

HOW TO HIRE IT-TALENT

Gaining a competitive edge in the war-for-IT-Talent in 2023



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INTRODUCTION	3
Are we winning the war-for-talent?	3
The uprise of Employer Branding	3
The Hybrid Work debate	4
Have another look at your hiring process	5
WHERE IS IT TALENT HIDING?	6
Look for IT Professionals within your organization	7
Look for IT Professionals outside your organization	7
HOW TO REACH IT-TALENT	10
Laying the bricks for your strategic workforce	11
Find IT Professionals within your organization	12
Find IT Professionals outside your organization	13
CONCLUSION	19
ABOUT BIZZTALENT	20

INTRODUCTION

Companies are in an aching need for IT talent. It's a war that's raging on for years now, and chances are that those shortages are only getting worse. At the same time, digitalization is excelling with greater speeds and companies are trying to keep up to stay competitive.

As if that challenge isn't enough, organizations are facing a huge talent-paradox in these turbulent times. Budgets are being cut because of high costs in uncertain times, but on the other hand, an investment in talent is needed to accelerate when times are flourishing again.

To put things short: as an IT leader you have to juggle different challenges to stay competitive.

Are we winning the war-for-talent?

Some great efforts have already been made these past years to win the war-for-talent. Organizations understood that candidates were no longer coming to them that easily and that they needed to create a clear brand visibility. Companies weren't (and aren't) in the driving seat anymore.

The uprise of Employer Branding

In came the Employer Brand. But did it really solve the issue? Actually, it mainly gave an answer (or solution if you will) to two other subjects. Your employer brand gave your company a face, and candidates now had the opportunity to identify with it. Secondly, you set some deliverables to which you had to adhere for your existing staff. They should feel connected with this Employer Brand. Besides this, we saw that for a lot of companies "Employer Branding" meant to just launch a campaign that stated how "awesome" they were as an Employer. On the contrary, Employer Branding is so much more than that.

Although Employer Branding wasn't the Holy Grail, those who get their Employer Brand straight are still able to do some exceptional work, but unfortunately it also gave candidates more options to choose for the "coolest employer".

“Employer branding is not about fancy advertisements. It is about projecting the values, beliefs and culture of your organization and attracting like-minded employees. It’s about putting these employees center stage and building a long term connection with them.”

- Louise Wieërs, HR-Manager

The Hybrid Work debate

A second revolution is still ongoing. Fired up by the COVID-pandemic, companies saw the importance of a work-life-balance. Again, this proved to be more of a solution to retain your current employees. Those who “loved” their job, but wouldn’t mind more flexibility, finally got the freedom they had been asking for these past decades. We saw crazy flexibility schemes. From a work-anywhere-policy to an unlimited number of days off. And we still aren’t there yet. As the aftershock of the pandemic is settling in the background, we see a number of companies that are rooting to come back to the office because they fear for their employees’ productivity. It’s a discrepancy which has to be solved by a change of mindset and a change in the way we define “productivity” for a job.

Nonetheless, it’s good to see a move in the right direction. **However, the shift towards Hybrid work isn’t really going to end the war-for-talent. It gives candidates the chance to even “cherry-pick” their opportunities more.**

So the question is: is there really a “golden solution” to end the war-for-talent? Probably not. But there is still some improvement to be made when it comes down to attracting and retaining IT Talent.

Have another look at your hiring process

There is a need to have another look at hiring strategies. According to Statbel the Belgian IT vacancy rate ¹with its 8.4% is still higher than the general vacancy rate of our Belgian Economy with 4.9%.

8.4%

the Belgian IT Vacancy Rate of last quarter

The marketing and sales pitch of an organization might have changed, but the execution of the hiring process didn't. Organizations are trying to keep their heads above water, while the struggle internally keeps rising. IT leaders are juggling different challenges to keep IT Infrastructures performant, but lack the talent that is needed to do so. At the same time Recruitment departments are under enormous pressure to find the right resources in time.

