Maurice Fuller

Hello and welcome to StaffingTec's staffing technology podcast where we speak with people who are leading the digital transformation of the staffing industry. I'm Maurice Fuller, founder of StaffingTec and StackVantage, and today I'm here with David Searns, CEO of Haley Marketing. Digital marketing is one of the most important trends that is happening in staffing today, and David and Haley Marketing are on the cutting edge of this trend. Hi, David! Welcome to the podcast. I'm really excited to speak with you today.

David Searns

Hey, Maurice! Glad to be here—this is going to be a fun chat.

MF

Awesome. Well, let's just jump right in and talk about what's facing staffing firms today as their biggest challenge, and that's recruiting. As we enter this post pandemic timeframe, nearly every staffing firm that I'm talking with has way more job orders than candidates. So let's talk about digital marketing and how that's changing recruiting. Specifically, I'd like to get into programmatic with you and what kind of impact that programmatic job advertising is having on the staffing industry.

DS

So I thought we were going to start with something easy, like, do I like the fact that Seattle is getting a new hockey team?

MF

laughs.
Of course, yeah. Jump right in and give you the hard questions.

DS

Alright. Well, let's talk recruiting. You're exactly right. This is the number one, number two, and number three issue for everybody in the industry, and it doesn't matter if you're recruiting IT professionals, healthcare, blue collar, picker packers—it's hard to get people to go to work. So the question is, what does digital marketing do? If you go back, even just a few years ago, what was recruiting for most companies?

It was job advertising. Once upon a time, it was Monster and CareerBuilder, then it became Indeed and ZipRecruiter. Social media has really changed the game, and you mentioned programmatic—we'll talk about that in just a second. But now when I'm thinking about a recruiting strategy, I have to think through a lot more pillars. Once upon a time, it was advertising. That's one of the pillars I'm going to think about is how to maximize that advertising. Next thing to think about is social media. How do I have unique strategies for both active and passive job seekers on social? The active job seekers: how am I selling my jobs, my brand as an employer, the clients I work with?

With the passive job seekers right now, how do I get people to go to work? Just getting people off the couch—because either they've got more compensation by staying home and working or they've got childcare issues or they're afraid to go to work... they're just uncomfortable. I heard a great interview with somebody that was talking about one of the reasons light industrial workers are doing no call no shows. It's not that they don't want to work; it's that they're afraid because they don't know what their personal schedule will look like. And they don't know what to do when

their child's school cancels. So rather than taking a risk, they just don't go to work. So in digital marketing, we have to think about: how do we create messages to engage with these people on social? The passive, the active. Even our job advertising, what we're posting, has to change. We have to be communicating with people the way it used to be many moons ago when job advertising was actually ads, not digitized job posts.

I mentioned that there's multiple pillars. We also have to think about our employment brand. We'll get more into that later. Staffing companies have got to think about, why should someone work for me? Why should someone work for a staffing company, period. I don't know what the data is recently, but ASA used to always say that four out of five jobseekers did not think about the staffing industry as a career choice. If we want to fill our job openings, we have to reach that 80%.

That brings us to the last pillar, which is the company's website. I know we're going to talk more about websites in a little bit, but specifically look at how much candidate traffic is coming to your website that never applies to a job. What am I doing to reengage that talent? What am I doing to increase conversion rates? What am I doing to tell my story in a more effective way? What am I doing to create better calls to action? All of those pillars can be optimized to improve recruitment marketing.

You mentioned one that was specific to job advertising: programmatic. So as probably everybody knows, it's software to help manage job spend, and there's two different ways it can be used. One is almost all the programmatic companies—the Appcasts, the PandoLogics—that have their own network of job boards, kind of like this black box of job sites that they control. They will, using their software, analyze your job posts and try to figure out where to post the jobs to get you a better response. That's one form of programmatic. It's actually not the one we like the best. The one we like the best is the second form where you take the money you're already spending with an Indeed, with a ZipRecruiter, and you set rules, and you use software to control your bidding strategy so that now you're getting more return on the investment.

