AdaptiLab

How to Attract and Acquire Technical Talent In a Remote Hiring World

■ Introduction

With the current COVID-19 situation, companies have been forced to transition teams to remote work. Before the pandemic, very few companies were fully remote. However, it has now become the norm, which means that companies who are used to working together in an office must adapt to the new environment.

One important function that companies must adapt is their hiring process. In-person interviews and onsites are no longer feasible, so companies must find ways to replace them using online communication tools and take-home projects. It is also much harder to sell a candidate on a beautiful office space or great location, since the candidate won't be able to visit (and will also likely not be working in that location for some time).

On the other hand, it will be significantly easier than before to find talented candidates. For starters, many companies have paused their hiring processes and even started laying off employees because of the COVID-19 situation. There will be less competition from other companies for talented candidates, and there will also be many more talented candidates in the pool. Furthermore, without the need to do in-person interviews and onsites, the interview process for candidates should go by much quicker. This not only allows you to get an offer to candidates earlier, but also will appeal to candidates who dislike long interview processes.

In the following sections of this guide we will dive deeper into the various elements of remote hiring and how they differ from typical interviews, which include onsites. We will walk you through the process of attracting talent, assessing their technical ability and company fit, and replacing remote onsites with virtual ones.

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■ Attracting Talent While Remote

Building brand awareness is vital to attract quality candidates. There are so many companies out there with easy-apply systems and strong recruiting programs that making your company stand out is vital to competing for talent in the current industry state. We think the best way to do this is by making your company's values and culture as transparent as possible. We see companies list out values on their "About" page and represent their culture in the way they communicate with candidates from the very start of the process. These principles should also be reiterated in all written communication with the candidate, starting from the job description and pervading to emails and even interview assignments.

Conveying clear core principles is valuable for a multitude of reasons. First, it is a great way for candidates to compare your company to other opportunities and automatically filter for companies that align with their values. Second, given that these interviews are conducted virtually, candidates experience what they expect in their day-to-day work with the company. From as early as the sourcing process, you should seek candidates whose values and personality align with those of your company. This enables candidates to self-select companies they are excited by, which will also save you time and resources when it comes to closing candidates later on. It can be more challenging trying to attract candidates while remote, since your company doesn't have the added benefit of doing career fairs at universities or hosting tech conferences. However, there are still plenty of other ways to build your brand and attract candidates. Good

pieces of content marketing, such as blogs, Quora posts, and Medium articles are great ways to get candidates interested in your company and the company's mission. Posting on LinkedIn and even just having a "We're Hiring" mention in your tagline can do wonders for recruiting. As more turnover happens at various companies, the most common place candidates will look to for new job opportunities is LinkedIn. Social media platforms like LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram can be incredibly useful resources for improving brand awareness. Uploading photos of the office and team building events can give candidates a taste of what it's like to work at the company, especially since they can't currently see it for themselves in person.

■ Remote Interviewing without an Onsite

For many companies, the onsite is the most crucial piece of the interview process. The onsite is where candidates will get to meet their potential teammates and companies conduct their most technically relevant interviews. Many startups will jump directly from an initial technical screen directly to an onsite, since it speeds up the interview process and allows them to ask more specific technical questions during the onsite.

With the current COVID-19 situation, actual onsites are now unrealistic. Instead, companies must adapt and find different ways to mimic or recreate an onsite with a remote experience. While this can be challenging, there are several ways to go about it.

Use a rotating interview room for a remote onsite

In a regular onsite, many companies will conduct back-to-back interviews with a candidate using several of their existing employees/founders. This experience is relatively easy to mimic in a remote setting. Simply have a designated Zoom or Google Hangout link for the interviews, and ask employees to jump in at their scheduled times (with a 10-15-minute buffer between scheduled times to avoid potential overlap and give candidates a minor break between interviews). The benefit to this experience is that, if your company already conducts interviews in this manner then it is a seamless adjustment. However, it can be a bit awkward or detached for the candidate when doing this style of interviewing while remote.

Unlike an actual onsite, where the candidate can explore the office or get some drinks/food during breaks, there are no real benefits that the company can supply to make the interview process feel more comfortable.

Overall summary: While this style of interviewing is efficient and easy to transition to, it can be somewhat cold and detached for the candidate, potentially leading to a worse interview experience.

Offload some of the technical questions to the initial screen

Many companies will only ask general or high-level questions during the initial technical screen. For engineering candidates, this normally means doing a software challenge with general algorithms (e.g. linked lists, trees, etc.) and answering a few high-level questions related to the specific role. Then, during the onsite, companies will ask much more detailed questions and questions specifically related to the type of work the candidate would be expected to do on the job. For example, a front-end candidate might be asked to create and style a web app on the spot, while a machine learning candidate might be asked to architect and outline a process for training and deploying a model.

Quite a few of the questions or tasks asked during the onsite can actually be shifted to earlier rounds of interviewing, or even to the initial technical screen. This way, companies can avoid having to do a rigorous "remote onsite" interview process, which, as previously mentioned, can end up being a bad experience for candidates. Instead, teams can focus the final round of interviewing on soft skills

and company fit, which will inherently result in less detached conversations and a better candidate experience.