So, How can you as an IT leader take action to attract the right talent in 2023 while you still focus on the bigger picture for your IT department? The short answer: **Be open-minded and focus on 2 key areas:**

- Understand where IT talent is hiding. Both internally & externally;
- Understand how to reach IT talent & which efforts you can do next to your HR department;

¹ Statbel: Vacancy Rate: The number of job vacancies compared to the total number of jobs.

SECTION 1

WHERE IS IT TALENT HIDING?

There are different areas where IT Talent is to be found. The important thing is to **have a clear roadmap** for your IT department. Much like you have a strategy for your technological environment (your IT Roadmap) it is important to have a strategy for your Talent Roadmap as well. Your **Talent Roadmap** needs to be adjusted to your own organization, since it needs to be in line with your company's long-term strategy and focus.

Having a clear Talent Roadmap means that you are going to define your **different supply channels for talent**. Typically, organizations start looking for talent **outside** their **own company**. They can do this by either attracting and hiring new talent themselves, or partner-up with an IT Staffing Agency like Bizztalent. But that's only one piece of the puzzle.

Maybe your organization houses some **untapped potential internally** as well. With a shift in focus, you could upskill and/or reskill current employees to be your IT professionals of the future.

Look for IT Professionals within your organization

Classic strategies rely on looking for resources outside the organization. Most of the time this is because **companies tend to focus on job titles and experience rather than focus on competences needed for a specific set of tasks.**

As the world around us gets more and more digital – skill sets change. Some jobs do not require the same competences they did 10 – 20 years ago. So instead of defining inflexible job descriptions – focus on the skill set that is needed to answer the needs of your technical organization.

This gives you the flexibility and possibility to look for talent that is already present inside the organization. Being it in the IT Department itself or within other departments – your own organization can be used as a new internal talent pool which in turn is good for your retention policy.. Such a framework is demanding for the organization, since it'll be the entire company that is involved in identifying internal talent pools. **However, you as an IT Leader can help other departments, such as HR, in creating the framework, by clearly defining your workforce planning with them.**

Look for IT Professionals outside your organization

Having an internal focus doesn't mean however that you do not need to have an outward vision as well. Having a strategy to upskill and reskill your current employees is enormously important, but it cannot be the only source within your Talent Supply Chain.

As we all know, the tables have turned when it comes down to looking for talent outside the organization. **We went from a passive strategy, where candidates just apply on your job offers, to an active strategy where you have to chase the candidates.** As we said before, a well-thought Employer Brand is key in this process, but it's only a fraction of the work you need to do.

So the question pops-up: Where do you find IT Talent outside your organization?



Belgian job boards & social media

Different job boards and databases have popped up and over the past couple of years we saw an enormous shift in popularity and effectiveness. Furthermore, the digital era brought us a number of AI-minded tools to automatically match opportunities and candidates, although we still aren't there yet.

But with so many job boards out there: on which one do you have to focus? And do you, as an **IT Leader**, need to focus on these job boards as well?

First off: what do we mean when we talk about job boards? In this context, a job board is every platform where both companies and candidates can create their own profile and “meet” or “connect” to either find their next employee or find their next job.

Job boards have what we call an active stimulus. A candidate can post a CV, which gives companies the information that they are looking for a new challenge. On the other side, a company can post their current vacancies, giving candidates the opportunity to apply.

But with the Social (r)evolution of these past years – we can look to Social Media as a job board as well. LinkedIn for example has grown enormously this past decade as a place to contact and annoy IT professionals more than anything.

But looking for candidates on Social Media requires a very different approach. Often a task that is “outsourced” to your marketing and/or HR department. Yet, **your efforts as an IT Leader on these platforms can mean a world of difference as well to reach the right talent pool when needed.**

By clearly defining your Talent Supply Chain – your organization can generate a steady stream of qualified candidates to join your organization.

As for Bizztalent – we saw that our efforts on LinkedIn and the management of our own database were by far the most effective when it came down to hiring IT Talent outside the organization. **This confirmed the premise that the worth of proactively reaching-out to IT Talent and maintaining a strong network is enormous.** Just posting a vacancy online and

hoping that candidates will come to you isn't going to cut it anymore. In 2022 alone, a staggering 90% of our hired candidates came from (pro)actively approaching them.

