

Paul Nixon: It's Paul Nixon carrying out another interview and this time we're with Matt Berry from Centrica. Matt, would you like to introduce yourself and tell us about all the social media world at Centrica?

Matt Berry: Yes. Hi. So yes, I'm Matthew Berry. I look after resourcing for the Centrica Group.

An important part of what we do, and I guess a progressively more important part of what we do, is our attraction and identification of candidates via social media.

And it's also becoming a more and more important tool just for communications as well as traditional replacement of online attraction methodology as well.

So we're using social media for a number of things: to get in touch with candidates that we normally couldn't get in touch with; it gives us an opportunity to hear about what candidates are saying about us as well.

So there are a number of places online where graduates – being a good example – will share their experiences, like RateMyPlacement and things like that.

Paul Nixon: Good or bad?

Matt Berry: Good or bad, they tell the truth; or everyone's individual perception of the truth. So that's actually a powerful tool.

And also just as a means of communicating with candidates, so all potential candidates. So we have up to half a million applicants per annum for roles across our business so trying to find a simple way of getting messages out to that fairly large audience is not easy. But social media lends itself very nicely to that. And-

Paul Nixon: So how long ago did you start getting involved in the social media side as a company?

Matt Berry: Well I guess it's probably been the last three years I would say. And it's been to do a couple of things. The social media from a recruitment perspective has been the graduates, and the graduate recruiters were at the leading edge of social media; not surprising given the demographic.

Paul Nixon: For the company or for recruitment or both?

Matt Berry: Well possibly for both but certainly within our organisation. And they did a number of things. They were using it partly as a communication tool. So highlighting what campuses they would be on, when they would be there, what they would be doing there, and getting that message out. So it was very much a communication tool to link in with a larger group of grads but-

Paul Nixon: Only through Facebook or...?

Matt Berry: Yes, Facebook was an important one. Actually Facebook for the grads is the primary one to be honest. So when I'm talking about social media for grads Facebook is really one of the key ones.

More recently things like RateMyPlacement for example is very important around the summer placement in the intern programmes because via that feedback and word of mouth via our participants we are building a reputation in delivering a great work experience.

We even encourage actually all of our summer placement students to leave their views on those sorts of I guess ratings sites, to share them.

So there's a double edged sword, obviously, so the good news comes out with the bad. But as long as it's balanced I think it's no

bad thing because what we're trying to do is give people a realistic sample or taste of what it's like to work in this business.

And hopefully a lot of people will like that but some won't. So if people can make more informed decisions before joining it's better for both parties.

So the grads were early on and that's certainly been three years. And another thing that we were relatively early on to be honest was the LinkedIn piece.

So LinkedIn is something that we have been working with for certainly over three years now actively as a recruiter. And I think in terms of having a tool that supports an in-house team that focuses on external recruitment, LinkedIn – and I'm not on their payroll – I would say is one of the most valuable tools that you can lay your hands on.

So we started a relationship with them about three years ago. The site has quadrupled in size; or its membership, more accurately, has. And we've used that as one of the primary mechanisms for us to do our research to start identifying candidates.

So if we're looking for geophysicists and we want people that are going to be based in Trinidad we can start getting very focused on looking for exactly those sorts of people in competitor organisations and with a little bit of skill map out that marketplace fairly quickly and start in a very, very targeted way, approaching people to have conversations about joining our business.

Paul Nixon:

And how much of an impact did that make in terms of, you know, compared to traditional methods of, "Please someone apply" as opposed to...?

Matt Berry:

So it's a completely different way of recruiting. And essentially it's a search tool, so you need to consider that particular tool.

And I think LinkedIn, of all of the social media tools, of all the social media channels if you like, is the one that absolutely lends itself best to recruitment because it is a professional network and that's kind of why it's there.

You've always got to be a bit careful with things like Facebook or the other Bebos and the like, be careful not to be treading on people's toes. Are people going there to get these messages or not? And if you get to the point where you're annoying people you're actually being counterproductive.

But LinkedIn is a professional network; people are using it to link in with other professionals themselves, to enhance their own knowledge of their industry, or whatever the case may be. So it's a much more fertile area for recruitment. But you've still got to do it the right way.

So one of the big benefits that we see in LinkedIn is that certainly half to three quarters of anyone that we would hire is already on it; which is quite staggering when you consider there aren't many places where you have such high penetration of the people you'd be hiring; certainly professional hires.

They're generally open to being contacted. In fact as a direct recruiter you have a big advantage.

