Learning, recruiting tools and performance analytics, all in one platform.

The Road to Becoming an All-Star Tech Recruiter

In this Whitepaper, we explain how Tech Recruiters around the world are experiencing the satisfaction of actually understanding the industry they are in, and the commodity they are dealing with.
If you are a seasoned technical recruiter and feel a sense of mild anxiety whenever candidates or IT managers make their latest pronouncement about the new big thing that is going to hit the IT department “…forget everything that’s gone before, we have seen the future, and it is AngularJS!” or “DevOps is our new religion… death to waterfall!” or “We must have Node in an Agile environment!”, imagine how daunting these acronyms and buzzwords are for those who are completely new to the world of IT!

The truth is that after just the first fortnight of being in technical recruitment, most recruiters wake up in a cold sweat, from what has started to become a recurring nightmare. The one where the person on the phone is screeching at you in an undecipherable language, instructions about what is needed and where you went so wrong with the last candidate you sent. In this dream she looks again at the job specification in front of her in a vain attempt to try and keep up, but the IT acronyms and terms are all merging into a pool of nothingness. Fledgling recruiters awake in the dead of night, hearts pounding and ears still reeling to the echoes of “We need .NET with AGILE experience and an understanding of Object Oriented and MVC! What don’t you understand about that?”

Recruiters aren’t historically drawn from a technical background. They are valued and hired mostly for their customer facing and sales skills. But the product they are selling, is one of the most sought after commodities in the world today. And it is the most complex commodity on the planet too – it is the IT candidate.
The Road to Becoming an All-Star Tech Recruiter

Ever since the story of technology in the workplace began, there has been a disjointed yet symbiotic relationship between the four key protagonists. Here’s how it goes...

‘The IT Manager hands over a new technical role (without really wanting to explain it) to an HR person who really doesn’t want to even try to understand it to any great level, and who promptly then passes it over to an agency Tech Recruiter who just prays that their word-matching skills on the internal CRM system (something like Adapt or Profile) will bring up a list of candidate CVs that fall somewhere into a ball park of likely contenders (not knowing of course that candidates will put EVERYTHING they have even walked past on their CV as a skillset). The candidates, who are often miles out of the ball park, then make it their mission to pull the wool over the eyes of the previous two, blinding them with science on the phone and with any luck blag themselves into an on-site interview, at which stage they reveal their complete lack of expertise for the role and fail.’

Ayub Shaikh, MD of Holistica Consulting has spent the past fourteen years introducing a mechanism in the recruitment industry, whereby recruitment consultants and HR can become comfortable enough in their knowledge to appreciate the nature of roles, to understand the purpose of certain technologies and to have a framework to expand that knowledge as new technology enters the narrative.

This has now been translated over from a class-based training format to an online platform in the form of our Black Belt in Technical Recruitment.

Be it learning Japanese, French or the art of Bonsai – we all have to start somewhere as clumsy, cautious beginners. ‘The Black Belt in Technical Recruitment’ will often be the first time most recruitment consultants will be given a clear and concise description of the world of IT, the companies, the IT roles, the technologies in a way that is not daunting. Many recruitment companies worldwide see this type of training as being an essential element to the ongoing success of their consultants. Amongst the first things that a delegate will hear on the video clips are terms like “safe, controlled learning environment” with further re-assurances from the trainer to “make your mistakes here, rather than out there with a client”. Managers observing their staff go through the journey of the seven missions and witness the initially stiff and caution expression of a technophobe change to one of relief, and then to interest, and then to understanding.

Very quickly whoever goes through the course will realise that ‘Ayub's on our side!’ This is not some techy trying to teach recruiters about IT. This is an IT guy who was also a recruiter and who understands the pain you feel, so has laid it on in clear terms from a recruitment perspective.

The journey begins with an introduction to Ayub, and then we very quickly dive into the good stuff. We start with an understanding of how the PC came about, building up to an appreciation of Client-Server architecture. Networking soon becomes a breeze, and we finally get to understand ‘thin client’, and why the hell Citrix, virtualization and XenApp keep turning up on CVs. Soon there’s no holding back. The journey continues through open and closed systems, development languages, systems integration and middleware. And before you know it, you’re ready to take tech recruiting by the horns!