Pre-crazy situations we're dealing with right now, we had clients that were being told, hey, to maintain your visibility on our platform, you're going to need to increase your job spend by… One company was spending 3500. They were told they need to go to 5000 a month, just to stay even. We put programmatic in place. We had a 63% increase in the number of applications. This is for healthcare. And their spend went down by two hundred dollars. It's all a matter of using the software to figure out how to better manage the spend, because what happens when you just let your branch offices spend the money is that they'll advertise using a recency effect. Whatever job came in last that they need, it's advertised. Then the money tends to get eaten up by the jobs that are easier to fill, because more people click on those jobs. So the software allows you to retain that budget and put it to the jobs that really need it.

That's where we love programmatic; it can drive such good results. And right now with the crazy situation, I mean… Year to date: cost of a job application is up 61%. Conversion rates are down double digits. So how we get more response, more ROI over spending, is we need the software to give us the data, so that we can then use the data to make better decisions about how to advertise. That's where we see that the software is going to beat the human every time.

MF

You made so many great points. Just touching upon programmatic, being able to work with a company like Haley to understand programmatic and optimize that and work with the right set of

vendors for your particular market I think is really great. And your points about why job seekers may not be re entering the market... I think thinking deeply about why that is and addressing that in your communications is such a great point that you made, in optimizing every pillar of that conversion process.

I would like to talk about this idea of digital transformation, which is core to what we do here at StaffingTec, and how the whole industry is digitally transforming. We've talked about all of these different ways of attracting candidates, which are largely digital. What I'm seeing is that marketing is playing a really big role in the digital transformation of staffing because they're central to a lot of things that are happening within staffing industries, and they have broad visibility. In all the different activities within staffing firms, in recruiting, and in sales—they play a central role. I want to get your view on what marketing is doing and the role that they're playing in leading that digital transformation.

DS

So if you think fundamentally about marketing, what's the purpose of it? It's to improve communication. It's to help an organization tell its story the way it wants it told. Just as importantly, it is to help another audience, a job seeker, an employer, to discover a company that can help them solve a problem. So let's think about the digitization of that. The number of channels of communicating with people has exploded. Now I have to think about, well, I have to reach people on email, texting, social media. So I have to think about ways to digitize my communication to use the right message, the right medium, for the various channels.

I also have to think about... what are my recruiters doing, what are my sales people doing that really doesn't add a lot of value in the service process? And how can we use automation, how can we use technology, to replace low value transactional work with low to no cost? Automation. So where are we seeing that? You're seeing that in Senses and Herefishes doing process automation. You're seeing that in the HubSpots and the active campaigns, doing more marketing automation. You're seeing lots of companies that are providing solutions that enhance communication.

I know we're gonna be talking on Haley's podcast with Great Recruiters. One of the things they're doing is, how do you get feedback on the recruiter? I can use Great Recruiters as a way to automate the process of building a brand for my recruiters. Maurice, looking at this fundamentally, how do I enhance communication? Start with your clients and candidates. How do they want you to communicate with them?

What's the statistics on texting? It gets like a 90 some odd percent response rate versus email which gets less than 10. Lots of staffing companies are still doing almost all of their candidate communication with email. So how do I incorporate texting? How do I match the timing of communication to the behaviors of the client or candidate? Well, that data about behaviors is probably going into my ATS. They applied for a job. They came in for an interview. They had an anniversary with us. That's where automation comes in. I can improve the candidate touchpoints using that automation to make a better service experience. The short answer to your question, the best I can summarize, is that I have to think about technology enhancing communication so my recruiters and my salespeople can spend their time doing the things that they are most needed to do in the process of serving clients and candidates.

MF

That's really great, and that really leads right into my next question. Marketing has changed so much over the last five to ten years in general, but in staffing specifically, and it sometimes feels like it's overwhelming for small staffing firms to know all the different things that they need to know to be effective. From SEO to social to website design, automation, email campaigns, etc.—it can be overwhelming. The large companies have the advantage that they have all these people that are specialized who can do these kinds of things. But if you're a smaller firm, small to midsize firm, how do you deal with all of these different pillars of digital marketing and be successful with limited resources?