So where LinkedIn is going to have to deal with some challenges is that recruiting organisations, i.e. agencies/consultancies, use it very heavily as a tool which does somewhat diminish its potency.

But when as an organisation you are directly getting in touch with people, that message is very powerful. And we do tend as a result to get very high interest, certainly in having a conversation, when people realise “There’s no middle man in this conversation. I’m talking with the business directly.” And that’s very engaging.

The other really interesting thing to remember, which many people may not be aware of, is that we interact. So we have a corporate licence with LinkedIn. So it’s not just about the members of our resourcing team having individual networks, we as two organisations have formed a relationship and we have full access to the entire network. And that’s something that search organisations do not have.

Paul Nixon: And so all of your members of your team can then share in terms of leads and...?

Matt Berry: Can then access that, absolutely. And it’s not dependent on their own network. So if I have just a network of a few million people, well that’s actually irrelevant because Centrica has a relationship with LinkedIn and as a result we have full access to the entire network.

So the key in all of this, it’s about initiating a conversation. It’s still got to be a quality conversation. And all this does is help you identify the people to knock on the door. But the way in which you go about establishing that initial communication and establishing dialogue is where the real skill is.

But that does level the playing field when you’re trying to compete with one of the big four search firms. This is a tool they can’t access in the same way. They’ve got their own proprietary tools that they play with. And that’s actually a huge advantage for us. So we can

actually get out to the marketplace almost quicker than some of those businesses.

Paul Nixon: And so do you use it for each of your recruitment team as your first start point?

Matt Berry: Well actually, that's a good question. So there's a whole continuum of hiring in our organisation. So we hire about five thousand people per annum. So it will save three and a half thousand.

Paul Nixon: So half a million down to five thousand?

Matt Berry: Yes, not... big numbers really. Fewer applicants would be better to be honest, so... (Laughter)

Paul Nixon: Dammit, they keep joining.

Matt Berry: But that's a good problem to have. That's always a problem I'd rather have.

So we could be hiring people from apprentices, graduates, experienced service engineers, customer service advisors, typically for that work we wouldn't be going to LinkedIn to try and identify those people because we've got a good volume of them coming to us when we put our proposition out.

So let's just say very roughly there are maybe a thousand professional hires per annum. They would be in that space where we would use a tool like LinkedIn; but then again not for all of them either because it is quite a labour intensive operation.

So the beauty of traditional advertising is that you put a lot of effort into getting some really good adverts done but then it kind of happens on its own.

Whereas with social media – and this is something that a lot of people underestimate – you must constantly turn the handle to engage; constantly be engaging, constantly be putting fresh information out there, constantly having a dialogue for it to work. You can't just pop something out there and wait for things to happen. Really it's about building a relationship.

So what we focus on is either for really niche roles – I used the silly example of the geophysicist in Trinidad. That's a great example because the skill set is really, really clearly defined and niche and the geography is very clearly defined. So when you've got a really tight target like that then these tools really come into their own.

Also with things like when we do our executive recruitment, so our top level of recruitment, it would be the place we start no matter what.

So even if you came to me as a hiring manager, as one of our leaders, and said, "Look, I'd like a member of my executive team", even if we thought well we might still work with a third party on that we're now at a point where before we even did that we would map that marketplace first. And we would start with LinkedIn.

So in terms of recruiting organisations thinking, "Well how can I take my first tentative steps into social media?", that type of approach is actually eminently doable because it just needs a small amount of knowledge within your own organisation. It does need a little bit of resource in order to have someone that can dedicate enough time to be actively working some of these jobs.

Paul Nixon:

Did you develop a kind of methodology for that to try in your team?

Matt Berry: Well initially we got it wrong so...

Paul Nixon: The best way to learn. (Laughter)

Matt Berry: We did learn from that. So the first year that we started using say the LinkedIn tool for example the team are all very experienced recruiters, and in fact mostly search consultants, so they didn't need to be taught how to use the tool.

But what we learnt is buying a tool is great but having recruitment consultants or business partners flat out delivering assignments didn't really give them the time that they needed to actually exploit the tool fully. So we got trapped a little bit and we had so much to do that we couldn't invest.

So we've now gotten to a point where we have invested in a small number of heads – and I only mean two very talented people – who spend a very significant amount of their time supporting our recruiters in going out and doing that identification and initial introductory work with candidates so that then our recruiters can then pick up on those conversations and go through the selling process and the selection process.