Why are we confident that the Black Belt will teach you everything you need to know about tech recruiting? Because there are two eternal axioms of technology,

‘IT Always Changes’...and ‘IT Never Really Changes.’
IT Always Changes

Ayub looks back on a particular encounter during one of his tech recruiting workshops...

“I’ve just sussed it out.” The cheery, youthful voice exclaimed to me as we were half way through the second workshop of the day.

“You’re never going to run out of material, are you? We’re always going to need this training, because the industry keeps changing!”

It was a workshop to clarify IT terms for HR and IT recruiters, but for the young lady it was like an epiphany as she began to grasp a far loftier concept. For she had suddenly realised that the terms which we were learning about on that warm summer’s day in London (Java, C#, Virtualisation, XenApp etc.) were not actually immovable, bedrock concepts – but rather just terms that represented today’s IT landscape. They were just a temporal snapshot of the technologies which for the moment made up the IT hot list for today. And by association, these were also the acronyms which glowed red hot with hubris on the CVs of this year’s ‘IT gurus’. In years gone by the terms would all have been different. A different group of IT candidates would have been basking in their own self-importance, and another group of HR and recruitment professionals would have been busy tugging their hair out in frustration at the hieroglyphics on those CVs.

The young lady in my class was of course also hinting that if my remit was that of a ‘demystifier’, coming to the aid of those who wished to understand these cryptic IT terms (which indeed it is), that I should never be short of people in need of salvation. I had honestly never thought about it in that way. But did she have a point?

Ever-Changing IT Landscape

As normal non-techie human beings from the operational side of the business (be it HR, procurement, marketing etc.), are we forever condemned to exist in a limbo of eternal ignorance in the face of this ever changing IT landscape? Will our job always be to wrestle with this monster whose prime purpose seems only to be the generating of new and more esoteric concepts each and every day, and to engulf us in an ever expanding veil of confusion?

The thought occurred to me. Was she right? Does IT do this on purpose? Always changing, forever morphing, particularly when the world had just got used to working in a certain way? Possibly, and possibly not. Certainly from my experience of the IT industry over the last two decades two things were blatantly clear. These being;

1) The more mystical and ethereal you can make your new IT concept sound to a CIO of an investment bank, the more they would salivate at the idea of being the first to implement it.

2) If you can manage to present any new technology in the form of a TLA (Three Letter Acronym), such as CRM, EAI, EJB, ETL etc. it would be a cert that the client would happily pay out twice as much again for the privilege. CxO-level humans love throwing around TLAs from technology during their breakfast meetings. So the killer blow would be to come up with a concept AND a company that was aligned to this philosophy. It’s not by chance that for years ERP candidates from SAP were showered with blank cheques!

A couple of recessions, and a dot-com bubble later, and the IT side of the business seems to have learned how to err on the side of caution when it comes to implementing new and mysterious ‘dark arts’. For a brief period after were back to the good old staples again. It was back to tried and tested software, written in familiar dependable languages (Cobol, C++, C etc.), all residing comfortably on a warm dry bed of faithful mainframes.
But just as things calmed down for a while, it didn’t take long for the passion and creativity to blossom within IT again. It doesn’t take a lot in technology to light the blue touch paper. Very quickly we find ourselves once again in a climate where change is occurring at such a frenetic pace, and where further technological innovations could appear to change the way we look at everything. Nestling amongst the ‘flash in the pan’ technologies there is always a risk that there may lurk a true paradigm shift. One which an IT department ignores at its peril.

The problem for the IT department is that they need to continually monitor the situation and assess when a true paradigm shift is on the horizon. In the early days of delivering training, I remember that attendees would nod in vague recognition when you mentioned terms like MS-DOS, or Commodore 64. It wasn’t uncommon to see a knowing grin appear when you walked attendees through the hardware hall of fame and uttered terms like Amstrad, Atari or ZX81. They would reminisce over bygone Christmas days, the entirety of which were spent with Dad trying to upload a simple ping pong game, from a floppy disc or a cassette player onto the TV screen via the newly acquired ZX Spectrum.