DS

That's a great question, Maurice. And you're right, it is overwhelming. When we started Haley Marketing Group way back in 1996, we were ghost writers. We wrote sales letters to help salespeople stay top of mind. We had one thing we did because that's how salespeople communicated. Most of them weren't even emailing clients in 1996. They were making cold calls, and they would write. Fast forward to today, and now we've got all these different communication channels and all of these options for how I can connect with employers and jobseekers. The challenge for small to midsize businesses is there's going to be a lack of resources.
Once upon a time, I thought I knew a lot about marketing. Our company as we've grown now has specialists. We have a team now of fifty-four people, and they are specialists in social and social PPC and Google PPC and Google search advertising and website development. So for a small company, the key is focus. Don't try to do all these things. Figure out, what am I trying to accomplish? Do I need more clients? Do I need more candidates? Everyone's heard the acronym SMART: set SMART objectives. How many do I need? I'm always amazed at the number of business owners where you ask them about their strategy for this year, or even their business goals for this year, like, "Oh, I want to grow." By how much? "Well, 20%." Why 20%? How many clients does 20% mean?

The more companies can start to break down their goals so they know exactly what they want to accomplish, the better. Now from a marketing perspective, they can then pick what tactics are most likely to accomplish their goals. I've seen executive recruiters that would be like, "I want to add four new clients this year"—very modest goals. "So I wanted to get really active on social media." And my response is, Why? I understand if you really want to drive inbound marketing, and you're trying to really grow your business, but if you want four new clients, that's the wrong marketing strategy. You'd be wasting a lot of time and resources to get found, so you can get four new clients. We could go directly at fifty new clients that are prospects and maybe land four. Strategy is the key. What do I want to accomplish, then match the tactics to the goals so that you're only doing what's essential.

MF

That's really interesting and that kind of leads up to something I've been thinking about, David, which is, do you think staffing firms in general wrestle more with the execution side or more with the strategic side, or is it some combination of the two in terms of optimizing their marketing approach?

DS

Alright, so people listening, don't get mad at me for saying this. It should be the strategy side. I see a lot of really good marketers where their focus is on the strategy side. But that's not the majority. Out of the 20,000 staffing companies, there's probably 18,000 that struggle with the tactics, because they put tactics first. Oh, I should be on TikTok because I see that all the younger workers in the office spend time on TikTok. You don't have an Instagram game plan—what are we doing on Instagram? They didn't start with the strategy so they then struggle with the tactics because there is no strategy.

MF

Yes, that's fascinating. I'm glad that you framed it up that way. I wanted to ask you about the measures that staffing firms should be using to benchmark and measure their performance on the marketing side. I feel like a lot of companies I work with don't have hardly any measures that they're looking at other than maybe what the best sources are for making placements.

DS

So, great question to which there are some good answers and some hard answers. Let me start with the good answers. In an ideal world, you're starting at the placement and working backwards, so you've got full cycle analytics. So I actually see leads coming in, impacting data going into my ATS, impacting data placements being made. We see that with some of the programmatic, particularly with Bullhorn. When our clients are using Bullhorn and they're using ClickCast, our programmatic software, we can see all the way through to placement. So that's an ideal world: I know, and I'm able to track individuals through the entire sales funnel, the entire recruiting funnel, to placement. But that's not the majority of the time.

Particularly for small and midsize businesses, it can be very difficult to track all that data. Where I see people often focusing are on the vanity metrics. How many likes did we get, how many followers do we have, what kind of engagement do we have? Those are really easy to collect, but they're the least valuable data. Now if you're just looking at overall am I having reach into my marketplaces, is there going to be some sort of brand recognition?—yeah, it's great to see how much likes and engagement you have. We have to look somewhere in the middle.