Paul Nixon: Okay, so you've got kind of finders, researchers, who target the right individuals and say, "Would you like to come talk? We'd really like to talk to you."

Matt Berry: Yes, absolutely. And then we hit, then we hand it on. And I think where I've seen businesses go wrong is not investing in the people resource you need.

So many businesses are comfortable to make an investment in a technology and say will spend fifty thousand or a hundred

thousand, whatever the case may be, and then just assume that it will happen from there.

And social media doesn't just happen. It is an interactive thing by its nature and it needs some skilled people to really get full advantage from it.

But the good news is that a fairly small investment can yield huge dividends. So even when we were getting it wrong it was paying for itself three times over, so it wasn't exactly a failure. But we didn't maximise our opportunity to get value from it.

Paul Nixon: And how much more benefit did you get by putting in that extra?

Matt Berry: So we're just working on that now but we will aim in the next 12 months to be filling half of our executive roles via this team. So that's our goal.

And certainly the couple of trial runs that we've had at just doing this purely via this approach have resulted in two successful outcomes.

So our initial sort of piloting of really investing properly has been extremely successful.

Paul Nixon: And has it collapsed recruitment times or not?

Matt Berry: Has it collapsed recruitment times? Slightly anecdotal would be my answer to that because the volumes aren't really high. But my initial reaction would be it has slightly.

So the thing that it allows you to do, and you can do it yourself, is to develop a view of the market fairly quickly. And the other thing that slows you down doing that is do you have someone with the skill and the time in your business to do it?

Paul Nixon:

Yes.

Matt Berry:

And it does take a lot of time. So the initial identification to think “Is this a piece of work that we can take on?” actually you can do now very quickly. And it just makes you a much more informed buyer.

So you can either go to that market and say, “Actually this market is fairly easy to understand. There are people out there. We can go and do that.” Or you can learn very quickly, “Actually this is an extremely tough market. There aren’t many people like this that we’re looking for and we may need some external help.” So it helps us make better decisions more quickly.

Paul Nixon:

Yes.

Matt Berry:

I wouldn’t say it necessarily compresses timings too much in that it’s still about engaging, it’s still about having that conversation. And it doesn’t take any of that away. So I think the upfront getting going is a bit quicker but the real benefit for us is we can do it ourselves. That’s where the benefit is.

Paul Nixon:

I mean particularly with companies who’ve got a strong engineering contingent, with the key shortage of engineers, I think there’s almost an element of – not between length and cost but whether you find someone or whether you don’t.

Matt Berry:

Yes.

Paul Nixon:

Is there any special focus you put in on the engineering roles or do they all come through your team?

Matt Berry:

They will all come actually. So what you will find is – and engineering is a tight market as you know so...

Paul Nixon: I have crimes in engineering in the long distant past.

Matt Berry: As have I. So engineering would be an example where we've made some acquisitions over the last few years and as a part of that process – and actually I'm not sure we made it part of our M & A process but we probably should have done – is that the entire board of organisations that we have acquired are all very visible on LinkedIn. They're all sitting there very easily identifiable and obtainable. So you actually know quite a lot about people before you even bring them into the organisation.

Engineering is an example where the candidate pool is a bit smaller. It is also in some ways quite clearly identified. So if you're a power station operations manager that's a fairly identifiable person that you can figure out.

Some areas of engineering I would say have greater penetration than others. So I would say in the oil and gas space there's a bit more activity of the professionals within the social media world. I haven't seen quite the same level of penetration in some of the more traditional engineering disciplines.

So our power station operational person for example would be less likely to be active on a site such as LinkedIn for example than say a geophysicist who is probably more likely to be found in that sort of space.

Paul Nixon: Well if he's stuck out on an oil rig he's got more time to... (Laughter)

Matt Berry: Well that's part of it, although I must admit geophysicists don't have to get stuck on oil rigs all that often. So they get to sit in front of rather large monitors most of the time.

But these things do come into their own where you've got very clearly defined parameters.

So if you're looking for just a general sales manager and he really could have come from a background doing any type of sales, well then that doesn't really lend itself to this type of approach because your target is so big it's almost you don't know really where to begin.

Whereas if you're looking for someone who's got business to business sales experience, who's worked in the public and private sector and has exposure to energy for example, then you've got a really tight target that then you can go and start interacting with people and have a meaningful discussion about it.

So it is about what type of role, what type of person, and how well defined. And in a way how small is the target because the better defined in a way it's easier to go at.