The knowing grins are less frequent nowadays. And are more often replaced by polite smiles and bemused shakes of the head, as the new entrants to IT recruitment ask me to describe briefly what a floppy disc might be. Or more worryingly, what a cassette was!

The young graduate who Ayub referred to earlier was in her first month as an IT recruiter. And of course to her as to all new entrants, IT today undoubtedly appeared to be this enchanting landscape which continually morphed into ever more unearthly forms. But had she fallen foul of the flip side of the equation? Not realising that actually in IT, things never really change...

And Yet, IT Never Changes

But the fundamental principles, the actual DNA of IT might actually remain immovable for a long time to come. If so, is it possibly the case that if you understand how it all hangs together in principle (the way it has as it has in IT from day one), then you can kind of get it for a long time to come?

Wow! That’s huge. That would mean that there’s a minor risk, when in conversation with a techie, that we might actually know what we’re talking about.

What we’re suggesting here is that to be fluent in the IT of today, one simply needs to appreciate the latest incarnation of each concept. Therein dwells the key to understanding IT. And, once we have that key, is it possible that we may never ever need to be flummoxed again?

So allow us to take you on a journey through some of the features of today’s IT landscape and to explain which concepts might be eternal, and which ones may be worthy of truly being astounded at.
If you wish to understand how IT corporate networks are about to transition into their latest incarnation, read on. But be warned, we’re now about to enter a zone where old and new paradigms seamlessly merge. There follow gratuitous descriptions of virtualised Cloud technologies and unnecessarily romanticised visions of the future.

Let’s begin.

The Future of Corporate IT: Heart Transplant

Firstly let's think about hardware in simple terms.

This is the physical, tangible stuff. This hardware comes in a spectrum of sizes. From the very small, neat pieces of kit that we carry around with us (laptops, smartphones and tablets), to the large and leviathan which we may spend an entire lifetime communicating with, but never actually see in the flesh (these are the mainframes and supercomputers in the background).

Essentially these are the two extremes of the hardware spectrum for the layperson to come to grips with. If you’re working in a corporate environment, then you’ll most certainly be using one of the devices at the one end of the spectrum (be it laptop, PC or tablet) to tap into the large machine in the background (or the machine that ‘serves’ us, aka ‘the server’).

Once we understand this we need to ask one simple question: “Does the organisation you work for want its users wandering around with their own disparate pieces of kit, carrying around with you that valuable business data?”

No, of course not. Large corporate IT is about allowing users the freedom to work in the locations and times which suit them, and then capturing and compiling the results of their activities into a ‘brain’ at the very epicentre. All of your thoughts and ideas are captured and assimilated into that single server machine at the heart of your organisation. Historically this powerful server has always might have purchased outright or, more commonly, leased from any one of the manufacturers of ‘large tin’ (IBM, Fujitsu, HP etc.). As well as this your employer would have committed itself to housing it on site, and paying for the upkeep and support of this giant hardware.

For a large financial institution this often involves setting aside an air-conditioned, de-humidified basement. Factor in a small army of systems administration staff to occasionally change the giant’s nappies. Oh, and a further crack team of network engineers to ensure that the cabled binary nervous system reaching out to its thousands of users are all functioning perfectly.

That’s the hardware up and running, but now we need it to sing.

Superimpose upon this hardware a layer of software specifically designed to bring the machine to life. Operating system
‘The Cloud’

(OS) software to be precise. This OS needs its own group of experts to keep the IT heart pumping at its optimum pace. Then bring on the database experts to look after the incredibly complex RDBMS system (the ‘database’ to you and me). Add some more business application software (and the corresponding teams of developers). And finally let’s install another group of patient helpdesk foot soldiers and support staff to solve user issues. Now you have something that is beginning to look like an IT architecture and an IT department. This setup becomes the core of an IT system that can gather the data you produce, and allows the end user to be productive. Higher up, closer to CxO level, a group of mathematical wizards will digest those facts and figures and present them in such a way as to become a distinct business advantage for the company (enter the dark art known as Business Intelligence or BI).

As you can see, hardware is important. But keeping it operational, efficient and continually useful is an art form. Not to mention an expensive activity! But just as important (if not more so) is the data that is spawned within the company. This is truly the key commodity, and the lifeblood for most organisations.