So I back up the sales funnel. If placement is the end, what comes before that? Okay, job applications. What's our metrics on job applications and what are our data sources for job applications? What's ahead of that? Okay, visits to our career site. Are we seeing an increase in traffic over time to our website? Is it slowly increasing, or is it more like a hockey stick—exponentially increasing? I can look at SEO, I can look at social, I can look at PPC. I can look at what kind of web traffic it is driving. PPC is a little bit easier because I can actually look at what I am spending, what's my cost for every click, and what's the conversion rate—at least I'm filling in a form. Now again, if I can see into the ATS, I can get my conversion rate on a placement being made, but most times I can at least get a conversion rate on a form.

For those people that are listening and thinking "David, you're just talking a lot of numbers," start as easy as you can. For our own company, we count one metric: sales leads. There's a ton of things that can drive sales leads, and we do look at all the individual pieces to see what's working. But if that one metric is not on, I don't really care that all the others are. Then I'll break it down. If that one metric *is* on, I might look to optimize some spend but I'm happy because it's easy to manage. You mentioned recruiting. I think the biggest thing is, what source is driving the

candidates we place? And what should I be paying per placed applicant, per application? That is where programmatic can add that data in. But the thing I would try to avoid is the vanity metrics unless the goal was solely about, "I'm trying to build my company brand." It's sort of like seeing how many people saw a billboard, or I can place an ad and buy it based on cost per 1000 impressions. It's really hard to tell the response.

Now, the marketers in the audience are going to argue with me. They're going to say, well, we can put UTM tracked links into everything we're doing so we're actually tracking every single click. We can get very granular with what people are clicking on, and we can benchmark campaign A against campaign B against campaign C. Absolutely. You can. That takes a much more sophisticated approach to marketing, which a lot of companies aren't going to have the time or resources to do, but that's the best way to track all the data.

MF

Exactly. The larger staffing firms with lots of internal resources can build out these really sophisticated ways of tracking. But it's interesting, if you can boil it down to just one key metric like that, I think that simplifies a lot of things. I like how you've done that. I wanted to jump into staffing websites, which are super important, and get your view on where staffing websites are headed as we move into this new world of mobile phones. Do you see websites essentially becoming apps, and where does mobile play into website presence?

DS

Fantastic question. I have to answer it in two parts. First, it's just websites themselves, then we'll talk about apps. One of the really interesting things that happened last year: we track analytics on hundreds of staffing companies, and the total traffic to our clients websites prior to the pandemic was running about 55 to 58% mobile. Since the pandemic, the mobile percentage has actually dropped to low forties. Still high, but it has declined greatly as people are working from home. They're using their computer as their primary method of accessing staffing company websites. So what does that mean? It doesn't negate the value of mobile. It does mean I really have to think about the experience of the user on both platforms: desktop and mobile.

What is the role of the website? Is the website there to tell your story? Probably. Is the website there to facilitate commerce? I'm mostly there to help people get to jobs. I'm mostly there to get employers to contact us about our services. So I see websites sort of migrating like when you go to a Netflix kind of site. I'm not there to learn about Netflix; I'm there to watch a show. So as we go forward with staffing websites (and apps cross over into this), I'm there to find the jobs. How do I get them as quickly as possible? Is the homepage—do I have a Search Toolbar just like I would if I was going to an Indeed? If I'm looking for talent, can I come there like I'm on Upwork and search your candidate database and see what's there and do self service? I see more and more staffing firms migrating to platforms for facilitating transactions, rather than just branding sites. That doesn't mean branding is not important. But again, why are people coming to your website? Some of the time they want to learn about you, but more of the time they want to do something. What is it they want to do?

Now let's talk about apps. My view on apps was greatly changed during the last year, particularly if you look at healthcare. If you look at Aya's success story. If you look at SnapNurse. Aya: I saw their CEO at the executive forum, and he talked about 330 some odd percent growth last year,

which he attributes to their mobile app. Why does it work? Because for the right kinds of healthcare jobs, particularly a lot of per diem jobs which SnapNurse does very well, when there's not a lot of time to place an order and I can't wait for the staffing company to go do recruiting, I can put the order out, and nurses can go find a shift. It is a perfect fit.