Paul Nixon: Would you or have you built any sort of cunning front ends around LinkedIn? Or would you?

Matt Berry: Yes. Well not with LinkedIn so much. So one of the things that we do – and we touched on Facebook – one of the things that we do with Facebook for example is that we have got our Facebook, so we have our Facebook pages and all of that sort of stuff. But we actually have our applicant tracking system, so our recruitment system, actually linked in to Facebook. So you can physically tap into any job in our organisation in the UK from our Facebook page.

So that's something that we're trying to do in a fairly low profile way, so we don't want people getting updates to walls and all this sort of stuff all the time. Because before you know it we've put 50

jobs on in a day and people are getting 50 messages and really beginning to dislike us significantly. So that's not the approach.

But it's helping people. If they want to find their way to us, or if they're learning about us from our other online activity, there's a really quick link-in where they – without even having to leave Facebook – can say, “Ah, that's great. Contact centre manager in Cardiff. I've just seen the Cardiff site has been having an open day.” And they're right there, click, straight in and they can look at that job and apply for it right there. So it's about bringing things together so candidates have an easier time of it.

I think there are a few other things that I think social media has got a greater role to play in the resourcing space. So LinkedIn is very obvious and it's hugely valuable and will become more valuable I think for us. There might come a time where it becomes so ubiquitous that it's almost not a differentiator anymore and it's just absolutely the norm.

Facebook is a great engagement tool more generally and for getting your message out to a fairly wide community.

But I think where we can do more and I think generally there's not as much effort developed is in things like onboarding for example.

So if I've been offered a job in the business part of my decision making might actually be to look at what are people saying about Centrica in social networks? What are people saying about say the Cardiff contact centre in British Gas?

Or I've just joined and I might want to start talking to people. I don't start for a month but I've got to figure out where am I going to live, who's got some ideas on that, and really start allowing your existing

people to start forming a support structure and network for people coming into the organisation.

And once again social media and things like Facebook have huge potential for that now people are-

Paul Nixon: And is your employee base pretty good at offering to do that?

Matt Berry: Yes. Well, they do it on their own. So this is the thing. It's about trying to put information where people are already. So the grads were another good example of that.

So onboarding, so we touched on the onboarding piece, so our graduates four or five years ago were creating a Centrica 2007 intake Facebook page. We didn't. And we couldn't stop it if we wanted.

Paul Nixon: Yes. They're the grads.

Matt Berry: They're the grads. It didn't take long to figure out: so take a step back. One of the big challenges a lot of organisations have, and particularly large organisations, is this funny middle ground between you've been offered a job and you accept it and you sign a contract but we're not going to let you touch any of our systems until you're in the door and you're behind our firewall and all of that sort of stuff.

Paul Nixon: And then we've got you. (Laughter)

Matt Berry: There's quite a grey murky period where communication is very difficult.

So with the grads we first learnt this, that a grad we may be hiring nine months ahead of when they join and how do you engage, how

do you communicate, how do you keep that relationship alive for this long period of time?

Grads were doing it themselves. So we just started tapping into that, giving them a framework around how they could set up a page, what information they might find useful on it.

And we schedule events and they'll schedule how they figure out accommodation for their first placement. We'll have induction days which we completely schedule via these groups. And they communicate, talk and support each other. It really makes their journey into the business a lot easier.

And I think we can replicate, and we are beginning to replicate, more about the general hiring. So one of the things we've recently built is an onboarding site, so a site specifically for anyone that joins our business the moment they say "Yes, I'd love the job." And one of the key things there is linking people into our social network.

So if we think about the Cardiff example there's I think – this information is slightly old, it might be different now, but at least 300 people in our Cardiff site have just formed, on their own, a Cardiff British Gas group.

Why did they do that? Because they want to talk, they want to socialise, they want to figure out who's going where. They want to keep in touch with people. It's there. It exists. It's our people. It's real. It's unfiltered.

There's always a risk with that but people are adults so why not allow people to really tap into that a lot more quickly and help them get a support network even before they join the business?

So I think there's a lot more we could do in that space which is really interesting. So we're taking our first steps into that right now.

Paul Nixon: And who drives the strategy on that given that you've had this initial burst of activity from the grads, who've taken the initiative, who are really actually on the front line because they know what's going on?

Matt Berry: That's right, yes.

Paul Nixon: Then how involved are you? Do you harness that thinking and that activity or do you – was there a kind of reining back process going, "Well, I think what we ought to do is..."

