJ (that is Twitter lingo for 'Need A Job?') Remember you are limited to 140 characters. Use as many hashtags as you want, but remember to be concise and engaging, too.

18. Analyze A Candidate’s Twitter History
When analyzing candidates on Twitter, you’d want to evaluate their activity to see how often they tweet, and what they tweet. Also worth considering is whether they fully utilize Twitter by retweeting tweets, say, versus tweeting about their own content only.

If you are seeking entry-level candidates, here are some tips to help you engage the college-graduate demographic on social media.

19. Be Specific And Informative
College students tend to focus on jobs that meet specific qualifications—and they tend to want to be truly interested in the specific job itself. The best way to engage them is to provide the most information you can about the position. You may want to focus on firing them up by telling "success stories" related to in-house promotions. Or maybe highlighting work-life balance is a strong way to go.

20. Cut Through The Noise
You need to be informative, but not wordy. And you need to pique their interest as well. Use pictures, video, even bright colors to grab their eye.

21. Avoid The Trite
Long lists of qualifications can be tiresome to read. You need to be creative when targeting college graduates. Use humor, maybe a more conversational tone as well. Talk to them on their level—but don’t talk down to them.

22. Engage In Hand-holding
Encourage them to ask questions. Let them know you are there to address any concerns they may have about taking the plunge. Here it’s very important to be responsive to them. This group needs to be cultivated carefully. They’ll turn away from anyone who tried to give them orders or is too harshly critical. You don’t want to seem too demanding, either.

There are countless ways to use social media to find new candidates. These tips can be used as your jumping off point. Shape them to fit your needs as well. Maybe concentrate on one platform, for example. And don’t forget that recruiting people will take time and may cost some money as well.

Social media is a difficult channel to master but can be highly rewarding in terms of helping you your operation with the right professionals who enjoy working with you.

And for as many ways there are to use social media to find the next member of your team, there are definitely some things not to do.
20 Indoor Plants That Can Improve Your Office Environment

Here’s a list of 20 indoor plants to consider for your office environment. Be sure to choose one that fulfills the needs of your work space. Enjoy!

Plants can add a lot of organic character to an otherwise drab office environment. They can improve air quality and remove impurities. They can add a focal point to your work environment. They can even create helpful separations between workplaces — and a source of peaceful contemplation during your hectic day.

Here’s a list of 20 indoor plants to consider for your office environment. Be sure to choose one that fulfills the needs of your work space. Enjoy!

**Jade Plant**
Jade, or *Crassula ovata*, is a small, succulent plant with small flowers. It requires minimal watering.

In Japanese folklore, the jade plant is known as the "money plant." Legend has it that its presence brings financial success. The reason for having this plant in your office should be crystal clear!

**African Violet**
The African violet, or *Saintpaulia*, is a flowering plant that requires a bit more maintenance than some of the others on this list. However, it takes up very little space, so it can be perfect for small desktops.

**Peace Lily**
The peace lily, or *Spathiphyllum*, is a large, space-filling plant that can also clean the air.

Better yet, it can grow even in low office lighting. The peace lily is ideal for an office space that lacks big windows.

**Chinese Evergreen**
Chinese Evergreen, or *Aglaonema*, makes a great office plant because it requires very little maintenance. It can also thrive in low light and remove toxins from the air.

**English Ivy**
This plant, also known as *Hedera helix*, is a clinging evergreen vine that can reduce airborne fecal matter particles and filter out formaldehyde.

As disturbing as it is to know those airborne...
particles exist, it’s good English Ivy can take care of it. This is another plant ideal for those stale office environments lacking a lot of fresh air circulating.

Parlor Palm
The parlor palm, or Chamaedorea elegans, is actually a small palm tree. This plant is ideal for creating natural separation of space in your office. And on those cold winter days, it can also add a bit of a tropical feel. The parlor palm is perfect for offices because it doesn’t require a lot of light either.

Snake Plant
The snake plant, or Sansevieria trifasciata, has leaves that can grow fairly tall. The shooting dark green leaves have bands of a bright yellow-green on the outside. A healthy snake plant definitely attracts the eye. And a few together make another natural partition.

Gerber Daisy
This flowering plant, also known as Gerbara, is a plant that can filter toxins like benzene, a substance that can be emitted by some printing systems.

Philodendrons
These plants are large climbers, which means they can add some height to small areas. Philodendrons can also survive without a lot of maintenance.

Cactus
These plants are small and come in several different varieties. They do require a significant amount of sunlight, so they are not recommended for dimly lit offices. If you’ve got a window sill that gets a lot of sunlight and tend to be forgetful, a cactus or multiple cacti would be ideal. More often than not, they’d prefer you forget to water them once in awhile.

Warneck Dracaena
This shrub, also known as Dracaena reflexa, can grow to be very tall. It’s another plant that can provide separation of different office areas. And it also combats pollutants commonly found in varnishes and oils. If your office space has hardwood floors, this shooting plant would be ideal.

Ming Aralia
The Ming Aralia, or Polyscias fruticosa, is a tall, bushy plant. It’s perfect for offices that require a bit of privacy between workstations. It also only requires water every couple of weeks.

