

Looking for work? Your next job interview might just come by text message

1 August 2019, by Edward C. Baig



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When the text message popped up on his iPhone, Malcolm Barnes was skeptical. Could this really be from a recruiter? Sure, he had applied online for a job. But in the era of data breaches, spam and scams, he wasn't sure whether to trust it.

"I've always had face-to-face interactions when hiring people (myself) or when I was looking for a job," the 28-year-old says.

As it turned out, the text was legit. He never met the recruiter who sent the messages. A month or so after the initial text, Barnes was hired as a senior patient care technician at Community Heart and Vascular Hospital in Indianapolis.

Texting has become a fairly routine staple of communication today. Many of us don't give a second thought to having relationships in our personal lives almost entirely by text, it seems. But as the portal to that dream job, texting is still pretty foreign to most of us.

Texting for a job in lieu of the more traditional

screener phone call is becoming more common. Depending on the role the company is trying to fill, texting may take you and the recruiter fairly deep into the courting process.

For Barnes, after a little research to confirm the recruiter's identity, that text exchange began his hiring journey—covering his qualifications, availability and even his salary requirements. It was well into the process that he finally got to connect with his prospective bosses in person.

That said, we may not yet be to the point of total comfort going from first contact to first day on the job via text.

In some ways, texting for hire parallels online dating, says Aman Brar, CEO of Jobvite, whose text-based interviewing platform Canvas is used by, among other places, the hospital that hired Barnes.

"In most cases, you are going to have a few live dates before you get hitched and spend the rest of your life together," Brar says.

The path to most upper management positions, as well as doctors, lawyers, and other professionals will typically still play out the old fashion way and barely rely on text-based recruitment if at all. But Brar says his company's text platform is used by airlines hiring pilots, hospitals hiring nurses, and employees in manufacturing.

Jared Bazzell, talent acquisition manager at CDW, a tech-solutions provider for businesses, says the mobile phone has changed recruiting. "We use texting on the principle that we want to communicate with our hires how they want to be communicated with," he says.

Some applicants will kickstart the job hunt-by-text search by responding to an ad that specifically says, "Looking for a job? Text 'Job to XXXXX,'" says Susan Vitale, chief marketing officer at iCIMS.

Her company last year bought TextRecruit, a candidate engagement platform that uses texting, live chat, and artificial intelligence to help organizations hire.

"From an employer's perspective, fish where the fish are," she says of TextRecruit, which has clients such as Amazon, Chipotle, Six Flags, and UPS.

Many such positions are hourly or blue-collar type jobs. But texting might be used at any level to schedule interviews or even arrange next steps after getting a job offer.

The pros and cons

Along with potential opportunities, texting brings its own set of challenges, not least is knowing where you as a candidate stand. Absent the visual cues evident during an in-person or even video interview, it can be difficult for applicants to gauge their prospects. Same goes when a candidate can't pick up the tone in a hiring manager's voice.

On the other hand, if a would-be employer happens to ask you a challenging question via text—how might you resolve Problem X at our company?—you may have some time to think about and craft a strong answer, rather than having to respond on the spot. In fact, applicants can often respond to questions more or less on their own time.

What's more, texting may let candidates casually inquire about a company's benefits or work-from-home policy as the questions occur to them.

That said, just as how to properly dress for an interview varies by job, industry and custom, the rules of how to engage a potential employer and stand out by text may vary as well.

Can I use emojis?

How do you navigate the uncertainty and avoid mistakes? The soundest advice—and this goes for almost any text exchange—is to make sure you know who you are texting with before hitting "send."

Texting with friends and family is typically casual, but that doesn't mean messages with a prospective

employer will be equally informal. Some employers may be sticklers when it comes to proper grammar or spelling mistakes; others are more relaxed.

Same goes for abbreviations ("u" instead of "you," for example). And be wary of autocorrect. Always check to make sure your words haven't been embarrassingly or unfortunately altered before sending.

So can you use a smiley face?

Consider the job you're applying for. A role in retail, for instance, may be more casual than a job where the quality of your writing will be critical.

"We have instructed our recruiters that texting is the fastest, most efficient way to reach your candidates instantaneously, no matter where they're at. And therefore, using chat language—emoticons, emojis, you name it—is all fair game," says Scott Sendelweck, HR Digital Marketing Manager at Community Health Network.

But Vitale of iCIMS advises candidates to remember that, "It's still a job, and just because you're using two thumbs to communicate doesn't mean you can treat it completely casually as though you are chatting with a friend here."

The use of emojis isn't the worst thing, she says, but probably unnecessary.

Short and sweet is fine, too, but she recommends keeping a level of decorum and professionalism. That means capitalizing letters and using proper punctuation.

Bazzell at CDW says his recruiters use emoticons and emojis when texting candidates. "Our recruiters show empathy. They show excitement, and that's the same thing we see back and forth. It looks and feels like a real [text message](#)."

But spelling does count, he says, and you need to consider "How are you presenting yourself to an executive?"

Am I speaking to a human?

In the early rounds, you may not even be texting with a live person at all, but rather a chatbot instead.

"We want to keep humans at the center of the conversation but certainly use bots where they make sense," Brar says.

Many organizations will tell you when that is the case.

Mya Systems built an automated "conversational AI" chatbot recruiting assistant called Mya, with the goal, according to co-founder and CEO Eyal Grayevsky, "not to replace human-to-human interaction, but rather connecting a job candidate with the right recruiter."

Mya clients include L'Oreal, Pepisco, Singapore Airlines, and Adecco, with the main focus on hourly type positions. Though Mya also helps fill entry-level finance and accounting type [jobs](#), as well as nursing, internships and new graduate programs.

Grayevsky says a candidate will know the text outreach from Mya is genuine because you would have had to previously opt in.

"Our technology is able to personalize and let you know, 'hey, you applied to a job nine months ago for a retail associate role in Atlanta, Georgia. Just wanted to check in. This is Mya on behalf of Jane at L'Oreal.'" Jane was the recruiter that they had engaged with. And there's a link for more information to validate that."

Many of the questions Mya asks are open-ended: "What are you interested in?" "What are you looking for in your next job?" "Are you all right with weekend work?"

The system can build a summary report card and surface interactions that the human recruiter can later review.

"Text is really nice. It is short, to the point, this is not an essay. You can provide bite-sized insights into who you are, what you stand for, what you're looking for," Grayevsky says. "For candidates, be yourself and treat it like you're talking to a recruiter

because a recruiter is ultimately going to see these interactions."

One thing he stresses is that a bot is not going to decide whether or not you get the job you're after.

"Our role is not to reject," he says. "Our role is simply to move people forward that are clearly a fit as quickly as possible."

Almost all the candidates who survive the text stage are presumably going to get a chance to impress a would-be employer in person, so be careful not to misrepresent yourself while [texting](#).

Keeping that in mind, the best way to stand out compared to the next candidate is to put your best foot, or thumbs, forward.

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