Matt Berry: Well, yes.

Paul Nixon: With a quill pen, you know? (Laughter)

Matt Berry: Yes, it's a funny question. So there's a certain level of – maturity is not quite the right word but pragmatism, you need that with things like social networks.

And one of the early impressions was first of all people didn't know what it was. So our executive team weren't really clear on what all this was about.

But the second was we can't control it therefore we don't like it. And there's a natural hesitancy about something that you can't have at least some control over, i.e. "What is everyone saying there and can I stop them saying it?" Well no, you can't stop them saying it.

But the thing that gave me great solace is that actually we can't stop people saying what they say anyway but at least we know what's being said, which is of huge benefit. So I would much rather

be very aware of what's being said than for us as a business not to be aware of it.

So my view, and the way we have tried to help steer the business, is to engage with these channels of communication because they're invaluable. And we do find now that actually our whole organisation is becoming really quite a lot more savvy and actually engaged with social media.

So things like Twitter – particularly Twitter and Facebook we will have people across our organisation – and British Gas is a great example – where we'll keep a close eye on what's happening. And we will learn about customers that have got complaints that haven't been able to reach us or have got an issue that they haven't felt has been resolved.

And it gives us another opportunity to really help make a difference to the service we offer a customer.

And that's not recruitment obviously, that's just about us doing our core job of looking after customers.

Paul Nixon: That's just customer service.

Matt Berry: Yes. But recruitment's not hugely different to that.

Paul Nixon: And do you use any fancy monitoring tools for that or...?

Matt Berry: I couldn't tell you off the top of my head what tools we're using but there undoubtedly will be some tools, particularly in the Twitter space which is aflood with data flung everywhere.

So I think the onboarding piece is interesting, there's more to be done there.

And I think the other bit that we're playing with now, and it's only in its infancy, is how do you get sort of practical, sensible, alumni networks? And once again this is another opportunity where I think LinkedIn lends itself.

And what we're beginning to do now is with a couple of our key recruiters – and actually the engineering space is an interesting space for this – and that is where we do have people leave our organisation we are actively encouraging them, and we're talking with them prior to leaving and contacting afterwards, and encouraging them to join the alumni for whatever the part of the business is – engineering partly would be Centrica Energy for example – and to form that network.

And that gives us the ability to keep in touch with people that are leaving the organisation, often with a lot of goodwill, but they're moving off for a whole variety of reasons.

So there's always a chance that we could be working together again or working as a supplier partner or all sorts of different ways relationships change.

And in an industry where there's a shrinking – well maybe not quite shrinking yet but we've got some demographic challenges where we have to think a bit more flexibly about how do we capture some of that talent, whether it's via part-time working or consultancy projects, whatever the case may be-

Paul Nixon: Could just try kidnapping.

Matt Berry: Kidnapping works. (Laughter) It's frowned upon, but you know. So that's an area that we're beginning to invest a bit more time in because it's such a valuable asset. These people that are leaving the business with goodwill, not to have some mechanism to keep in

touch is a bit of a risk, particularly where some of these individuals have such niche knowledge that's very hard to replace.

So we are putting a bit more effort into having a more formalised approach for maintaining those relationships.

Paul Nixon: And how much resource do you put into that? What sort of things then do your people do who kind of manage those networks?

Matt Berry: Yes, so we're just in the infancy at the moment to be honest. I'd say it's six months old right now. Probably when we spoke for the first time we were just literally kicking it off.

And the key thing has just been to capture people that are leaving; in a friendly way, not kidnapping them. But capturing those relationships, building that group, stimulating some discussion amongst that group where we have an opportunity to share information that they'd be interested about and just getting that out there via that mechanism. Because we'll always be doing projects or elements of work that will still be of interest to that professional community.

Paul Nixon: Okay, so from an intellectually interesting type of thing then you're not bringing down the shutters, you're still being quite open?

Matt Berry: Well obviously anything that's commercially sensitive naturally we won't be getting out to the public domain. But there's nothing to say that we can't at least be giving open – in general I would view any business update generally that we have in the business – maybe my communications team wouldn't appreciate me saying this but generally I view that as public domain.

So as soon as we've got it out even internally that's public domain. So is sharing that with an alumni network really so different? My argument would be no it's not. So that's the general approach that we take. Very early days, so we need to see how we can grow that. But I think there's more to be had there. I think there's more to be had.