This doesn't mean that the use of Social Media like LinkedIn should be your organization's only focus. It is important to **look at all possible sources strategically** and define a clear talent supply chain. But where job boards are mainly a tool for your HR department, you as an IT Leader can leverage the power of these other sources, such as LinkedIn, and make it your personal database.

90%
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approaching them.**

With a few simple steps, you can use these platforms to your advantage to reach-out to IT Talent. Because it's by **creating visibility and a personal brand**, that you can attract those interesting talents for your organization.

SECTION 2

HOW TO REACH IT-TALENT

We previously mentioned that having a clear Talent Roadmap is key. What we basically are saying is to **get your strategic workforce planning straight**.

Chances are that you as an **IT leader** have already heard of this term and that you have your workforce planning in order. If however you have not heard about strategic workforce planning yet, or you do not actively “forecast” the knowledge you’ll be needing – then don’t worry. This is probably the part where you can already **gain a few steps**.

In a few words: Strategic Workforce Planning is the act where you plan and scale your current human capital to match it with current and future business needs and goals.

Once you’ve got your **strategy** planned out, you can then focus on reaching your IT Talent. Again, a mix of **inward and outward activities** is needed and needs to be tailored to your specific organization.

Laying the bricks for your strategic workforce

As this white paper is focussed on finding and reaching IT talent in 2023, we don't want to dive too deep into strategic workforce planning. However, it's important that you give sufficient attention to this topic, as it helps you to build the future and accelerate your business goals

By planning out this clear Talent Roadmap, you'll save both yourself and your HR colleagues a lot of headaches in the year(s) to come, and you get a clearer vision on the questions where to go looking for your talent and how you can reach them.

Once objectives are set, competence needs and gaps are defined, you can start by meticulously planning your recruitment strategy and efforts. Being it internal or external hiring, with this plan at hand you are prepared for what might come.

Laying the bricks for your strategic workforce

- #1 Define both your short- & long term objectives
- #2 Analyze your current Talent Force
(look for knowledge & competences that are present)
- #3 Define the gaps in your Talent Force & correlate them with future needs & risk analysis
- #4 Define your internal upskilling &/or reskilling strategy
- #5 Define your external hiring timeline & actions

Find IT Professionals within your organization

1. Create Internal Talent Pools

In today's economy, candidates have no problem finding a challenge elsewhere. That's especially the case for IT. So creating an internal Talent Pool starts with getting the **employee journey**, which you communicated through your employer brand, right! **You need to create an environment that stimulates learning, trying and possibly failing.** If employees get stimulated to put their capabilities to work and to create an added value for the organization, they'll do so.

2. Share your technological roadmap & responsibilities

That's why communicating your talent needs and gaps for the coming year(s) is important. If you are transparent about the challenges ahead, give your IT Professionals the opportunity to hone their skills in needed technologies, and empower them to act upon it – you can tap into the intrinsic motivation to be an added value. An added value not only for the team, but towards the company's business goals as well.

But make sure that your message resonates across the entire organization. As we said before, these past years have been marked by a digitalization that is moving at a blistering pace. However, this doesn't mean that it is only the IT department that needs to follow the digital movement. **It also means that technology is no longer the sole responsibility of the IT-department. Other departments can act as Product Owners for specific technological innovations within the company.** Using these kinds of Product Owners can relieve your IT department partially since they can act as a first SPOC for related problems. Hence, you can "buy" your IT Team more time to focus on other technological innovations. Alignment between the IT department and such Product Owners is still key off course in order to prevent shadow IT across your IT Infrastructure.

3. Stimulate reskilling

Empowering all people across the organization to take ownership of their growth opportunities within the company, can give you an extra pool of competences to work with. **Creating a clear Talent plan can help you discover those technically prone resources to partially fill current and future gaps.**

By defining your technological roadmap and identifying the technical requirements that come with it, you have the opportunity to construct them into clear “competence bricks”. **Do not always construct them into a position. But define a “competence brick” first that is needed to achieve a goal, so responsibilities can be shared across the organization.**

This isn't an exercise that is made in a single day. It's neither a one-size-fits-all type solution. It's a framework that needs to be defined with HR to tap into those talents in your organization that are not yet involved with IT or that are, as an IT professional, not yet involved with your future technology stack.