If you ever need a reminder of how obsessed we are with the collection and assimilation of data into BI in this 21st century, take a look at the Facebook valuation just before it floated. A tad under $100 Billion, simply because it purports to be the platform to capture BI about an entire generation of consumers.

For all of the above reasons we, the end users, have accepted the self-imposed mandate of the IT department to apply strict rules as to which hardware we might use in our workplace. We also abide by their laws relating to the very nature of the data which may or may not be allowed to stream in and out of its corporate network (viz. the banning of Facebook in many organisations). After all IT are the ‘Guardians of this IT Heart’ and so they feel justified in imposing some form of discipline on which devices are being hooked up to it.

But user attitude is changing in this area as we shall see later. The BYOD (Bring Your Own Data) is an added headache for the IT department in this new era.

So what about the future of this age old set up as described above? The question on everyone’s lips is: “Will there ever come a time when the technology and infrastructure on our planet finally allows IT to relinquish hands-on control of the central server hardware?”

And many are saying that the answer may now finally be ‘Yes.’

Enter the ‘Cloud’

So now the real question. What exactly is the Cloud? It’s ‘Everything As A Service’ or (XaaS). Where ‘X’ can be replaced with the technology of your choice.

Think about this. The idea that you may never need to buy any technology layer outright ever again. You just need to rent it as a service. This in layman’s terms is the essence of Cloud Services. Everything from software to data storage, to hardware, is delivered to you as a service; where previously you would have purchased it and owned it.

In case you’re not swooning with excitement at this thought. Let us help you along a little. This has potentially huge implications. What could the ‘X’ actually stand for? In hardware terms Cloud offers ‘IaaS’. Or ‘Infrastructure As A Service.’

In other words, the renting of hardware, which is otherwise invisible to us. Hardware which resides miles away, or in a completely different country. And which can be tweaked in terms of its power and capability, by a simple phone call to your Cloud provider. Servers which can be doubled in capacity or halved within a matter of hours. As your company expands and grows, so can your hardware in the Cloud. What does that mean for a large blue-chip organisation?
Well. Only the near-complete elimination of all hardware and network headaches. Only the complete relinquishing of the many annoyances which come with purchasing and running your own huge expensive servers. That’s all!

(You need to read the last two sentences with an equal measure of dramatic exclamation and sarcasm to get the full effect. If you’re unclear as to how to achieve this, simply call up your company’s helpdesk and describe a PC problem to 2nd line support. Wait two seconds, listen to the tone of the response as they feign sympathy. That’s the ball park area you need to be in.)

But sarcasm aside, make no mistake about it. One of the key reasons Cloud technology may prove itself to be the next evolutionary step in corporate IT is that, for the first time, the nirvana of a truly ‘virtualised’ (the clichéd buzzwords are pouring out thick and fast now) IT architecture is a plausible option. For the uninitiated ‘virtualisation’ has a couple of meanings in IT. But in this context, think of it this way:

“We don’t know where the hardware physically is, or how it is structured, or even who looks after the day to day running of it. And we don’t care. As long as it does exactly what our old ‘big box’ in the basement used to do, that’s fine by us. As long as we can shrink our network administration budget by 60% where do we sign?”

The Cloud will mean that the physical purchase of a mainframe by your organisation will become an outdated concept. More likely, they’ll buy a virtualised mainframe, one which is never physically seen or touched by the end client. This of course also means that the army of support and networking staff are no longer a concern for the end client.

But there’s more...

Data Storage

What about storage? After all, this is a relatively straightforward concept. You work. You create documents, drawings, photos, emails etc. We press ‘save’ and that data is stored in our hardware. On our laptop this may be the in-built hard drive. When at work it may be the PC’s hard drive, but more commonly you’ll be required to store it on the central server.

If the nature of the data itself becomes complicated, or the searches we carry out become more sophisticated we store everything into a corporate database which resides as a powerful filing system on that server. A database application like Oracle allows us to utilise sophisticated tools and a querying language (PL/SQL) to invoke the data in a format that suits our needs. So far so good. What could be simpler?