So those two things, I think alumni and onboarding, I think there's a lot of potential. And the reason is these networks are about relationships and communicating. And that's what these tools are for. They're designed to build a network and to communicate with people so...

Paul Nixon: But I would almost imagine that at the same time as you start saying "Well actually here's a valuable resource that we haven't tapped before that's sort of moving off but we're still keeping tabs on them" that the sort of job offerings and the nature of how you're going to offer those in the future is having to evolve at the same time.

Because you're seeing an opportunity over here that you're going to need to use, probably, given the shortages and so is that – was there a kind of chicken and egg part of that, was it together or...?

Matt Berry: I'm not sure if I've got your question quite right but you've kind of got to do both together so...

Paul Nixon: Well were you offering to alumni before to come back and work a bit part-time or...

Matt Berry: I think we didn't even really have the opportunity to because we just didn't know where they were or what they were doing. So as soon as they were out of the business it was like a mystery. "Where have these great people gone?" We couldn't even talk to them if – well

we could but it would be almost like starting a whole piece of search all over again.

So this is really about making sure that we don't get that great distance anymore between our people when they leave. But in terms of – I'm not sure whether you're talking there about the return trip or...?

Paul Nixon: I'm talking about the next stage on where you might then start saying, "Right, here's a pool of things that might interest you we're going to offer. Here's part-time working or flexible working or working from home or from a Zimmer frame or whichever works."
(Laughter)

Matt Berry: So that's the next step, continuing with the Zimmer frame analogy. So the first thing that we just identified is that we just had a giant hole there and we had to find a way of filling it.

There are actually proprietary tools and there are organisations actually – and I'm sure you know – who'll do this for you as well. But we thought no we'd like to dip our toe in the water, see what we can actually get of this.

And maybe we do need to do something a little bit more sophisticated at some point but our first goal has just been to not lose touch.

Our next challenge is how do we extract some value from this? And that's what we haven't landed on yet. We're just in the early stages and we're probably just getting to a point now where we've nearly got enough of a pool where you can do something with it.

So the next challenge for us is how do we make sure that we can get value from it? Our business has got enough offerings and flexibility generally to be able to get something there.

So we are generally flexible. We're flexible on time, we're flexible on location. We're flexible on the way in which you engage with the business; all that's there.

Paul Nixon: Yes.

Matt Berry: So the trick will be then how do we reengage with those individuals to see what the opportunities to come back are? They'll be highly informed buyers obviously because they'll have been in our business before and they'll know all about us.

Paul Nixon: And they'll know all about the culture.

Matt Berry: Absolutely. In terms of engaging though the other area which we have been probably supporting for about a year now and we've got to a point where I think we need to do a lot more internal engagement to go to the next level, but social media I think is an underestimated tool for referral programmes.

Paul Nixon: Yes.

Matt Berry: And I just don't think enough is being done. Overall I would say that actually we don't have as many referrals occurring, so people referring new hires into the business, as I would like. I think we are light in that area, about 10% of our hires.

Paul Nixon: Do you give any obligation to managers or senior managers?

Matt Berry: There's no obligation. There is a reward. So you will receive a bonus if you successfully introduce a person to the business.

So another thing that we've done on the social media front which is a little different is that we've social media enabled our referral process. So we make sure all our jobs are in one place.

So if you are interested in recommending a friend to a role they're all in one spot. So that's the first thing that we got right.

Paul Nixon: And do you prioritise the really tough ones that you're struggling to crack?

Matt Berry: We will have hot jobs, so some of those jobs will be hot jobs which we rotate every week. So yes, some of the tough ones we do highlight.

And then we just make sure that any role that we have running an internal person can look at it and within I think it's two clicks but certainly no more than two clicks they can share that job with their friends.

So you could send me a link and say, "Hey Matt just saw this", or tweet me or Facebook me or whatever you want to do, say to me you just saw this HR manager job, looks fantastic. And if it was a tweet it would be a TinyURL, the job would all be in there and I'd just click on it, there would be the job, and I could apply straight away.

And that would also help the business track the fact that you were the person that had introduced me. So it kind of squares the circle if that's the expression.

Because typically the problem we had with referral programmes is it's just an administrative nightmare. "Who referred you? When did they do it? Did anyone know about it? What was the job?" All of this

sort of stuff which is so difficult to manage. And it just cuts a lot of that away and just makes it a very transparent clean process.