Find IT Professionals outside your organization

Depending on your internal talent pool, chances are that you are going to focus on attracting talent outside the organization as well. As your HR Department can focus on specialized job boards such as IctJob and Campus recruitment activities with universities, **you as an IT responsible can focus on a few other steps to reach IT Professionals at the right place, at the right time.**

1. The importance of thinking ahead

Starting early with your game plan is key. Yet it is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment when you will be needing your new resource. You created your workforce planning, but there are also uncontrollable forces that might push this plan either forward or backward. It isn't always easy to just say: “I'll need a new System Engineer or Support Engineer starting in September.” Maybe someone on the team leaves, and you'll need a new infrastructure resource faster.

Maybe the economic situation changes, budgets get under pressure, and you need to postpone your hiring until next year.

So what does 'starting early' mean exactly? Sending out a job request to your HR department a few months in advance? This could be good when you look at it from a recruiters' perspective. In 95% of the situations, your company is going to work like this as well. It gives your recruiter time to set up their plan of approach and gives them the opportunity to start looking for the resource as the need presents itself. However, it can be too late as well, depending on your hiring lifecycle and the heat of the market at that time.

It's by thinking ahead of the recruitment challenges that might come, that you as an IT Leader can help accelerate the attraction and hiring of a new resource. It is the efforts you execute at the beginning of the year that can give you a competitive edge when the need presents itself later on.

Thinking ahead is all about growing your network today. Given your agenda as an IT Manager is filled with numerous other tasks, we'll start with LinkedIn as an example. This social network has around 4.5 million users in Belgium alone. That's about 38% of our country's population. Yet not all those profiles are relevant, since not everyone is as active on the platform. Still, there is a great deal for you to achieve in this area.

35 %

of our hires last year came from LinkedIn

2. Create value to gain trust

As we said before, the amount of messages IT professionals receive from recruiters who are offering them a job is tiresome. Why? Because there is no value creation. Offering a job to Network or Security Engineers who are happy where they are today, isn't creating value. So when we say that you as an IT Leader need to think ahead by growing your network, it doesn't mean that you need to start sending job offers to every tech-savvy person you see on the platform.

That's why just posting a vacancy online isn't going to cut it anymore either. There is a limited value creation. The vacancy is only valuable to those people who are actively looking for a job. And for the past years, those numbers have dropped as well within the Information Technology sector. Meaning that the talent pool you get from these actions is going to be limited.

Creating your 'Talent Pool of the Future' on LinkedIn as head of an IT department means that you need to create valuable connections. Taking 15 minutes out of your busy schedule to connect with around 5 IT professionals a day can grow your network with around 25 to 35 new interesting people per week. That's around 1300 new connections a year. You do the math. Why do you think so many people nowadays have 500+ connections? It's to grow their network to leverage it in the future.

Connect strategically and in line with your workforce plan that was set out to meet your needs and goals. Be open, friendly and non-intrusive. Add a friendly message to your connection request and thank them for accepting you into their network.

From there on, start to create real **value** with those new connections. Being it through regular posts or through follow-up messages you sent them. You are an IT leader, so surely you have something interesting to say that can offer them real value. But keep it unbiased and unconditional. Ask them about their upcoming challenges and share yours as well. You share a common interest, Information Technology. Surely you can find some common grounds there.

