

Social Science Computer Review

<http://ssc.sagepub.com>

Internet Recruiting: The Effects of Web Page Design Features

Philip W. Braddy, Lori Foster Thompson, Karl L. Wuensch and William F. Grossnickle

Social Science Computer Review 2003; 21; 374

DOI: 10.1177/0894439303253987

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://ssc.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/21/3/374>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Social Science Computer Review* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://ssc.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://ssc.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations (this article cites 11 articles hosted on the
SAGE Journals Online and HighWire Press platforms):
<http://ssc.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/21/3/374>

Internet Recruiting

The Effects of Web Page Design Features

PHILLIP W. BRADDY
LORI FOSTER THOMPSON
KARL L. WUENSCH
WILLIAM F. GROSSNICKLE

East Carolina University

In this study, the authors investigate the effects of two web site design features on prospective applicants' evaluations of a hiring company's online recruitment image. A total of 175 students navigated one of four web sites to locate and review a job advertisement. Participants visited a web site that was easy or difficult to surf and viewed a job ad that was presented in bullets or paragraphs of text. Afterward, they completed a survey that measured their impressions of the recruitment image, reactions to the hiring organization, and their willingness to apply for a position. The results provide partial support for the anticipated favorable effect of navigational ease on participants' impressions of recruitment image. Contrary to the authors' prediction, however, organizing the text in bulleted rather than paragraph format did not significantly improve evaluations of the company's recruitment image.

Keywords: navigational ease; text formatting; impressions of recruitment image;
Internet recruiting

Recruitment is particularly critical for organizational effectiveness because it has salient implications for the selection of employees. Specifically, the recruitment function directly affects the size and quality of an organization's applicant pool, thereby determining the selection ratio for available positions. When companies have many individuals applying for a few job openings, low selection ratios exist, which can help increase the utility of their scientific selection system. Accordingly, organizations are frequently concerned with recruiting numerous applicants (Spector, 2000).

The attainment of a sizable applicant pool often requires a clear understanding of the manner in which recruits are drawn to hiring organizations. The recruiting literature suggests that being successful when attracting applicants entails maintaining a favorable recruitment image (Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993); therefore, organizations should attempt to relay information in ways that enhance their recruitment images. Although years of research have sought to identify the characteristics of traditional sources of information that influence applicants' impressions of recruitment procedures, very little is known about

AUTHORS' NOTE: We would like to thank East Carolina University's fall 2002 industrial-organizational psychology research group for serving as pilot participants in our study. In addition, we wish to acknowledge the contributions made by the following individuals: Mandee Foushee, Danielle Mariconi, Bill Piver, Heather Cavey, Jennifer Bibbs, Jennifer King, Ken Stiltner, Lyndsi Taylor, Megan Mullaney, and Pammy Hale. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Phillip W. Braddy, P. O. Box 325, Hobgood, North Carolina 27843; phone: 252-904-9191; e-mail: PWB062779@hotmail.com.

Social Science Computer Review, Vol. 21 No. 3, Fall 2003 374-385
DOI: 10.1177/0894439303253987

© 2003 Sage Publications

the manner in which company web pages influence prospective applicants. This is an area of growing concern, because Internet recruiting is becoming increasingly common in the modern day workplace. The present study addresses this issue by investigating the effects of two web page design features on people's evaluations of Internet recruitment advertisements.

Traditional Recruiting Methods

Companies can rely on numerous media for transmitting relevant job and organizational information to potential applicants. Historically, organizations have depended on methods such as recruiters, job advertisements, employee referrals, walk-ins, and employment agencies (Breugh, 1992). It is important that companies devote extensive time and resources to the development of these media in order to enhance their recruitment efforts. For instance, recruiters can be trained to portray themselves in a more favorable manner by expressing concern for applicants, job-related knowledge (Connerley & Rynes, 1997), a personable demeanor (Rynes, Heneman, & Schwab, 1980), and verbal fluency (Rogers & Sincoff, 1978). This may, in turn, enhance a company's recruitment image and improve subsequent selection efforts.