So we've had some good successes with that but I think what we really need to do now is the tool's in place and it works and people have used it but it's all about engaging with your people and getting them to embrace it and think, "Hey, this is a great thing to do. I love working in this business. I want to share-

Paul Nixon: And understand what great value it has for the business with getting the right sort of people. "If we like you then we're probably going to like your mate."

Matt Berry: Absolutely right. And there's huge value there. And I think actually there's value for every type of recruitment, whether it's a customer service advisor or whether it's an engineer or whether it's a head of finance. I think there's a lot of value throughout the whole chain.

So that's one of our focuses now, is now that we've got that working and it seems to work pretty well and we're running at about 10% referral now, which is an improvement on where we were at but it's certainly not class leading, it's not how do we engage the external marketplace, it's how do we engage the internal marketplace?

So that's a bit of a change for us in the recruitment team because often we're spending all our time thinking about external recruitment.

Paul Nixon: Looking outwards not inwards.

Matt Berry: And we have to look inwards as well. So that's quite exciting.

Paul Nixon: And how can you go about – or have you got ideas and plans to go about exciting them and energising them or...?

Matt Berry: Yes, I think there are a few things. One of the things that we've started to do is actually the external team now handles all internal recruitment as well. So now there's one team that kind of looks after everything.

And that's a really great thing because once a bit of internal recruitment results in the fact that actually there isn't anyone quite right now then it heads outside straight away. So you've got one team now that's really got the full visibility of everything that's going on.

But the other great thing is that that team is now directly talking to all of these candidates. So we would have 5,000 to 10,000 applications internally per annum. So we're making sure that we're the hub of all of that communication.

And hopefully that can be a good place to A) build that relationship but B) form that launch pad. In terms of how we go about getting the comms right I must admit I don't have the answer quite right on that one yet.

Paul Nixon: It's coming soon. It's a work in progress.

Matt Berry: It might be. I hope it is. But I'm not sure we've quite landed it. But there are elements of competition in there, so some of our teams and sites are highly competitive. So I think there's an opportunity for either different contacts and locations or different teams to be competing-

Paul Nixon: Once you get the competition in there...

Matt Berry: Exactly. And build it into some of our engagement activity which is – you know generally speaking our people are very engaged, they love working in the business and they would recommend us, but it's

helping them understand actually it's quite an easy thing to do and it's not difficult.

And actually you're already on Facebook talking to your mates and you can just click a button and you can tell them how to roll. It's actually that simple. But we've just got to get that message out there.

And we did focus more on making the process really simple and slick but now we've got to help people understand that it's really simple and slick.

Paul Nixon: Yes, and the value that it adds.

Matt Berry: Yes. And that actually they could earn some money. You could earn £500 or £1,000.

Paul Nixon: Just share a burger with your mate. (Laughter)

Matt Berry: Exactly. Then you can buy them a beer or something.

Paul Nixon: That's right.

Matt Berry: Yes.

Paul Nixon: Stepping back, with all these great initiatives going on is there any kind of central governance process for the social media side or an idea generation part? How do you...?

Matt Berry: Yes, that's a good question. So for our group we have a social media policy of course which is a fairly straightforward thing which says, "Look, social media is part of everyone's lives. Use it but use your common sense."

Paul Nixon: Yes.

Matt Berry: So all in all a fairly sensible approach. I would say we don't have a rigidly controlled external approach with social media. So where we are very, very rigidly controlled is where we've got messages at a corporate level that we're trying to get out across the whole of the organisation. That has to be very, very-

Paul Nixon: Uniform?

Matt Berry: Exactly. Very clear, no inconsistencies, because we're communicating with the market, or whatever the case may be. That's absolutely crystal and it's very buttoned down.

The business units themselves have a moderate amount of freedom in terms of how they engage with customers or candidates but all candidate interaction is managed in one place by one team and that's the resourcing team. And there is not a lot of other stuff going on that doesn't funnel through them in some way.

So there may still be individuals contributing, whether it's blogs or other types of social interaction, but it will all pretty much be channelled via the team.

Paul Nixon: But would you direct that and say, "Look, it would be really great to have a one year in graduate blogging about X" or...?

Matt Berry: Yes, so it's a mix. For anything to do with recruitment or attraction we direct it.

So we have a couple of people – in fact we have one person who has a very significant part of the job, probably 50% of it, which is coordinating our social media activity and presence.

And that's actually quite difficult in that we've got a large variety just in recruitment. It's quite difficult. So you've got a large variety of role types, a number of different teams, all of whom are one team but they've all got different types of people they're trying to attract.

