

5 Ways to Prep for Engaging Passive Tech Candidates



Some things are just hard to do. But recruiting top tech talent doesn't have to be. See how Dice can help.

Top tech recruiters know that treating passive candidates like active job seekers is a waste of time. They just won't reply. In this first article, we'll share some of the keys to preparing for that first email or cold call, so that you can improve the chances of getting in-demand tech pros to engage with you.



“Know your audience and your own opportunities inside and out. Simply describing the job and flattering the engineer isn’t enough. With generic flattery, you’ll simply end up with nicer “not interested” rejects from passive tech talent.”

Chetta Crowley, Director of Strategic Tech Hiring, Groupon

Talented tech pros get bombarded by recruiters

Many top tech pros get 20+ InMails and emails every week. Most consider the messages spam, and it’s no wonder. The messages are generic, with titles like, **“We need a hot shot Java programmer in Chicago.**

Interested?” and the attached job descriptions are boring and loaded with 30 requirements. Why would a top tech candidate, who is not actively looking for a job, even open that message from you?!

Before you send that first email or make a cold call, you must prepare.

Personalization and customization is key to improving your response rate

So, how do you get a passive tech pro interested? Personalizing the email or phone call is critical. And the foundation of personalization is research.

1. Research their interests and expertise

Obviously, hardware engineers are different from software engineers. And within software engineering, there are 10+ specialty areas: front end, back end, embedded systems, mobile apps, etc. Going beyond keyword matching is critical to targeting the right leads with the right opportunities. The good news is that engineers often publicly share their interests and areas of expertise on sites like [GitHub](#), [Stack Overflow](#), and in various

forums across the web (many of which are searchable through tools like [Dice's Open Web](#)).

"I'll take their name and fish around their code repositories, technical forum Q&As, blogs and social posts. These tell me a lot about them, and helps me more credibly approach them and decide if my role maps well to their interests."

*Steve Levy, Recruiting Strategist,
outside-the-box Consulting, and
Founder, Long Island .NET Users Group*

So, before you write that email or prepare for that call, you must know something about the kind of technology and work that interests them. Simply knowing they've done Java programming is not enough. What kind of technology are they passionate about? Are they contributing code to the open source community, sharing ideas in forums, or writing blog posts that highlight their expertise? You want – no, you need – to know this ahead of time. It will help you make a more credible introduction and avoid generic approaches like, "I see you have 6 years of Java programming experience. We need someone with 5-8 years of experience, so we'd like to see if you'd be interested in this job we have ..."


2. Research their current employer

What does their company do? Is it a tech startup, a well-established non-tech company, or a well-known global leader in technology? Use that information to help differentiate your company from the work they do now. Will your smaller company likely offer them a bigger job with a larger scope than they'd have as a Software Developer II at their current company? Will your company offer them the chance to work on building something new – something that will impact millions versus the maintenance work they do

now? Is their company doing well? Is it growing? Is it profitable? Are their products well received in the marketplace? Engineers don't just care about the technology they work on. They also want to work with companies that are successful and growing, as these organizations offer more opportunities to lead, and often are in tech investment mode.

3. Research their career history (What moves have they made?)

On a related note, look at their past. If you can find out where else they've worked, you may gain insight that will help you craft a better targeted message or reply to questions or concerns. Have they been a full-time employee their entire career, working for companies for 4-5 years at a time? If so, a 6-month contract position may be a hard sell. Have they moved around the country quite a bit? Or, are they still living in the same town where they went to college 10 years ago? If so, getting them to relocate can be a much bigger barrier than quitting a job they like. Finally, does it appear that they're working virtually for a company that doesn't have a tech center in their city? If so, a job that doesn't offer the flexibility they need may be a deal-breaker.



“First, see if you can turn that cold contact into a warm one. The warmer the contact, the better the chance you will be able to engage. And engaging is the first step to selling your opportunity.”

*Marcie Davis, Sr. Manager,
Recruiting Programs, CACI*


Additionally, if you'd need them to relocate, you'll want to proactively research cost of living differences. The salaries required to maintain a good living situation in NYC versus Kansas City, for example, are quite different. You need to know this before you target someone, because you could be wasting your time and theirs if your compensation packages and relocation offerings won't come close to addressing the significant cost differences. Having said that, some candidates might be excited to return "home." So, if you can tell that a candidate moved away, and your opportunity is closer to where they went to college or grew up, you may be able to offer them the chance to move back to family and friends.

4. Research their connections (Do you know someone they know?)

Obviously, leveraging a shared connection to turn a cold email or call into a warm one is recruiting 101 stuff. So, it would be silly not to leverage social media, your colleagues' shared work history, and your own work history to improve your chances of getting a response and/or helping to gain additional insights about this passive candidate's motivators and interests.

5. Research your own company and jobs

Steps 1-4 are critical – you should never go in blind when contacting a



"The success of your efforts depends on your ability to establish your credibility, personalize your message, and make a genuine connection that's not just about you and what you need."

Ed Delgado, Talent Strategist, Yahoo!

Passive candidate. However, you also must know your own stuff. What's the value proposition for a top engineer at your company? Look beyond the buzzwords on the job description to be able to share – and answer questions about – the specific projects they'd work on, the impact their work would make, the team they'd work with (including the hiring manager's background), and the salary and relocation packages available. Depending on a traditional job description (which, let's be honest, is probably poorly written) to persuade a top-quality passive candidate to

leave his/her job is not going to cut it. Do your research and your credibility will skyrocket? (Plus, you'll stand apart from recruiters who send spammy, "Interested? Job description attached" emails.)

Wrap Up: The foundation of good engagement is research

So, what's the secret to improving your hit rate? Learn as much as you can about a candidate's interests and motivations (not just the keywords and technologies in their profile) to ensure the kind of opportunities you have align with what they likely want. In summary, customize your approach to what a candidate cares about; not what you have to offer.