Spider Plant
This plant, also known as Chlorophytum comosum, is one of the easiest plants to grow indoors. It is often displayed in hanging baskets, so it can also create some visual interest in an office space.

Weeping Fig
The weeping fig, or Ficus benjamina, is a large plant that can filter pollutants from carpets and furniture, such as formaldehyde and benzene. The waxy green leaves on the weeping fig even look the part of the plastic jungle that this plant should help replace.

ZZ Plant
The ZZ Plant, or Zamioculas zamiifolia, is one of the most low-maintenance plants you can find. In addition, it can add
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a tropical feel to your space. And, as a bonus, some of the plants even produce flowers.

**Aloe**
Aloe plants are small enough to easily fit on most desks. They also have air-filtering qualities, with the ability to remove things like formaldehyde and benzene from the air. The gel inside the plant can also be used to treat cuts and burns.

**Umbrella Tree**
The umbrella tree, or Schefflera arboricola, can grow to be quite tall. It’s perfect for creating office privacy. But there are also smaller dwarf versions for desktops.

**Fittonia**
This plant, which is sometimes also referred to as the nerve plant or mosaic plant, can work well in offices because it actually thrives on fluorescent light.

Plus, the over-sized, inside-out look on the leaves of the Fittonia can serve as quite a focal point in your office space.

**Pothos**
The Pothos Plant, or Epipremnum aureum, is a flowering plant that can fit perfectly on most desktops, though it may require occasional trimming. Aside from that, it’s very low maintenance and can be left on a desk for lengthy periods without needing much care.

**Azalea**
This flowering shrub is not only visually appealing, but it can also filter the air to combat formaldehyde. The plant thrives mainly in cool environments, so keep that thermostat low.

Whether your concern is air quality or simply a bit of visual appeal, there are a variety of choices for office plants. Start thinking about transforming your office environment today.

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And for freelancers who themselves operate as solo small businesses, marketplaces have opened up new opportunities and become powerful marketing platforms.

Here are 35 places for small businesses to find freelance assistance and help, and for freelancers to get work:

**GENERAL FREELANCING SITES**

**Upwork**
Elance and Odesk have merged to create Upwork. Now the 800-lb gorilla in the freelance space, it has millions of freelancers. You can find talent for just about any “knowledge industry” speciality your small business may need. With the rating system you see what previous employers think of a freelancer. For freelancers, Upwork offers an escrow payment protection system and millions of employers looking to hire help.

**Guru**
Businesses can find freelancers for thousands of services on Guru.com. Employers get access to 1.5 million freelancers and a time-tracking system that was introduced in 2015.
Freelancer
Freelancer.com is a large freelance site where you can hire freelancers for projects and also post design contests. Freelancer seems to especially cater to online businesses and online entrepreneurs, with sister sites like Warrior Forum and Freemarket, where you can buy and sell websites.

CrowdSite
At CrowdSite.com you create a 140-character ‘shout’ (like a tweet) to describe your project, see who responds, and then negotiate the details with the freelancer. You can also launch a design contest on the site.

Fiverr
Every service is $5.00 at Fiverr. You may have to pay extra to get what you require, though. Stay away from spammy services such as buying social media followers. Instead, go for small projects such as getting a simple image created. New freelancers use Fiverr to establish themselves, offering services for a limited time at rock bottom rates until they develop a portfolio.

Freelanced.com is essentially a messaging board that freelancers pay to access. Small business users can post a job or search freelancer profiles. Payments are made direct to the freelancer without any compulsory escrow service.

Rat Race Rebellion
If your company has positions that could be filled by someone working from home, then Rat Race Rebellion is worth checking out. For employers, the process is as simple as just sending an email with a job description. Freelancers do need to be cautious because contracts and payments are entirely off-site.

FlexJobs
Posting a job is free. People looking for flexible work pay a small monthly fee. FlexJobs also searches the Internet for professional-level flexible jobs and sifts through them, making the freelancer’s job a little easier.
**Wonolo**

Need help for just a day? Or for an hour? Staff very short-term jobs through Wonolo.com. Freelancers, called Wonoloers, get notification via an Android or iPhone app of immediate jobs and can accept via their phone.

**TaskRabbit**

TaskRabbit.com is a place to find workers to perform errands and other tasks. Although the TaskRabbit for Business service shut down, and the focus is on consumers finding help, there’s nothing that prevents a small business from using TaskRabbit say, to find some cleaning help. Freelancers looking to earn extra money can become “Taskers.” The service is currently in “19 cities and counting.”

**Writing Jobs**

Online Writing Jobs is a content service where companies can get content from pre-screened writers with industry-specific expertise. Articles go through a two-stage editing process before they are sent to the employer. Freelancers get paid up to $50 per article.

**DailyPosts**

You can have articles written for your company by qualified subject-specialist writers at Daily Posts. This is a British company that employs writers from the U.S. and around the world. All articles are checked by two editors before they are sent to the business.

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Textbroker
Small business owners can use Textbroker to have content written mainly by U.S. writers. With Textbroker you can specify the quality of the writing you want and only pay higher rates for important articles by better writers.

