



## remarks

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**A Modest Proposal** The system of “matching” candidates and opportunities on the Internet is a highly inaccurate process. One observer suggests a more thorough approach.

BY ROBERT E. DUPONT



After reviewing a large sample of physician recruitment Web sites and reading hundreds

of job opportunities, I have a few observations to make about the process of recruiting physicians on the Internet.

As it stands now, the process is fairly straightforward: A candidate accesses a Web site, registers a user name and password, enters data about his specialty and preferred location, and submits the information. The information is then sent to a Web server powered by a search engine that burrows into a data base of opportunities to find a match. When a match is made, the candidate is notified

that an opportunity fitting the candidate's profile and preferences exists. No question about it, the process of finding an opportunity by specialty and location on the Internet is quick and easy. For employers, recruiters and others who host these Web sites, I'm sure there's a sense of satisfaction that a “match” has been made.

Or has it? Invariably what takes place after a “match” has been made is the irksome, sometimes arduous task of verifying—and this is true for recruiters and candidates alike—

that a match does in fact exist. Indeed, after discussing the matter with scores of residents, I am led to believe that, more times than not, a match doesn't exist. I suspect it's the same for recruiters.

The problem here is that neither candidate nor recruiter has entered enough information about each other to determine whether it's worth pursuing one another in the first place. Many residents and practicing physicians complain that job opportunity descriptions are in-

complete or inconsistent, running the gamut from cryptic, one-line ads to chatty travelogues that seem more like vacation resort ads than a job posting. Viewing them singly or side-by-side can be very frustrating, because the time and effort it takes to follow up usually results in the disappointment that comes from discovering that the posted opportunity doesn't even come close to matching the physician's preferences. In any case, this is not the optimum way to find or help someone find a job.

A better way, I believe, is to be honest and forthcoming about what both sides prefer before either decides to court the other in earnest. Here's one way this could be accomplished.

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### A Uniform Preference Comparator (UPC)

I propose that physician recruitment webmasters create a uniform and comparable set of data fields that cover candidate and employer preferences to be called a Uniform Preference Comparator or UPC. The fields completed by the candidate and the employer are essentially mirror images of one another. The data from these fields can be juxtaposed, compared, and contrasted, resulting in meaningful information that can be used for informed decision-making. This simple decision tool can be used by both candidates and employers to arrive at a more accurate picture of what each prefers. The data fields can be grouped into four areas: 1) **practice opportunity**, 2) **compensation**, 3) **contract terms**, and 4) **compatibility**.

#### Practice Opportunity

Under this heading, candidates would succinctly state their job preferences. In the same terms and fields, employers would feature their opportunity. Information such as location, climate, population, practice size and type, and work load would be common to both parties.

Each field would have a dropdown list from which to make a selection. For example, under "work schedule" a candidate could choose how many hours per week she wishes to work. Likewise, an employer could select how many hours per week he wishes the candidate to work. A report could compare the selections from both parties textually or graphically for a meaningful comparison. A "text box" in each section, in which narrative text can be inserted, would allow either candidate or employer to qualify, amplify, or justify a feature or benefit being sought or offered.

**Compensation** To compare compensation needs and offers, four sub-groups would be used: salary, benefits, perquisites

(perks), and relocation. Under salary, candidates and employers can select from salary range, acceptability of fixed salary, salary plus incentive, income guarantee, and other options such as loan forgiveness, signing bonus, or student loan assistance.

Under benefits, candidates and employers would identify items which are desired or available. These could include malpractice insurance, medical insurance, retirement programs, vacation, CME allowance, and many others. All of these items can be quite specific in order to zero in on exact preferences.

The availability or desirability of perks such as cell phone, pager, club dues, and other items could be selected. Options under relocation would include moving expenses and reimbursement of real estate expenses.

#### Contract Terms

To help avoid negotiating conflicts, a section for contract terms offered or requested could include options for employment status, employment term, the availability of partnership, and dispute resolution method. It would cover even such details as the number of years to partnership and whether outplacement services are provided.

#### Compatibility

An important and more subjective component would be a measure of compatibility. One such learning instrument is DiSC®. Candidates and employers would each take the instrument, which is used to delineate how a person tends to behave or is expected to behave in various situations. Usually the situation or focus is a work environment. DiSC is not a "personality test," nor are its scores to be judged as "good" or "bad."

Although employers may be tempted to use the resulting DiSC Profile to "select" one candidate over another, that is not

the primary purpose of the test. It is primarily intended to create an agenda for a thoughtful dialogue on the subject of whether a candidate will fit within a group's culture. The DiSC Profile is intended to help candidates determine if their behavioral tendencies are compatible with the behavioral expectations of the group, just as it is intended to help the employer articulate what kind of behavior would be most effective within the culture of the group. DiSC is self-administered and can be accessed on the Internet at [www.PPSSonline.com](http://www.PPSSonline.com).

Individual and comparison reports are available within hours of completing the instrument. A DiSC Profile Report will provide candidates and employers:

- A graphed comparison of a candidate's natural behavior vs. a group's expected behavior.
- A detailed narrative description comparing a candidate's natural behavior vs. a group's expected behavior.
- A graphic display comparing the intensity of a candidate's behavioral tendencies compared to behaviors expected by an employer.

#### Time, Effort, and Results

I know of no Web site in the physician recruitment industry that uses anything like a UPC. However, an example that hints at what I am talking about can be found on PracticeLink's Web site, [www.practicelink.com](http://www.practicelink.com). The process of completing its candidate profile (7 steps) approximates the experience of completing a UPC tool. The latter, of course, would take more time (DiSC itself takes 10 minutes to complete), but the effort would be worth it. All in all, it should take the candidate or the recruiter no more than 30 minutes to complete a computerized UPC form.

Given the number of fields and response permutations, it would not be

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practical to search for an opportunity or a candidate using the entire UPC data set. Because of the number and detail of the variables, it is unlikely that one would ever find the perfect candidate or the perfect opportunity using the entire UPC. Therefore, I suggest that candidate or opportunity searching continue to revolve around specialty and location.

Once an opportunity or candidate is found, however, either party could choose one or all four categories to compare preferences. Here the candidate's preferences would be displayed in text or in graphic form next to the employer's preferences. This would allow precise analysis of how close the two parties are in their needs. For example, if a candidate preferred a "base salary with a production bonus" and an employer preferred to offer a "net income guarantee," both can read that one says "yes" and the other says "no." Or, if responses were color coded, one can easily see that one color or the other indicates disagreement (red) or agreement (green). In either case, each party now has meaningful and comparable information at hand to review.

And this is the point where I believe the action really begins. Is it go or no go? Should the parties pursue one another? If the answer is no, move on and don't waste each other's time! If it is yes, confirm whether areas of disagreement are fixed or negotiable or whether agreements can be extended or substituted. In this kind of exchange one gets to the heart of the matter very quickly. A constructive dialogue between the two has been achieved, and cooperative negotiating is now possible. An exchange of questions and answers can then be centered on the four categories of the UPC.

Compare this scenario to the way it works now. I believe there is a difference, one that deepens the process, enlightens the players, and promises to reduce frus-

trations for both parties. Therefore, I propose that all physician recruitment Web sites incorporate UPC for the benefit of both parties in this critical transaction. ■

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