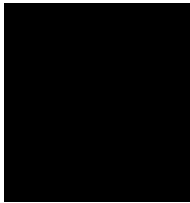




Embrace Change and Lead with It

Thanks to a passion for keeping up with changing technology, Bill Fowles and his team have transformed the way global technology leader ABB recruits top talent

By ADAM KIVEL



Although ABB is a global leader in electrification, robotics, and industrial automation, it wasn't long ago that the company was collecting applicants' résumés by hand. Attracting the top candidates with cutting-edge skills and knowledge is one thing, but managing the flow of talent, finding the best applicants, and bringing them on board—all by sifting through boxes of paperwork—is a titanic challenge. The solution came by turning to

technology, and ABB has been reaping the rewards.

A major part of the drive toward technology-based recruiting was bringing aboard Bill Fowles, who joined ABB as one of its US-based talent acquisition managers in 2013. From the start, he led the charge in a technology-first approach, which focused on more mobile-friendly and digital talent tools.

"I knew that our team was going to start collecting thousands of new leads and talent pipelines, and if we didn't house them or store them properly, all of that would go for naught," he explains.

Fowles came to ABB with more than twenty years of experience in talent acquisition, working with Fortune 500 companies including Honeywell, Cisco, and IBM. ABB's global reach had room to grow in terms of talent acquisition and recruitment, especially in the US market. The opportunity to leverage his experience to drive awareness of the organization's brand was an irresistible challenge, especially when paired with the opportunity to implement new technology-driven solutions.

"We're in a mobile world, and if your company isn't able to connect and message consistently, candidates will go to companies that do connect," Fowles says. "So, we began to leverage our digital capabilities, and we've become more agile and fluid."

RECRUITING WITH A PROACTIVE APPROACH

One of the most important steps in this transition was Fowles's partnership with Avature. Thanks to Avature's global candidate relationship management (CRM) tool, ABB was able to bring candidates' potential to life, rather than leaving their paper résumés buried in files. "A strong CRM tool can consistently message and bring to light those candidates that possibly may have been overlooked," he says.

In a sense, ABB now has the capability to see the journey from source to hire all within a single tool. Fowles and his team are able to sort a massive number of résumés and select candidates based on things like a particular skill or certification. They can also access the information of a candidate at a California-based military event from their Cary, North Carolina, office, all in real time.

To that end, Fowles has instituted a more proactive approach to recruitment at ABB. In a world where a majority of individuals are receptive to new opportunities, as some studies have suggested, a proactive philosophy can make an amazing impact. Competition is high, and any edge in recruitment can make the difference between success and stagnation.

Although ABB relied external recruitment agencies in the past, Fowles and his team have been able to produce real traction and

properly measure that success. ABB not only saw a reduction in cost in its recruiting process, but it also improved in several key performance indicators, including quality of hire, employer branding, and time-to-fill. The latter of those is especially important in the engineering world. "Average time-to-fill within engineering can be anywhere from, say, sixty-five to seventy-five days," Fowles explains. "We've been able to reduce that closer to sixty days, and we've been holding that consistent over the last three and a half years."

BUILDING BRAND RECOGNITION

In addition to adopting a CRM, Fowles and ABB entered the social media sphere to expand the company's brand awareness, using employee testimonial videos in particular. "That was one of the strategies that we wanted to utilize to really show that our employees were brand ambassadors for ABB here in this region," Fowles explains.

The results from that social media push have been staggering: in the three and a half years that Fowles and his team have spent on the project, their number of global LinkedIn followers has grown more than tenfold, from seventy thousand to eight hundred thousand, and their videos have amassed over twenty thousand views to date. Meanwhile, employee involvement in the testimonials and social media push has only improved the morale at ABB.