JournalismJobs
JournalismJobs is the place to find writers for news sites and content requiring a journalistic background.

PitchMe
Your small business can find a journalist to write articles using PitchMe.org. You sign up, describe the articles you need, and journalists pitch you their ideas. You accept one, pay the site and the journalist is paid when you accept the finished article.

VISUAL ARTS JOBS

EnvatoStudio
FreelanceSwitch has merged with EnvatoStudio to form a freelance site that is primarily focused on graphics, website design and programming. Small businesses can find the freelancers they need to design websites, develop apps, and do similar tech and design projects.

Behance
Behance.net, now part of Adobe, is a community of 5 million creative professionals with online portfolios. Businesses can post jobs for $399 per month -- making this service pricey for small businesses.

Aquent
Aquent is akin to an international temp agency in that it interviews and screens temps and freelancers. Businesses can post short and long-term vacancies. Freelancers like the higher rates of pay than are available on most freelancing sites.

ArtWanted
If your small business is looking for original art, then ArtWanted is one place to start. Browse through artists’ work posted for sale or as samples. You can commission artwork by your preferred artist. Freelance artists get exposure and can sell their work.

99Designs
Love ‘em or hate ‘em, design contest sites are one way for a company to get proposals from graphic designers, quickly and easily. At 99Designs.com, you may be sent 50 or more design proposals, and then you only pay once for the winning freelance designer you choose.

DesignHill
DesignHill is another site where you can hold a design contest. You get up to a hundred draft proposals. The winning designer you choose gets paid.

COMPUTERS AND WEB DEVELOPMENT

Computer Assistant
Computer Assistant lets you register on the site and post your problem. Local freelance computer experts bid on the job. The site advertises same day remote and on-site service.

GetACoder
GetACoder is a place to hire low cost offshore help for software programming and other tech projects. Freelance coders are charged a commission by the site.

FreelancerMap
FreelancerMap is a site where IT experts,
and the people who need them, meet up. There is a monthly or annual subscription required that lets you post jobs and see the applicants for those jobs. Skilled freelancers can sign up at Freelancer Map for a small monthly fee. There is a limited free account, too.

**MISCELLANEOUS JOBS**

**SkillBridge**
If your small business needs a consultant to manage an important business project, then SkillBridge is the place to look. The freelancers for hire here are “elite.” Some are former C-level executives.

**Tutor.com**
Is it just knowledge you need, such as to learn accounting? Need to get your employees trained on Microsoft Excel? Go to Tutor.com. Freelancers with knowledge to share can apply to be a tutor, too.

**Arise**
Arise acts as a clearinghouse for customer service work and directs work to qualified freelance personnel (“agents”). Services offered include outbound calling, live chat support and technical support. Freelancers work from home, but will need to form a company and have an email address at that company rather than a free email, like with Gmail or Yahoo.

**JustAnswer**
Need a question answered about a legal issue or computer hardware? JustAnswer has experts to answer your questions within
minutes. All experts’ qualifications and expertise are vetted. The service will cost you less than hiring a local professional. Qualified freelancers can work with Just Answer.com to answer questions in their fields of expertise.

**Update Legal**
If your legal practice requires extra staff, then Update Legal can provide the qualified staff you need on either a temporary or a permanent basis. Legal freelancers will be attracted by the wide range of benefits available, including medical insurance and a 401(k) program.

**Uber, Lyft, Sidecar**
While not freelance marketplaces in the traditional sense, these driving services are ways for freelancers with clean driving records and no criminal history to use their own vehicles to earn extra income. Small businesses could reduce travel expenses by using Uber and Lyft rather than regular taxis. Sidecar gives you a convenient way to outsource time-crucial deliveries.

**CONCLUSION**
Whether you are looking for freelance or temporary help in your business, or are looking to hang out your freelancing shingle, these freelancing sites will give you plenty of places to start.

**Anita Campbell**
CEO and Publisher
@smallbiztrends

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**Manage Your Projects & Organize Anything**

Trello is the free, flexible, and visual way to organize anything with anyone. Drop the lengthy email threads, out-of-date spreadsheets, no-longer-so-sticky notes, and clunky software for managing your projects. Trello lets you see everything about your project in a single glance.

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Occasionally, I hear of people who create their own position in a company, which — let’s face it — sounds pretty cool. I mean, to be someone who’s doing such a bang-up job creating new opportunities and processes that someone else recognizes it and makes a whole new job title? Boy, does that sound fun or what?! A clean slate. A fresh canvas. Who knows what greatness awaits?

Call me a pessimist, but I bet most of those kinds of jobs end up like this cartoon in short order.

Mark Anderson
Cartoonist (www.andertoons.com)
@andertoons
When you first get started in business, you and maybe one or two other people wear all the hats. Not only are you the owner of your business, you’re its accountant, IT manager, customer service representative and marketing rep all at the same time.

Over time though, as your company grows, you’ll find it necessary to branch out and establish teams of specialists. And when this happens, one of the first teams you’ll want to consider building is your digital marketing team.

While there are any number of professionals you could hire at this point, building your digital marketing team will allow you to expand your promotional efforts, bringing in the additional revenue that will enable you to bring on others in the future.