But hold on! What if we run out of disc space on our laptop? Simple (but expensive). We go out and buy an external hard drive. What if our software becomes outdated? Simple (but expensive). We go out and buy the newer version. Now consider the corporate situation. Not so simple (and ludicrously expensive!). An IT department has to continually monitor the size and thirst of its user base. Capacity planning has been the bane of many IT managers in a climate when a company merger could be announced overnight, and could double the user base within a matter of months. In the past IT has learned to cope somehow, but always with a fair amount of pain, and ensuing loss or degradation of service. More users, mean the upgrading of numerous aspects of the IT architecture from storage capacity, right through to network delivery and server processing power. In addition what about the licensing implications which come into play when doubling the user base? On the other hand Cloud offers DaaS. Or ‘Data As A Service’. You might also want to tick ‘SaaS’ or Software As A Service’ on the menu.
The Pros and Cons

These two offerings from a Cloud provider will ensure that capacity, storage and application needs can grow and shrink as you require with minimal interaction on the part of the IT department. If it lives up to its potential, here is a concept which can make an IT architecture as agile, and fluid as the changes going on around it. The concept of ‘elasticity’ is borne of the Cloud era.

What Cloud effectively means is the ‘outsourcing of the heart’ of our corporate IT. Many organisations are well settled into this mode of working. Will the in-house mainframe be a thing of the past? In all honesty nobody knows for sure. What we do know is this:

Pro:
1) There has never been a more robust and sophisticated infrastructure globally in terms of transmitting huge amounts of data at mind-blowing speeds. Be it over wireless or fibre technologies. This makes the proposition of hosting groups of virtualised servers on a server farm far, far away more attractive. Your servers may be housed on a tropical island on the other side of the planet, and the data backed up to a data farm in Greenland and just for good measure, once again to Bangalore. Adding or removing a server, or increasing your database capacity in the Cloud is essentially as simple as making a phone call to your provider. The case for investing in Big Hardware, and Big Software, and maintaining it yourself starts to lose its appeal. You’d be crazy not to!

Con:
2) There has never been a more scary time to relinquish control of your IT infrastructure and the data that resides therein. Cyber-criminals, cyber-terrorists and even entire countries are the foe. And if there is one lesson learned over the last decade it is that the hackers are nearly always one step ahead of the established experts in the game of corporate security.

And what would happen if for any reason you lose that vital physical connection to your Cloud provider. Your organisation would be thrown into the dark ages. Completely outsource the very lifeblood of your organisation to a third party, at a time like this! Are you insane? Welcome to the world of CIO breakfast meetings. Let’s move on to you and me.

The Future of Personal IT: Cloudy with potential for Storms

Oh! This is the beautiful territory. An area of unabashed innovation, and one which many think is behind the recent blossoming in technology innovation generally. There’s no doubt about it - it’s never been a better time to be a consumer in the technology market.

Remember for a moment the mobile phone industry of the past, it wasn’t that long ago when the choice of which handset to upgrade to was a boring and uninspiring one. There were a handful of manufacturers who pretty much ran the show, and as users we had allowed ourselves to be herded into one of these large camps. We defined ourselves as a Nokia, Sony Ericsson, or Blackberry person. Some of the operating systems on these phones were less clunky then the others, while some vendors had more robust handsets (who can forget the indestructible Nokia 3310!). When upgrade time came around again, we knew that we were going to be presented with nothing more than a slightly better camera. Maybe a smaller handset, a different coloured casing. The pace of change was excruciatingly slow.

Then one day Steve Jobs decided that he would focus the full intensity of his famed reality distortion field upon this inert telecoms handset landscape. It resulted in the release of a piece of earth-shattering technology packaged and presented in a casing, which itself was a work of art. The ground-breaking iPhone was launched, and nothing would ever be the same again. No one saw it coming. Not least the old guard; Nokia, Blackberry and Motorola. The world of consumer telecoms would change forever. The playing field was levelled to the extent that, within a matter of few years, those who
didn’t appreciate the enormity of the shift in consumer perception, might themselves be headed for extinction. Who in 2005
could have predicted that companies like Blackberry and Nokia would be fighting for their very survival in years to come? And
yet here we are.