Position advertisements are also among the most common media used to convey job and organizational information to potential applicants. Numerous authors have made recommendations for improving job advertisements, yet there is a paucity of empirical work that has investigated variables that may influence prospective applicants' evaluations of recruitment image. What little research has been done suggests that variables such as the amount of white space, presence of borders, size of the advertisement, and use of illustrations cause applicants to be more responsive to recruitment advertisements (Kaplan, Aamodt, & Wilk, 1991). According to Holbrook and Lehman (1980), these variables can have such a profound impact by affecting the readership of job advertisements.

In short, training recruiters to be more effective and manipulating various aspects of job advertisements can influence how prospective applicants perceive recruitment procedures. By outlining the conditions under which conventional media favorably influence potential applicants, the literature provides some practical guidance for organizations interested in enhancing their recruitment images. Today, however, many organizations use the Internet in addition to or instead of traditional recruitment media. This trend necessitates research that identifies the characteristics of Internet recruiting that will enhance an organization's recruitment image.

Internet Recruiting: New Sources of Information and Their Effects

Many contemporary organizations now commonly use the Internet effectively to transmit information to prospective applicants. Some companies seek the services of third-party sites (e.g., *monster.com*), which benefit organizations by posting their job openings to various web sites. Third-party sites allow applicants to access job search engines, which make it possible for them to scan various job openings that have been posted on the Internet. Job search engines also enable applicants to post their résumés to various job boards of interest (Zall, 2000; Zusman & Landis, 2002). Once third-party sites collect these résumés in their databases, they forward them to the appropriate organizations ("Recruiting," 1999).

Other companies often exploit another electronic recruitment avenue, which entails creating and using their own web pages to attract applicants (Zusman & Landis, 2002). This enables organizations to post relevant job and organizational information. In addition, many companies use recruiting software and establish electronic databases that automate various

activities. These activities include, but are not limited to, the following: their databases may facilitate the collection and maintenance of résumés, they may select applicants on the basis of criteria established by the organization, and they may automatically submit particular replies to job candidates (*Web Recruiting Advantages*, 2001). In short, the Internet permits the automatic completion of many functions previously accomplished by recruiters and job advertisements.

From the organization's perspective, Internet recruiting yields many advantages that are not realized when traditional recruitment strategies are used. The two most important benefits of Internet recruiting include reducing expenses and enhancing efficiency. According to Kay (2000), recruiting employees using the Internet costs approximately \$1,200 less per employee than recruiting with traditional media. Similarly, Marcus (2001) reported that using the Internet as a recruitment medium costs \$1,400 per hire, as opposed to \$4,000 per hire when using newspaper advertisements. Although there is some disagreement over the exact costs, the savings associated with Internet recruiting can be partially attributed to the decreased reliance on posting various job advertisements in newspapers and in flyers. Moreover, it has been predicted that Internet recruiting will virtually eliminate the use of recruiters in the future (*Web Recruiting Advantages*, 2001). If this prediction holds true, the cost of recruiting employees will drop significantly.

Internet recruiting also enhances the efficiency with which organizations operate. This is achieved primarily through expediting the recruitment process. For example, organizations can spend less time gathering and sorting application materials (*Web Recruiting Advantages*, 2001), they have the luxury of posting jobs on their web pages shortly after a position becomes vacant (Crispin & Mehler, 1997), and applicants can respond to recruitment messages much more rapidly than in the past, because they can submit their résumés electronically. Finally, it has been suggested that Internet recruiting significantly reduces the amount of paper (e.g., résumés) that must be processed by organizations (Zall, 2000).