Before you begin hiring these professionals, you’ll want to take a few key steps, including documenting your processes and determining what specialists you’ll need. Once that’s complete, it’s time to get hiring.

Below are the 5 people you should look for first when building your digital marketing team.

**THE MARKETING STRATEGIST**

Your marketing strategist is the person who’s ultimately responsible for deciding on and overseeing your digital promotion efforts. As a result, he or she needs to understand both your company and your buyer personas extremely well.

Once hired, your strategist will work with the rest of your digital marketing team to create a content calendar and keep your efforts on track.

You’ll want to choose someone who already has a strong online presence and a good track record. This is also somebody who’s able to balance the competing priorities of budget and outreach.
Because the strategist needs to have a combination of both analytical and creative skills, filling this role can be a challenge. Ask around for referrals and be sure your interview process is thorough enough to weed out those that won’t actually be able to move the needle for your brand.

**THE SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER**

Your social media manager will be responsible for putting the strategist’s social media marketing plan into action.

He or she will engage customers and other stakeholders on social networking sites. They’re also staying informed about trends and shifts in social media demographics. Your social media manager should be an expert in knowing how to communicate your voice to the outside world in a way your customers will love.

When hiring for this position, thoroughly investigate the candidate’s social media presence. It should show both maturity and flair. Anybody can claim to be a social media expert but a quick check of a candidate’s social profiles should tell you whether he or she is truly able to walk the social media walk.

A good content creator knows you have only seconds to get someone’s attention and is skilled at doing so. That said, finding candidates with all the skills you want can be tricky. But they are out there. As you interview possible content creators, ask to see samples of their work, or ask them to create an interview video for you to demonstrate their skills.

**THE DATA ANALYST**

Without somebody looking over your analytics data, you’ll have no way of knowing whether or not your marketing content is making a difference to your audience. That’s where your new data analyst comes into play.

Your data analyst is responsible for knowing the goals of your marketing efforts and knowing how to measure the results of your social media, written, and video content compared to these target metrics. With the analyst’s help, your digital marketing team will be able to focus its efforts on creating content that connects with customers. They’ll also be able to avoid wasting time and money on things that aren’t effective.

When hiring for this important role, look for data analysts familiar with major social media networks and third-party analytics tools. Also look for those who have the ability to present detailed data in a usable, understandable, and actionable format.

The content creator will work closely with both your strategist and social media manager to create on-voice content for your company. As a result, the person you hire needs to be skilled at both written and verbal communication, and be able to create anything from blog posts to YouTube videos. Ideally, the employee should also be trained in copywriting so that he or she can create content for your website and landing pages.

**THE CONTENT CREATOR**

Content creation is a major priority for most businesses these days. Having a skilled content creator on your digital marketing team will allow you to create more content, more efficiently than if you’re constantly relying on outsourced workers.

Your content creator will work closely with both your strategist and social media
THE TECHNICAL SPECIALIST

Last, but certainly not least, is your technical specialist. This digital marketing team member will be the technical implementer of your marketing strategies.

Since most tools used in digital marketing these days require some level of coding, this person must be well-versed in HTML and CSS.

After joining your company, your technical specialist will work to create templates and help build out your campaigns. He or she must also stay engaged in the realm of emerging technologies and keep informed about the changing trends in digital media. With these skills, the technical specialist can add the polish that simple content alone lacks. That makes him or her a valuable part of your digital marketing team.

When you’re interviewing for this position, it’s a good idea to have another person with you who’s comfortable with technology to ask specific software and coding questions. The last thing you want is to hire a technical specialist who can talk a good game but can’t actually execute your important projects.

If you don’t already have a technical person on your team who can fill this role, have a friend or fellow entrepreneur stand in to thoroughly vet your candidate’s credentials. Will you have the budget to hire all five of these people right away? Probably not, unless you’re the lucky recipient of some serious venture capital funding.

Even if you can only bring on members of your digital marketing powerhouse team one at a time, keep these recommendations at the back of your mind. That way, you can address different needs at the appropriate time, depending on your internal priorities and your budget.

Whether you hire one person or five, having a digital marketing team on hand to manage your efforts will make a big difference in your ability to promote your brand and encourage customers to buy your products and services. With the right specialists in place, you can rest assured that your marketing efforts are in good hands. That will free up your time to focus on other aspects of your business.

How have you considered building a digital marketing team?

Sujan Patel
Cofounder of ContentMarketer.io
@sujanpatel

ClickDimensions Marketing Automation for Microsoft CRM

ClickDimensions is the top-rated marketing automation solution for Microsoft Dynamics CRM. ClickDimensions provides email marketing, forms, surveys and more.

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http://clickdimensions.com
What Is E-Verify and How Does it Work?

E-Verify is an online system that helps you verify whether a potential employee is eligible and authorized to legally work in the United States.

HOW TO USE E-VERIFY

You submit information from an employee’s Form I-9, the Employment Eligibility Verification Form, to E-Verify, which serves as a sort of portal. The new hire’s information is then checked against databases operated by the Social Security Administration and a unit of the Dept. of Homeland Security.