3. Leverage your network

You built your network and offered value to create a relationship of trust. Once trust has been established, you can start leveraging the growth of that new network. We heard someone say once: “you don’t ask somebody to marry you on a first date either”. A trivial analogy, but yet so true. It’s when you build trust with your new network and when you make them aware of your company and the position you take from an IT-point of view, that you can take the relationship a little further. **It’s here that you as an IT Leader can pivot your new network into valuable candidates or competences when the need arises.**

4. Do your due diligence

LinkedIn has proved its worth as an awesome tool and when not yet used in this way, it’ll be a great area of improvement to get your first results. Yet this kind of strategy works on other platforms as well. **Choose your flavor, see what feels natural to you, what works for you and as you would do with your technological environment: test, upgrade and renew where necessary.**

5. Qualitative hires at the speed of light

At Bizztalent we meet numerous organizations who meet a perfect candidate for the job but still lose them to a competitor. The problem? The speed with which the vehicle moves. This means that regardless of the efforts you and your HR team do to find the right resources and build a relationship, **the speed and agility with which you execute the hiring process is key within IT.**

Guarding a qualitative approach is important, but having a long time-to-hire will always put you at the back of the pack. Therefore, **it is imperative to create a hiring process that is flexible, qualitative, swift and tailored to the gap to fill.**

Together with your HR colleagues, you can clearly define the different steps that’ll be taken, but try to keep it to a minimum. If you want to let your HR department do a first screening

before you interview a possible candidate, that's fine, but try to compound the interviews with the IT department into one conversation as much as possible.

Foremost, make it one of your priorities to give clear, complete and quick feedback to your HR team whether you want to meet a candidate or not. Make sure that such a job interview is prioritized as well, and don't put more than a few days in between interviews. If done correctly, you'll be able to send your potential candidate an offer within 2 to 3 weeks, starting from the first contact that was made for the job.

2,5
weeks on average
to fill Infrastructure
vacancies last year

Our Recruitment Team at Bizztalent has used a similar approach for over 10 years now, resulting in a time-to-fill of about 2 to 3 weeks for Infrastructure vacancies. **It's by putting your engine into a higher gear and operating quickly that you'll be able to get a step ahead in the war-for-talent.**

6. Openness and completeness will move you forward

Next to building your own network, defining a clear and swift hiring process, it's important to give enough attention to informing your HR team. They know the company and if they searched IT profiles before, they know the IT Department as well. However, don't assume that they get all the finer details that there are to a position.

Communicating the technological knowledge needed to fill a vacancy isn't enough. **Be elaborate and abundant in the information you share. Give your HR colleagues the ammunition they need to inform and persuade a candidate.** Give them insight to the projects that are on the agenda, be flexible in technological must-haves, and inform them about the conceptual knowledge that is expected. Maybe there are similar technologies or certain competences/traits that are beneficial to the organization as well, or that make the learning curve of a new team member shorter. In this [blog post](#) we explain the **5 key answers your Recruitment department needs to start their search**, and we share a **free template** which you can use to send internal position requests.

Be open-minded. What you are looking for today might be the white raven, but will that still be the case tomorrow? So in analogy with your strategic workforce planning, don't try to define everything into fixed roles – but aim to look for necessary, future-proof competences which will broaden your scope.

By doing this, you'll save your HR department and yourself a ton of frustration and time. As they get a clearer view of the context, they are able to keep focus and help you in a quicker and more qualitative way.

CONCLUSION

The shortage in our Belgian IT Market is structural and dependent on many socio-economic factors. A lot of which we didn't address in this white paper. On top of that, the landscape will be ever evolving.

But it doesn't mean that you as Head of an IT Department can't take matters into your own hands. **You are in a position which gives you the opportunity to think in a creative manner and improve talent results for the better in collaboration with your HR department.**

Once business goals are defined, you can already start with the basics: mapping out and planning the knowledge that is needed. Once your Talent Roadmap is set, you can set up a strategy for your Talent Supply chain. You can either leverage your internal skill pool if your company structure lets you, or point your focus outward by actively engaging with a network of "untapped" resources. From there on it is your alignment with HR, your willingness to move quickly and your openness that'll give you an advantage to your competitors.

ABOUT BIZZTALENT

Bizztalent gained experience over the past 11 years in staffing much sought-after IT Infrastructure profiles for our partners. By leveraging our expertise and niche, we were able to grow to a team of 130 IT Infrastructure consultants, with whom we support clients in their projects when the need for talent is at its peak. And we are still growing every day.

When finding the right talent gets tough, we are there for our clients and stick to our mantra: we believe in the power of IT consultancy as a ground for success!

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