So why are we discussing a mobile phone in a Whitepaper about understanding IT?

If you’re asking this question, take a step back and look again at this picture. The change is truly seismic. It’s so big you can’t
really see it from the ground. Rise above the noise and you’ll see that what the iPhone did was to spark an arms race in
the area of ‘converged’ technologies. The battle lines have been drawn, and they run clearly across the palm of the user, rather
than the desk. ‘Converged’ is the term for the meshing of both IT and telecoms into a seamless form. The next generation of
mobile handset will never be ‘just a phone’ again. The arms race we are in now is one which continues to transform the mobile
handset into a devastatingly powerful consumer computing device.

We are (as has been long predicted) now at the stage where more people access the Web via their hand-based device, rather
than via their desk-based machine.

Our beloved Smartphone is the last thing we check up on before we lay our head down to sleep. It’s the first thing we check
in the morning (after the device itself has woken us up!) to see if the world out there still loves us.

In essence what Apple did, was introduced the idea of a ‘spectrum within a spectrum’ for the consumer. Apple wanted us
to be locked in however to their vision of the future, a risky strategy when the key visionary himself passes on. Except now,
we see the open community start to finally kick in and get with the script. From way back in the race, the Samsung Android
combination has now put forward suitable challengers to the Apple offerings.

In any case, the resulting competition in the market guarantees that for years to come we, the user, will be presented with a
cornucopia of devices for our personal use. They will range in size from something that wont even produce a bulge in your
jeans, to something slightly larger so that the screen shows off the magnificence of its many million colours (think iPhone and
Samsung S Series). On to the mini-tablets, which might seem ungainly as a phone when held to the ear (think Samsung Note),
but which make you think “Wow! Why would I buy a laptop now when I have all this in the palm of my hands!”

And on to the tablets (iPads and Galaxy tabs), which make us think “Wow! What a movie and internet experience! Do I even
need to keep a desktop device anymore?”

And finally on to the hybrid tablet-ultra-notebooks (Lenovo, HP, Dell et al) which say “Yes, actually you do still need a serious
machine. A tablet will never be enough. Don’t kid yourself. Behold me in my contorted magnificence. I swivel my screen to
any angle. And then my screen pops out to become a stand-alone tablet should you wish. You can then click it back on and I
become a serious business machine again.”

The innovations are pouring out thick and fast now. Even as we write this, HP have just announced a patent to licence a 3D
display for mobile and tablets which will enable 3D viewing of images above the screen from a distance of 2 metres away,
without the need for those awkward 3D glasses.

The choice is ours, the user is in control. Heaven knows what we’ll be using/wearing in a mere five years from now as our
personal IT architecture. And this is becoming the 21st Century thorn in the side for the IT department. Enter the realm of the BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) debate. You see, we as users are starting to fall in love with these devices. Pouts of remonstration now appear on the faces of previously staid and compliant employees, whenever we ask them to put away their own devices and log in using a standard issue corporate device. The key question for IT in the next couple of years is:

“Do we impose upon the consumer the hardware that is best aligned to our network (as we’ve always done), or do we make our IT infrastructure more fluid and adaptable so that users are able to use the device they prefer to work on.”

The rise and rise of personal hardware is upon us. And we will dance to their tunes, flitting from one device to the other. Seamlessly throwing photos, documents, songs and even live video calls around from TV to car to phone as if they were mere digital post-it notes pinned loosely to the sky above us. Knowing that whatever device we use, the data will have seamlessly synched itself within our own personal Cloud (‘PaaS’ is where the Cloud offers ‘Platform As A Service’). So even at the consumer level, the Cloud makes its presence felt. Our various devices will simply become portals to that infinite architecture.

In concluding, we’ll make a prediction. That in years to come you too might be seen sitting in the board room. Possibly between meetings. Sporting your quad-core, GUI-enable Prada glasses. As you wait for the next meeting to start, you’re casually flicking through your emails via Tai Chi type hand gestures, and relaying confident commands to an invisible server in the sky. If you’re scoffing, or smiling cynically at the thought. We wouldn’t be so sure.

Take a look outside. It’s much later than you think!