E-Verify then informs you whether the new hire is authorized to legally work in the United States.

Its website claims E-Verify is a free service that can provide results in as little as five seconds. Available nationwide, it is now used by nearly 569,000 employers, including small business owners.

More than 1.4 million employment websites use it, and about 1,400 companies join it each week. Currently, there are 18 states that have active E-Verify use laws in place. Its use is also required by public entities and contractors, according to information provided (PDF) by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The USCIS is the branch of Homeland Security involved with E-Verify.

To enroll your company in E-Verify, you are required to provide basic information. This information includes company name, its doing-business-as (DBA) name, mailing
address and number of employees. Then, you agree to follow E-Verify's rules.

Webinars are available that provide information about various topics, including enrollment.

As for E-Verify's rules, a key one is that you enter the employee's Form 1-9 information within three business days of their start date.

**HOW IT WORKS**

E-Verify sometimes displays a photo for you to compare to the photo on the employee's document. This helps prevent fraud. You can't specifically request a photo comparison. When you are authorized to do so, you compare it to the new hire's photo pasted onto one of these documents: a Permanent Resident Card or "green card," U.S. Passport or Passport Card.

Typically, 98.81 percent of the time, the information you enter matches what's in the government’s databases, resulting in an authorization. Sometimes, E-Verify can't instantly confirm authorization because a manual review of records in the government’s databases is required. E-Verify aims to alert you within 24 to 48 hours if this is the case, then sends the results. If the information doesn't match, procedures are provided for you to follow.

However, according to an April 2014 paper prepared for The Department of Homeland Security by Westat, most companies don’t do this. The report called “Findings of the E-Verify Survey,” (PDF) says most employers using E-Verify simply terminate workers’ employment lacking a final confirmation. The report notes:

“In 2013, most E-Verify companies with workers receiving FNCs [Final Nonconfirmations] reported that their companies always terminated the workers’ employment immediately (83 percent) while a few (8 percent) indicated that they sometimes terminated workers’ employment immediately.”

**E-Verify enables you to verify the identity of the candidates based on their photographs. Sometimes, manual review of records is required.**

**ADDRESSING PROBLEMS WITH THE SYSTEM**

Taking aim at early criticism of E-Verify — that its substantial learning curve required an allotment of time and effort unrealistic for small businesses — the website now provides online tutorials, reference guides and manuals. E-Verify also offers dedicated customer service.

In addition, it prompts you to make decisions before you even enroll, such as who at your company will access E-Verify. Browser system requirements are Firefox (version 3.0 and above), Chrome (version 7.0 and above) or Safari (version 4.0 and above).

E-Verify was developed following the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA). That legislation was signed into law by President Bill Clinton. The purpose was to impose stricter limits on immigration while expanding grounds to deport illegal immigrants, including those convicted of crimes.

**CONCERNS REMAIN**

There remain concerns about the potential impact on small business if E-Verify were made mandatory in the United States. That now seems a distinct possibility.

In early March, the U.S. House Judiciary Committee passed H.R. 1147, also known as the Legal Workforce Act. If made law, it requires every new hire in the United States...
to be electronically verified. (E-Verify may not be the system ultimately used should the law be passed. Any system used, however, will be similar to E-Verify.)

**E-Verify was developed following a legislation signed by President Bill Clinton.**

Notice the language of the bill:

“Amends the Immigration and Nationality Act to direct the Secretary of Homeland Security (DHS) to establish an employment eligibility verification system (EEVS), patterned after the E-Verify system. (Eliminates the current paper-based I-9 system.)”

According to the April 2014 Westat report, some employers still report negative experiences:

“For example, small percentages of E-Verify employers in 2013 agreed that it was sometimes impossible to fulfill E-Verify process obligations (11 percent) or submit case information within deadlines (14 percent). In addition, a few E-Verify employers (ranging 2 to 6 percent) agreed that using E-Verify has made it difficult to attract qualified and work-authorized job applicants, has resulted in some existing employees choosing to leave the employer or in the termination of some existing employees’ employment, or has reduced the employer’s competitiveness.”

Also of note:

“Compared with large companies, small companies were less likely to agree that E-Verify is highly accurate and an effective tool. Small companies were also less likely to agree that the number of unauthorized workers who applied for jobs decreased because E-Verify was used, to agree that using E-Verify resulted in the firing of some existing employees, and to agree that it was sometimes impossible to submit case information by the required deadline. Among companies that have ever had workers who received a TNC [Tentative Nonconfirmation], small companies were also more likely than medium-sized and large companies to indicate that assisting workers with TNCs was a burden.”

The cost of setting up E-Verify “has remained fairly stable,” with the median cost pegged at $100 in all three survey years. However, a footnote to that statement revealed that: “because of the high costs reported by a small number of employers, the median (rather than mean) costs have been used for the survey years.”

**COST STILL AN ISSUE**

Cost has been a chief criticism of E-Verify all along. Commenting in 2013 about the possible impact of E-Verify on small businesses, DeAnne Hilgers of Lindquist & Vennum LLP, explained:

“The costs to employers are significant, especially to smaller employers who do not have HR staff. Often, that HR person is the company owner who is up to his or her elbows with their employees working to make the company successful. When the employer loses an employee, they are losing twice the direct productivity — the lost worker’s and their own.”