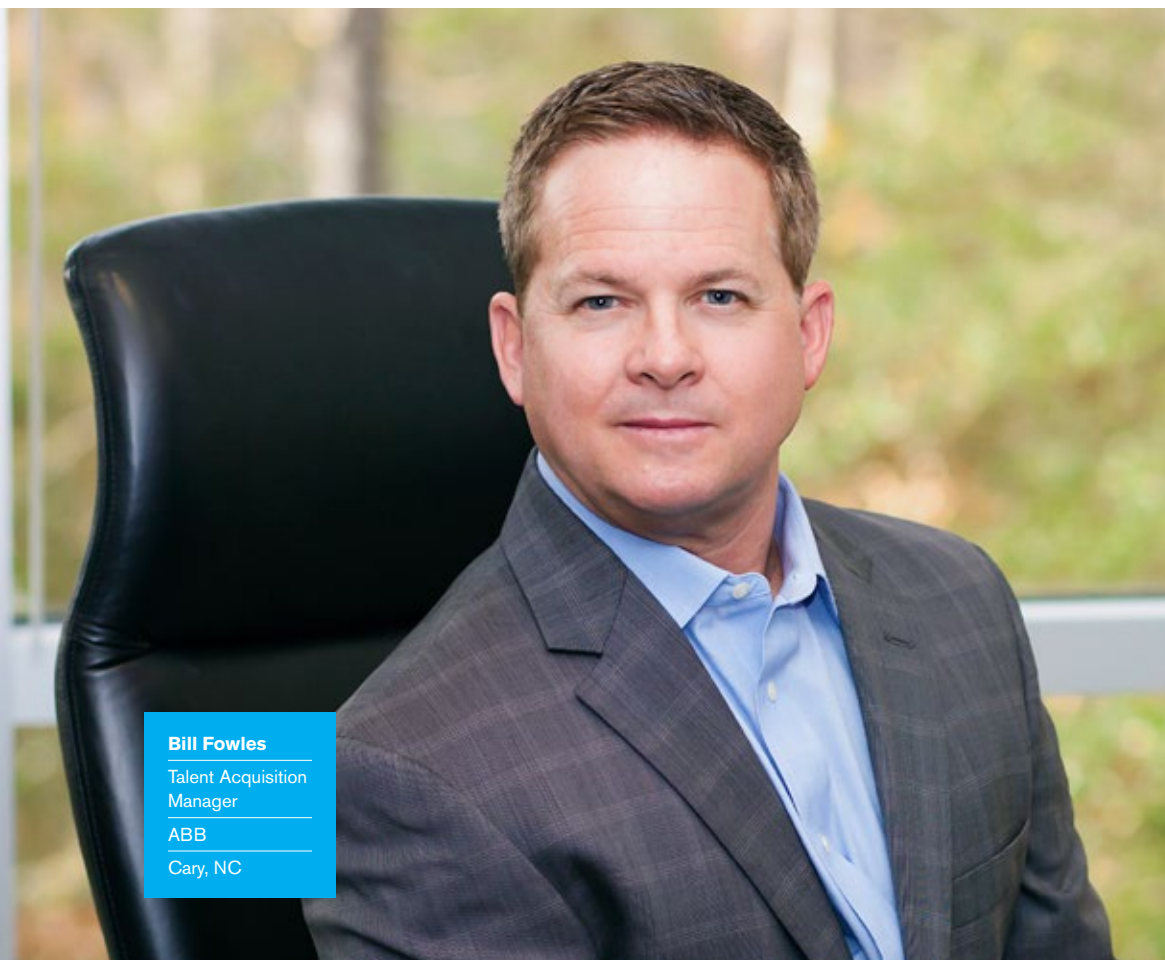
More than a tool in his repertoire, Fowles feels that Avature's products offered ABB a completely new perspective on talent recruitment. "It's essential," he says. "If you're going to create a global, mobile, fluid talent organization, you have to have the right tools in place to be able to not only stay up with the times, but to also measure your success."

But, the process wasn't without its challenges. ABB doesn't sell consumer products, so building brand awareness was difficult in its very nature. On the other hand, the organization works to get power and automation into homes and communities safely and reliably—a very compelling message. Learning to bridge that gap was important for Fowles. "If you're not an engineer, you may not be aware of any ABB products," he says. "More and more of our employees are seeing the opportunity to share stories and really get more involved in social media, which has really made the difference."

CREATING A DIVERSE TEAM

For ABB, that difference includes a drive for diversity, and the recruitment team has developed programs specifically aimed at candidate diversity, as well as improved outreach for candidates that otherwise may be overlooked, such as military veterans, individuals with disabilities, and university students. "We attend events of the Society of Women Engineers, the National Society of Black Engineers, and the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers," Fowles explains. "We have engaged with a local vendor, Enable America, who has really helped us to create some outreach into other important channels and talent pipelines as well." He also emphasizes that it's been a team effort. Everyone on the US team has come together with global partners to emphasize ABB's commitment to diversity.

When ABB team members are actually out in the field at these events, Avature's CRM tools allow them to bring along a tablet



Bill Fowles

Talent Acquisition
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BILL FOWLES

computer and gather candidates’ information easily. This information can then also be made available immediately at ABB offices worldwide, as well as easily and conveniently store information.

“Now, we’re able to see how we did from an event three years ago, which is something that only a CRM tool would allow us to do,” Fowles explains. The organization has had some immediate hires from these events. It even hired one individual who the team had met at an event two years prior because that candidate stayed on ABB’s radar thanks to the CRM. These results are important for explaining the success of this approach to those in other departments. It’s difficult to measure the improvement in a vacuum, but actually having statistics from the CRM to prove the success of this new approach makes it clear.

CONTINUING TO INNOVATE

Fowles is also quick to note that while the team has made impressive strides, that improvement

is constantly at the front of their minds. “ABB is a company that really prides itself in its continuous improvement,” he explains. “We’re a company known for our innovation, so this journey that we’re on today is not over. We’re continuing to look at how we can improve, as well as how we can share our best practices across the globe.”

He’s already seen that international spread, receiving calls from ABB offices ranging from Canada to Sweden looking for demos on the CRM tool and information on technology-focused approaches. In fact, being able to rapidly adapt to the changing world and share successes with his team is key to ABB’s success and Fowles’s leadership approach.

“We live in a world today that’s constantly changing, and if your company doesn’t have a philosophy of embracing change and really looking at a continuous improvement mentality, you could easily be left behind,” he explains. “That’s always been my leadership style: to embrace change and to lead with it.” ■