

The Perfect Applicant Tracking System

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In your work, if you have anything at all to do with hiring people, then there is something for you in this article. If you work in Human Capital, either as a business leader, HR executive, HR generalist, corporate recruiter, or contingent recruiter, then this article is vital to your business future. We'll review quickly the main purpose and uses of an Applicant Tracking System (ATS) and we'll look at what makes a **perfect** one as an aid to evaluating commercially available or home-grown systems.

What is an Applicant Tracking System?

An applicant tracking system is a repository and living database of applicants. Its main purpose is to allow corporations to hire talent to work for those corporations. It has many reasons for existence including being a place where applicants' resumes are stored, a searchable database where recruiters can match applicants' skills with job requirements, an audit trail for applicant activity, and is a statistics and metrics generating machine to satisfy various government reporting requirements and to support the evaluation and improvement of corporate staffing systems.

Characteristics of a Perfect Applicant Tracking System

The following list is not meant to be an exhaustive one. It is, however, a good place to start when evaluating commercially available or home-grown systems.

1. It must be easy for an applicant to apply online at a corporate website and their resume must be automatically added to the ATS. Resume formatting must be preserved by this interface and any widely used format must be accepted. Since more than 90% of all applicants use some version of Microsoft Word, it is crazy to force them to enter resumes in plain text format.
2. Once resumes are part of the ATS each and every word in the resume, cover letter, and any other forms completed by the applicant should be searchable. There should be no manual building of skills lists. There's no point to that if everything on the resume is searchable.
3. There should be a variety of search tools including true Boolean and a Boolean assisted interface. There are a lot of additional search techniques and the better systems will provide a set of tools to suit various uses.
4. Communication with interesting, potential fit applicants should be easy. Integration with email should be complete and emails both sent to and received from applicants should be automatically recorded as part of the applicant record. The recording of notes from telephone conversations should also be easy.
5. Spell-checking should be provided throughout the ATS.
6. Distribution of a resume and associated documents to hiring managers should be by email from within the system and a record of each distribution and response should be automatically recorded.
7. Each step of the recruitment process, from candidate application through hire or rejection, should be completely customizable. A fast and efficient process is one of the characteristics that distinguish employers of choice from others. The system must be customizable to follow any process and must not limit employers' choices.
8. The ATS must be fully integrated with the Human Resources Information System.

9. The ATS must be fast, easy to navigate and learn, and must allow users to work the way they want to work.
10. The ATS must provide a full set of metrics and statistics. Both those required by law and those required to increase staffing efficiency are required. Standard reports are great but user defined reports are also essential.
11. Requisitions for open positions are an integral part of any ATS. The creation, management, approval, and filling of requisitions must be fast and easy. The posting of requisitions to corporate Intranets and corporate web sites is essential. Automatic posting to the major career sites is also a requirement and the ability to customize posting to any external site is highly desirable.

Does The Perfect ATS Exist?

The perfect ATS probably does not exist. There are many systems, both commercially available and home-grown. This article is not an evaluation of those systems. It is not an exhaustive checklist but you can use it to evaluate what you have or what you may consider as likely candidates.