One piece of data haunting E-Verify for years is a 2011 finding published by Bloomberg, which suggests that H.R. 1147 would cost employers $2.6 billion to implement.

Overall, public support for E-Verify use is strong. A recent Gallup poll found that 85 percent of likely voters think businesses should be required to use this system.
Hiring a great team is such an important part of running a business. Sometimes, you need some extra help for an event or busy time. In those cases, being able to find reliable help, quickly, is what’s most important.

That’s where Wonolo comes in. Wonolo works with both businesses and job seekers and is the focus of this Small Business Spotlight.

**WHAT THE BUSINESS DOES**

Connects companies with candidates for flexible work.

**BUSINESS NICHE**

Offering flexibility to both businesses and workers. Wonolo makes connections quickly. Businesses that are looking for event staff or temporary help can do so. Workers — the company calls them “Wonoloers” — can find work that fits with their schedules.

A.J. Brustein, co-founder and CEO at Wonolo, says, “We allow companies to find talent today versus next week as traditional temp staffing agencies would generally operate. We also allow our Wonoloers to work whenever, wherever, and for whomever they want — complete freedom and flexibility which was never available before for real jobs.”
Our company is 10 people but we have 5,000 Wonoloers so it actually feels huge. We go out and do jobs with Wonoloers all the time to experience our product and get first-hand feedback from the faces of our company – the contractors in the field, Wonoloers – out there doing the work everyday.”

- Brustein

**HOW THE BUSINESS GOT STARTED**

As part of the Coca-Cola Company, Brustein explains, “We initially created Wonolo inside the Coca-Cola Company. We spent a lot of time with Coke’s front line workforce, seeing if we could find some ways to leverage that workforce to give us a leg up in whatever company we ended up building.

“We while working with their merchandisers, we saw the same thing happening almost every single day. They would get a call sometime during the day to go service an outlet that wasn’t on their route. Usually to restock a shelf or build a display or something. These unexpected calls would cost the company a lot of money — make the merchandiser work overtime, [result in] extra transportation cost, delay his visit to the other retailers, and while the product is out of stock, consumers are buying Pepsi instead of Coke.

“We started saying to these merchandisers, why don’t I go and stock the shelves and you keep on your route and I’ll meet you at XX store. Then we got to thinking, this job isn’t that difficult if I can do it and I am not a trained merchandiser. So why couldn’t another merchandiser do it, or another Coke employee do it, or even some random person shopping at that store right at that moment? "Coke, and other businesses, consider only their existing employee pool, and often only considered the person who was assigned to that store. But in reality, the only important thing is to get that shelf stocked — the means doesn’t matter, only the end. So, we saw an opportunity to do something about that and created Wonolo to solve this problem.”

**BIGGEST WIN**

Getting the first customer. Brustein says, “We had spent months trying to convince Coke to roll out Wonolo in a test market but it was very slow going and after months and months of waiting, we decided to move outside of Coke and find another first customer.

“We found an eCommerce company with a couple hundred employees that was struggling to keep up with its growth and couldn’t find talent, having had bad experiences with other staffing solutions and not able to hire their own people quickly enough. They said if we could help them, they would give us a try.

“We didn’t have any Wonoloers at that point, so we used our own company to fill the wonoloer needs. As we scaled, we found a way to source Wonoloers and take them off our balance sheet. Since we were in the business of connecting people, it made sense to apply that same logic to the Wonolo model.”

“We love it when a Wonoloer ends up delivering us food!”
but hustled to recruit people and make sure we had all of the jobs filled over the Christmas holiday. We did, we saved their Christmas, and they went on to become our first, and still our biggest customer."

BIGGEST RISK

Spinning out of Coca-Cola.

Brustein says, “We were basically risk-free entrepreneurship inside of Coke — nice Coke salary, funding, building and running a business. If it failed, we still have a job and then just start over on another business.

“Spinning out, we are on our own. Find our own funding, pay ourselves much less, nothing to fall back on. The end result is unknown — we spun out last year but until the business IPOs, gets acquired, or fails, we won’t know. But it certainly is much more rewarding on our own.”

EMPLOYEES

Ten, with many more Wonoloers.

Brustein says, “Our company is 10 people but we have 5,000 Wonoloers so it actually feels huge. We go out and do jobs with Wonoloers all the time to experience our product and get first-hand feedback from the faces of our company – the contractors in the field, Wonoloers – out there doing the work everyday.”

HOW THEY’D SPEND AN EXTRA $100,000

Hiring more sales and marketing staff.

FAVORITE TEAM LUNCH

Any food from a company that hires Wonoloers.

Brustein says, “We love it when a Wonoloer ends up delivering us food!”

[Image]

Annie Pilon
Staff writer
@AnnieHP
"Ban the Box" refers to a growing number of laws that would limit whether or when employers may inquire into arrest or conviction records of job applicants. Here's what you need to know.

A legal and social movement is coming at you like a freight train. The movement restricts employers from asking potential hires about criminal backgrounds early in the job application process.