The main difficulty with this approach is that it would require interviewers to be more thoughtful, or spend more of their time interviewing candidates, which is not necessarily easy (since a majority of employees prefer to be working rather than interviewing). However, there are several software tools on the market that were built to automate this process. If you know what you're looking to technically assess in a candidate, some of these tools can be useful. For example, AdaptiLab's technical evaluation tool is used by our existing customers to assess machine learning and data science coding ability. This is a skill normally tested during the onsite, but our customers use the evaluation tool to automatically assess this during the initial technical screen.

Overall summary: Moving some of the more technical evaluation to earlier rounds of the interview process can make the final round a better remote experience, but without the right tools it will require additional work from employees.

Replace the onsite with a remote working session

Several companies have already replaced the traditional style of back-to-back onsite interviews with working sessions or paired programming. During these onsites, the candidate will complete work-related tasks with one or more employees on the team, so that the team can better gauge the candidate's on-

the-job ability. Candidates will interact with the rest of the team as if they were already working at the company, and will complete tasks or projects that are related to what the team actually does. This can be done easily while remote, since it doesn't require the candidate to actually travel to the office with their laptop and get set up in the office space.

While this is a great way to assess what the candidate will be like if they were hired as an employee, it is time-consuming and requires a lot more flexibility from existing employees. Furthermore, if a company uses internal communication that requires a company email or authentication, the candidate will need to be granted special guest permissions, which can be a burden to set up.

Overall summary: This is a good way to assess a candidate's ability to do work-related tasks in a team environment, but it can potentially slow down team output if there are many candidates that need to be interviewed.
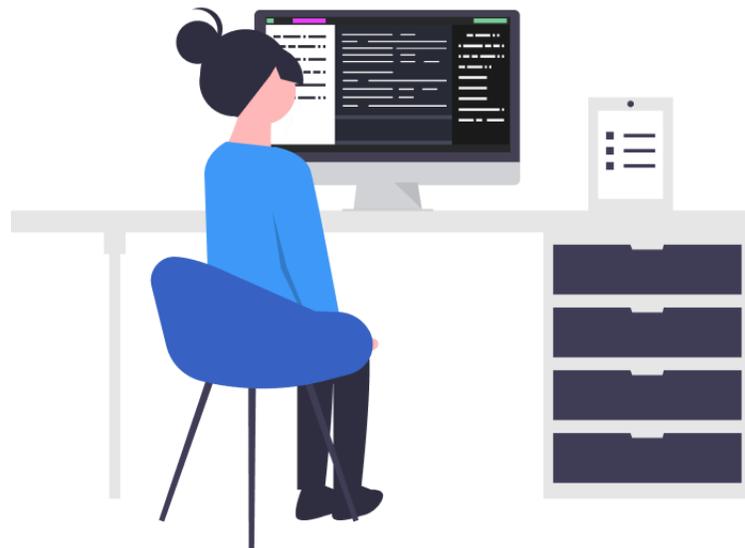
■ Remote Evaluation of Cultural Fit

Just as important as evaluating technical fit with the company is evaluating a candidate's culture fit. Can the candidate work well with others, both within their own team and outside of it? For engineering candidates, this means working with people in product, marketing, sales, etc. Therefore, it is crucial to also have non-engineering employees evaluate candidates on their company and culture fit. It may be somewhat of a hassle to coordinate with people from other departments in the company, but doing so will save you from having to deal with an employee who can't cooperate with non-technical colleagues during a project cycle.

It is easier to evaluate culture fit if the remote onsite is not already jam packed with several technical interviews. However, if you do use a rotating interview room for the final round, it would be best to place the culture fit interview somewhere in between all the technical ones. This gives the candidate a much-needed break from the barrage of technical questions.

■ Making an Offer with Less Information

Given the current circumstances, it will be difficult to get as much information on a candidate as you normally would if you're not used to doing fully remote interview processes. For instance, it will be more difficult to assess a candidate's

intangible qualities, such as how the candidate interacts with other team members in person.

In this case, you should definitely be more careful when giving offers to candidates that you aren't completely sold on or comfortable with. It will be more difficult to train up new employees if your team is still figuring out the best ways to do remote communication, so it may be more important than ever to heavily weigh a candidate's ability to get up to speed quickly. Having new employees come in who are already comfortable or familiar with the existing tech stack and technical concepts will be a huge boon in the current situation.

◼ Conclusion

While the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an enormous amount of hiring freezes and layoffs across the world, companies that are still able to hire can potentially benefit from the increased number of talented candidates in the pool. To maximize on this, companies must be able to adapt to fully remote interviewing processes, and ensure that they are able to gauge candidates properly while still providing a good interview experience for the candidate.

In this guide, we've provided several strategies to go about improving your remote interview processes, as well as advice on how to attract and evaluate talent. Hopefully you'll be able to incorporate these tips and practices into your own hiring process and continue building out your team remotely.

About the Author

Allen Lu, CTO of AdaptiLab

Allen is a cofounder and CTO at AdaptiLab. He spent time working on machine learning teams at Google and Microsoft, where he experienced both sides of the hiring process. He has helped several companies improve their machine learning and data science hiring processes, and hopes that he can continue doing so with AdaptiLab.

James Mahoney,

Growth Specialist of AdaptiLab

About AdaptiLab

AdaptiLab is a Seattle-based startup that graduated from the Techstars accelerator and is backed by Trilogy Equity Partners. AdaptiLab has helped several companies, from large corporations like Experian to fast-growing startups like Highspot, optimize and improve their machine learning and data science hiring processes.

If you are interested in learning how AdaptiLab can **help you with your machine learning and data science hiring**, click below to request a demo!

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