And presenting a coherent front to the external candidate world takes – it's a bit like herding cats. So you're constantly trying to line up.

So what you don't want to do is say, "Ah, we're in the University of Edinburgh today and we'll be meeting with engineering students to talk about mechanical engineering opportunities in business", and then have someone say, "And by the way we're in the University of Edinburgh today to talk about finance roles in British Gas", and look like we're a business that just doesn't talk to each other.

So we do spend a bit of time making sure that we've got a diary and we know what we're doing. There is some coordination there so that we can actually buddy up and share. But that does take a little bit of attention.

And the other interesting thing is we do a moderate amount of work which really isn't directly recruitment related but it will have some flow and benefit for recruitment at some point. And that's around say things like school engagement and campus activity or getting into colleges and talking about apprenticeship schemes and that sort of thing.

So we also use that medium to help people understand, "Oh, this is where we're going to be. This is what we're doing", so that if you're interested in an apprenticeship in Wolverhampton for example you can make sure that you keep track of that and then when there's

something nearby for you, you can come in and be made aware.
So it does help people keep tabs.

But what that means we need to do is we need to be quite diligent
in making sure that we're always getting good fresh information out
there so that it's worthwhile.

Paul Nixon: Yes.

Matt Berry: The big challenge with social media, or one of them, is that if you
don't keep your content relevant and fresh and up-to-date then
there's no reason for anyone to look at anything that you're doing
and you'll very quickly have something sitting there that just-

Paul Nixon: Was interesting.

Matt Berry: -gathers dust, yes. And so it doesn't stop on that side. It really
doesn't stop.

Paul Nixon: So a kind of final question is really where do you see things going?

Matt Berry: Yes, I thought you were going to ask me that question.

Paul Nixon: Yes. What's your next step?

Matt Berry: Where's the future of social media?

Paul Nixon: Tell us the future.

Matt Berry: Yes. No, I don't know. So it's just in its infancy at the moment and I
think organisations haven't really figured out how to engage yet.
And we touched on earlier about do people want to be harassed in
their private space, so I'm chatting to some friends-

Paul Nixon: I'm sure you might have had a few cold calls at the weekend.

Matt Berry: And it is very similar to that. So when you get that call late at night and you think, "Well, I'm trying to cook my dinner and I don't want insurance."

Paul Nixon: "Just take a hike."

Matt Berry: "Just please go away."

Paul Nixon: "I don't want double glazing."

Matt Berry: Exactly. So I think business needs to be careful that they understand the space, why people are there, and why would they want to hear from you. So that's the bit a lot haven't gotten quite right.

So our general approach is to make ourselves available and where people want to choose to engage like that we make it very easy to. So if you want to follow what we're doing, you want to keep up-to-date with events, that's all there. If having seen that then you want an easy link-in to opportunities, it's all there. But we don't really push it hard at you.

But it's about the engagement activity that would get you interested to come in rather than pushing hard to push opportunities at people.

Paul Nixon: And would you see the kind of either replication or move of the kind of general information that you have in the careers area of the website moving into the social media space? Again, so that it's all...

Matt Berry: It will.

Paul Nixon: Actually in both places or do you think it...?

Matt Berry: Yes, I think it will. So I think if you talk to some of the big technology suppliers who are supporting recruitment processes the big thing

for them is how do they tap into social media and make it a fundamental part of the recruitment platform? So I think that the two things are going to come a lot closer together.

But it will mean that we need to change a little bit the way we think about the recruitment process and I'm not quite sure how that's going to land yet.

So what I can see happening in the very near future are things like LinkedIn – I think LinkedIn will be under a lot of pressure to allow some of the biggest recruiters in the world to get in there. I know they're bashing the door down.

And LinkedIn are going to have to make some decisions about what do their customers want and what really is their business model?

Because I think some wrong decisions there could destroy that business and what is currently a great networking tool, which has a good balance of job opportunities and sharing professional networks and knowledge, could then just become polluted to the point where it actually loses all of those things.

So LinkedIn is an interesting example of where is it going to go and how is it going to manage this pressure? And I think the way businesses want to promote themselves and interact with candidates will become more social enabled.

But business will obviously change, will have to get more mature, become a bit more mature in the social media space, which is going to take a little bit of time.

But I think it's an opportunity to make the process a bit more engaging. But I don't think it's going to make life easier.

Paul Nixon: No. (Laughter)

So that was all the time the technology let us have. So, finally, thank you very much to Matt Berry for an excellent interview and some great insights.