It's been dubbed “Ban the Box” by some. Others, including President Barack Obama, call it a “Fair Chance to Work.”

According to figures provided by the National Employment Law Project, more than 70 million Americans have an arrest or conviction record. The rationale behind the campaign is that, if employers ask up front on the job application about criminal history, many of those 70 million may be excluded.

And some of those might have been qualified for the job.

WHAT IS BAN THE BOX?

The Ban the Box campaign was launched in 2004. It is so named for the checkbox on applications asking about a job applicant’s criminal background.

Although the movement is more than a decade old, in just the past two years it has “gone viral” in the words of the Society for Human Resources Management.

Nationwide, more than a hundred cities and counties have passed Ban the Box legislation, as of September 2015. In addition to the local jurisdictions, 18 states have passed some form of legislation, per the National Employment Law Project.

Each jurisdiction’s laws and policies differ.
Some laws apply mainly to public or government jobs. Others also apply to private enterprises, or to businesses over a certain size, or those involved in government contracting.

**DELAYED INQUIRY — OR STRONGER RESTRICTIONS?**

Many of the laws seek to delay employers from asking about criminal history until after an interview or conditional job offer has been extended.

The rationale is that as an employer, you should at least consider the person’s qualifications. Later on, the employer can inquire into factors such as convictions and make a more informed choice at that point.

Jesse Stout, policy director at San Francisco-based Legal Services for Prisoners with Children, a Ban the Box partner, told Fox Business that the Ban the Box effort is meant to level the playing field.

He said, “The idea is that someone … who sits down for an interview is not judged based on their convictions.”

Other laws, however, go further than merely delaying consideration.

Some laws and ordinances restrict the employer’s ability to consider certain types of criminal history at all. Or they specify conditions of how and when criminal history may be considered. Or they impose added regulatory steps in the hiring process.

San Francisco’s law applies to employers with 20 or more employees. Employers are supposed to (1) consider only criminal convictions that directly relate to job requirements, (2) take into account how long ago the conviction occurred, and (3) consider whether there were any mitigating factors or rehabilitation.

But San Francisco’s ordinance goes even further. Employers are required to affirmatively state in job advertisements that they will consider applicants with a criminal history. They also have to provide a notice to applicants and give them a copy of any background check that results in a decision not to hire.

The rationale behind delaying employers from asking about criminal history is that the candidate’s other qualifications should be considered first.
The Ban the Box movement has been joined by advocate groups, such as legal aid organizations and elected officials. The National Employment Law Project, which is also backing changes to the minimum wage, has it as one of their top national campaigns.

Those who support Ban the Box point to it as giving a fair chance.

That sounds reasonable to many people. And, in fact, many employers stopped automatically excluding applicants with criminal backgrounds long ago. Instead, they evaluate the circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

Ban the Box also has its critics. The National Retail Federation criticized the group and its campaign for exposing retailers, their customers, and employees to potential crime.

A New Jersey Chamber of Commerce official noted that the Ban the Box effort is one more directive that makes it more challenging for companies to manage their businesses.

That seems to be one of the concerns of critics. Ban the Box imposes additional regulatory burdens. It is yet one more thing to make the hiring process more complex and cause employer missteps, even when you’re trying to be fair.

Also, if you interview someone and consider all the facts carefully but then later exclude the person, you could still end up facing a legal challenge.

In April 2012, Ban the Box and other groups submitted testimony and research to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The EEOC then moved to clarify and strengthen its policies. The EEOC updated its Enforcement Guidance on Consideration of Arrest or Conviction Records in Employment Decisions. Among other things, the EEOC guidelines make a distinction between arrests and convictions, stating that, “The fact of an arrest does not establish that criminal conduct has occurred, and an exclusion based on an arrest, in itself, is not job related and consistent with business necessity.”

Under EEOC rules, if you decline to hire someone due to criminal history, and that person is a minority or part of a protected class, the business could end up facing EEOC action due to adverse impact on the protected class.

Therein lies another concern of some employers. Even if employers make a case-by-case judgment, they could still end up facing legal action if it tends to exclude minorities more so than others.
Addressing questions of criminal history is a complex legal area. Small businesses should do these things to make sure they are in compliance with Ban the Box:

- **Determine which laws apply to your company** — Consult with your employment counsel to see if there are any state or local laws that apply to your business, and what they require. Also, EEOC guidelines may apply.

- **Revise and reprint job application forms** — Review your employment application form. Does yours ask about criminal history? Consult with your employment counsel and consider removing that question or check box. Then have the form reprinted. As a best practice, more and more employers are voluntarily removing that question. Even those who still strongly believe they can and should inquire into criminal history are doing it later in the hiring process. And, while it may be your company’s practice to review the facts of each situation individually, a check box on a job application has a chilling effect. It feels like an automatic disqualifier. It may keep good candidates from applying. For that reason, alone, some employers remove it.

- **Destroy outdated application forms** — Make sure only the new version is used. It’s not uncommon for an outdated form to stay online in one place, even if a new one goes up on another URL. Managers may erroneously keep outdated forms thinking they are doing the company a favor by using up the old supply, too.