I think where apps facilitate a more efficient last mile, they are going to dominate. But when it comes to me having to get a job order and I have to go recruit, I think apps as platforms are going to be a struggle for most companies to get people to use their platform. The big guys, they have reach. They can use all their branch network and get thousands of candidates or hundreds of thousands of candidates on their app. For most staffing companies, where the apps are really going to make a difference isn't in creating a big platform. It's in enhancing the service experience. Your time entry is here. You can check your pay stubs here. Basically, everything I was going to do by calling in, I can now do 24/7, just like I use my banking app. I think that style of app is going to be critical for all staffing companies. The mobile platform will depend on the kind of roles you fill.

MF

Yes, lots of great information here. I think mobile is the future and mobile apps for staffing firms is where it's all going, and it's interesting about the challenge of getting users to actually use the app. I'm sure that's where Haley will play a role in working with staffing firms to accelerate adoption of mobile apps. I want to move on to marketing automation, which is one of my favorite topics. You've set up a practice focusing on automation and marketing automation. I wanted to get your view on that. We touched upon that earlier, but I want to understand more about the potential for automation and marketing automation and what that is doing for staffing firms in terms of enabling them to move faster and more efficiently in filling orders.

DS

If you think about the purpose of automation, it goes back to my earlier comments about taking low value or transactional tasks and enabling them to get done faster, more efficiently, and more consistently. It's also about the overall client and candidate experience.

I'll date myself here, Maurice. Back in the olden days in my parents staffing company, we used to run a ton of ads every Sunday in the local newspaper. The phone would ring off the hook on Mondays. The recruiters would be like, wait, I'm really busy, take a message. Wait a minute... you just spent thousands of dollars to get people to respond, and you don't have time to take the call? Well, that's happening today, but now it's happening digitally. Emails are coming in, texts are coming in. Imagine the poor recruiter—how do you possibly have time to stay on top of every candidate communication? Let's add in Facebook Messenger and all the other places that messages can come in from clients and candidates. People can't keep up.

So we looked at automation, and we looked at the fact that there are amazing platforms out there. We mentioned Sense, Herefish, HubSpot. We've seen for years people buying HubSpot, which is a sizable investment, with almost no strategy on what to do with it. So my analogy is that it's sort of like buying a Ferrari but leaving out the engine. The engine for automation is content. The reason we're building an automation practice is that we see the ability to create more journeys in Sense, more campaigns. We use an active campaign creating recipes that enable staffing companies to create a higher level of content—create a greater volume of content.

Jeff Staats, who is our new Chief Marketing Officer, comes to us with really deep marketing automation experience. At his firm, he had 250 Sense journeys running. A lot of our clients are running a handful of Sense journeys because they don't have anybody who knows the product to do the technical side *and* knows the content to be able to create engaging email and text content that gets people to respond. Ultimately, automation is about communication. It's about enabling communication at scale to strengthen relationships, which staffing has always been about. We're just doing it in new ways.

We can see that there's so much need for companies who are adopting these tools to find better ways to use them because it's impossible to have resources. One of our clients said, "Well, I'm going to hire a $40,000 fresh out to help with my social media, and I want them to do the automations, too." Jeff talked to this client and said, "I'm going to be honest with you. That person doesn't exist." You're not going to find someone with that combination of skills. You need to get an automation person who knows the technical side, who knows the content side, and then get someone to do all your social media. They are two different people, and the automation person is going to cost you a lot more. We see that most companies don't need this full time. Even when we set up our own Active Campaign, we hired a consultant to help with the data migration, to help with the initial setup—someone who knew the platform—because we wanted to shortcut the learning curve. We wanted someone who could show us things that we didn't know how to do, because we didn't want to learn by stubbing our toe.

MF

Very insightful. Jeff Staats is certainly a brilliant marketer, and you're very fortunate to have him on your team. I think any Haley client that works with Jeff is going to see terrific results. I also think that smaller and mid sized staffing firms can use automation to really set themselves apart. I've seen some smaller firms do amazing things with automation. I really think this is a very, very important part of the digital transformation of staffing firms, and I'm glad to see that you guys are leading the way. Personalization: you touched on that a little bit with respect to market automation, but that's a really big part of what you're doing and a way to drive value, right?