- **Review internal HR policies** — Update your company’s policies as needed.

- **Train hiring managers** — Instruct them not to ask about criminal history during interviews. They could say the wrong thing at the wrong time. It’s best for someone who is knowledgeable, like an HR manager, to handle all legally sensitive matters.

- **Document decisions** — Document any hiring decision that is based in whole or in part on a criminal history, including other factors that entered into the decision. If challenged, you will need the documentation. You may also be required to provide it to the applicant.

- **Understand how to read background checks** — Talk with any background checking services you use. See how they designate criminal history. For example, do they note whether an arrest resulted in a conviction or whether the charge was dismissed later? Is the difference between an arrest and a conviction clearly distinguished?

- **Stay up-to-date** — Ask your employment attorney to notify you of any future legal changes. Or stay aware of any changes through business organizations to which you belong.

Review your employment application form. Does yours ask about criminal history? Instruct your hiring managers not to ask about criminal history during interviews.
**BAN THE BOX LAWS ALREADY IN EFFECT**

As of early September 2015, a total of 18 states — plus the District of Columbia — have adopted Ban the Box legislation in some form. They are:

- California
- Colorado
- Connecticut
- Delaware
- Georgia
- Hawai‘i
- Illinois
- Maryland
- Massachusetts
- Minnesota
- Nebraska
- New Jersey
- New Mexico
- Ohio
- Oregon
- Rhode Island
- Vermont
- Virginia
- Washington, D.C.

Also, more than a hundred cities and counties — including Boston, Chicago, Seattle, Newark, N.J., and Indianapolis — have implemented some form of Ban the Box for public employees. In some cases, the laws apply to private company hires or those hired by city/county vendors.

Remember, each law is different.

For an updated list, along with links to where to find the laws, see the Ban the Box information compiled by NELP attorney Michelle Natividad Rodriguez on the organization’s website, NELP.org.
Top 10 Interview Questions to Ask Prospective Employees

How do you know a candidate has the right skills that fit your needs? Ask the right questions to hire the right people.

While unemployment is at its lowest in five years, it is still challenging to find the best employees for your company. Not only do they need the skills to perform their jobs well, but they also have to fit within the company’s culture.

To hire the perfect people, it’s important to ask the right questions. This is a challenge for many small business owners because they typically talk more than the job candidate or they just ask questions which review his or her resume.

**CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF?**

This is always a good introductory question. Ask and then don’t say another thing until they are done. What they actually say is not critical, but how they answer this question is. Do they focus on personal or professional details? How do they see themselves? Does this view fit into the culture of the company?
CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT A TIME WHEN...

Many job candidates can talk in generalities about their skills and accomplishments. However, asking for a specific example is a much more effective way to discover what they have really achieved.

For example, when interviewing a sales candidate, pose this to them: “Tell me about a time when you won a customer from a competitor.”

HOW WILL YOU CONTRIBUTE TO THE COMPANY?

This will highlight their goals for the specific job and which of their skills would be most beneficial for the company. It will also tell you how they see themselves as part of a team.

Remember, their goals should match the company’s. When they deviate, employees leave.

WHAT IS A SPECIFIC EXAMPLE OF THE BIGGEST PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGE YOU HAVE FACED?

How a candidate faces adversity is key. Even if a project didn’t go as planned, it’s important to find out how the applicant reacted and would remedy the problem in the future.

HOW WOULD YOU SOLVE...

Test them. In a professional setting, these are typically hypothetical situations or ones that have actually occurred at the company. They should demonstrate job-specific problem solving skills.

Don’t be afraid to ask them to solve problems they would face in the first month of their job at the actual interview.

WHY ARE YOU HERE?

Andrew Alexander, President of Red Roof Inn, says this helps reveal what the person’s passion is. The applicant should want to work at the company, not just want a job.

Employees that are passionate about the company’s mission excel at their position.

WHAT IS YOUR IDEAL JOB?

Liz Bingham, partner at Ernst & Young, says this question helps match whether or not the person is suitable for the open job.

It reveals what their passions and strengths are.

WHAT AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT WERE IDENTIFIED IN YOUR LAST JOB REVIEW?

Andrew Shapin, CEO of Long Tall Sally, says the answer to this question can show self-awareness and weaknesses when people answer this question honestly.

WHERE’S YOUR PASSION?

Hilarie Bass, co-president of Greenberg Traurig, says they only hire people who are passionate about that profession.

It helps attract committed employees that will make the business successful.

HOW DO YOU MEASURE SUCCESS?

This answer will tell you what the candidate values and if it matches the job compensation structure.

What are your favorite top interview questions to ask?

**Engaged Hiring Process eBook**

The Engaged Hiring Process is an easy-to-read, 45-page guide to hiring in a small business, written by Zane Safrit, an experienced CEO.

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Join highly curated vendors who are already selling their digital, services and physical products

Not a deal site: You have the flexibility to price your product profitability

How does it work?

Pick a plan
List your products on our marketplace
Closely work with us & actively participate in our marketing campaigns

I am interested! Who should I contact?

Contact Chaitra Vedullapalli at chai@meylah.com or call her at 510-579-4945

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