DS

It's an expectation now. I'll go back to the Netflix analogy. You log on, and Netflix has a recommendation engine that's gonna find you shows that match things you've looked at in the past. It knows your past behavior. Now, I don't know that all the staffing automation platforms have that kind of recommendation engine at this point, but people expect relevant communication. So as status changes, as a relationship changes, they want more and more relevant information coming from whomever is reaching out. That personalization is beyond just addressing somebody as, "Hi Maurice. Here's my standard email for you." It's really acknowledging the status of the relationship, the status of your career journey and where you want to go next, or as an employer, the needs you're likely to have, and then ensuring that what you're serving up is as relevant as it can be.

MF

All right. Well, this is StaffingTec, and we do think a lot about staffing technology. So I would like to ask you about marketing technology, and what your thoughts are on how staffing firms should

think about investments in MarTech to drive the most value and support an effective digital marketing plan.

DS

Great question. I wish I had an easy, great answer. Let me think about this for a second. From a technology standpoint, I would start with looking at, what are the greatest barriers to client and candidate service today? Is it the capacity of my recruiting team? Is it the ability to get the message out by the sales team? Is it staying top of mind with people? Looking at where the gaps are in your service process will help you identify where we can use digital transformation to eliminate what was human service with technology.

If I was going to start, Maurice, the first place to look is obviously your website. That is your storefront. That is your branch office. I remember a client once arguing with us, saying nobody goes to my website, it's just a brochure. And this was a sizable regional firm. We told him that we beg to differ. If he looked at your Google Analytics, which he never had, his company had 600,000 visitors to the website in the past year. He had no idea. He never looked at it. He just assumed, because he was not a regular visitor to his own company website or other companies' websites, that people weren't using it. We said, how many people visited all of your branch offices collectively in the last year? I bet it was a lot less than 600,000. So I need to make that branch office facilitate transactions as effectively as I can. But what do I look at next?

Then I'd look at the automation tools. How do I make that service experience more personal, more efficient? Then I look at a chatbot on my website because we're not open 24/7, and people expect some sort of response 24/7. Do I have some way to engage people, even if it's simply just to collect information? To drive people to the right pages on your website—that would be the next thing that I would look at investing in. I would look at social automation. One of the things that's very challenging is getting salespeople and recruiters to participate in active management of social media. Social media gets better results when the people in the organization participate than when it's just one of your company pages, but it's like pulling teeth.

One of the things we do is we build software to automate this so that we could have a marketing department centrally curate what they want the company to be sharing. Then salespeople and recruiters can automate without losing control of their own personal social media and automate the sharing. To do that team based content distribution, that would be the next level.

Then I would look at a lot of the bells and whistles. I would look at video platforms. Video is so effective on social media, but for a lot of companies, once upon a time it was difficult to create. Now all of us have a Zoom account. So now video is much easier. But there are platforms that make it really easy to create branded videos so that I can make that a regular part of communication. I work with one client in Dallas, Texas, who is using video email to do outreach, as opposed to just picking up the phone. And last October, when they couldn't get into clients offices, they sent out 300 some odd video emails. They got 34 new clients. They certainly don't get that kind of response if they make 300 and some odd cold calls. So again, it's about looking at where the gaps are in the process. They realized, our current calling methods are very inefficient, what would make them better… then looked at those point solutions. I'll go back to the beginning. It's about communication and strategy first, and then that determines where to invest in marketing technology.

MF

Yes, so many great points. Staffing firms don't necessarily need a lot of tools in their MarTech stack, but they need the right tools. With the right tools, they can have a really significant impact. So, David, thank you so much. I always learn so much when I talk with you. Best way to reach you is:

DS

Email: dsearns@haleymarketing.com. Reach out to me on LinkedIn or check out our website, haleymarketing.com. I see every contact form that comes by.

MF

Alright. Thanks, David! Thanks everyone for joining us today on the Staffing Technology podcast. We'll see you on the next episode. So long, everyone!