Recruitment Image During Internet Recruiting

Organizations historically have been concerned with their recruitment images when using traditional strategies. Likewise, as recruiting media change, it will be essential for organizations to direct continued attention to their recruitment images. Recently, the literature has begun to provide some suggestions for enhancing the appearance of organizational web pages when they serve as a recruiting medium. For example, according to Metz and Junion-Metz (1996), there are numerous aspects of web pages that can be manipulated to enhance recruitment images. Some of the variables include the following: design, text, reading patterns, and pictures. Design is the first aspect important to web page development. In general, the best design is one that is simple, which means that visitors can navigate the site with ease. The second aspect important to web page development is the text. Web pages should contain sentences written succinctly in the active voice, and the important words should be presented in bold or italic letters. Moreover, bulleted text is generally preferred to paragraphs of text. Reading pattern is the third aspect important to web page development. People read in certain patterns (i.e., left to right and top to bottom), so the most important information to be conveyed should be strategically located. For example, it may be a good idea to place the important text at the top of the web page, because people often neglect to read sites in their entirety. The fourth and final aspect important to web page development is the use of pictures. Pictures should be included only when they are highly relevant to the message that is being conveyed, and they should be colorful, large, and ordered so that they transmit a meaningful message (Metz & Junion-Metz, 1996).

Although very few studies have tested the preceding propositions, one noteworthy study investigated the effects of web page design features. Zusman and Landis (2002) examined the relationship between the quality of Internet job advertisements and applicants' impressions of recruitment image by showing three Internet job advertisements to a group of undergraduate students. The first Internet job advertisement was classified as unattractive, the second as average, and the third as attractive. The unattractive web page consisted of white and black text in paragraph format. The average web page contained attractive fonts, colors, and layouts, and it used a bulleted format for the text. Finally, "attractive colors, exciting text, and several pictures characterized the appearance of the 'attractive' page. . . . The text was also presented in a bulleted format with simple and concise wording. Additionally, there was a tool bar at the bottom of each screen to allow for easy navigation and direct access to contact information" (Zusman & Landis, 2002, pp. 290-291). Results revealed that the attractiveness of the web page affected respondents' perceptions of quality. The attractive Internet job ad was viewed most favorably, indicating that variables such as concise wording and easy navigation played a salient role in shaping recruitment images. The average job ad was viewed less favorably than the attractive ad and more favorably than the unattractive ad, suggesting that web page fonts, colors, bullets, and layouts are also important in influencing applicants' impressions of recruitment image (Zusman & Landis, 2002). Unfortunately, a number of the web page design features manipulated in this study were confounded (e.g., bullets and colors), which makes it difficult to determine exactly which features influenced perceptions of the job advertisements. Clearly, this confounded design affects the precision of the conclusions drawn from this study and should therefore be corrected in future research endeavors.

Hypotheses

In summary, the research indicates that applicants are indeed influenced by one or more of the web page characteristics mentioned by Metz and Junion-Metz (1996). Specifically, the Zusman and Landis (2002) study provides initial evidence that web page navigation and formatting can significantly influence applicants' assessments of organizational web pages. Although these findings seem promising, there is a need for additional research before definitive conclusions can be drawn. Accordingly, this study investigated whether two specific web page characteristics influenced applicants' impressions of Internet recruitment advertisements.

Our first prediction, which was consistent with Metz and Junion-Metz's (1996) opinion that web site design and navigation are critical elements of the development of a visitor's reaction to a web page, sought to examine whether navigational ease helped to explain Zusman and Landis' (2002) finding that people prefer attractive recruitment ads to average ones.

Hypothesis 1: Participants will form more favorable impressions of web pages with easy navigation than of web pages with difficult navigation.

Our second hypothesis was derived from the contention that text formatting affects perceptions of online recruitment images (Metz & Junion-Metz, 1996). Specifically, we aimed to test whether bulleted text formatting played a role in Zusman and Landis's (2002) finding that people prefer average recruitment ads to unattractive ones.

Hypothesis 2: Participants will form more favorable impressions of job ads that list text in bulleted rather than paragraph format.

METHOD

Participants

The participants in the present study were 175 undergraduate students enrolled in psychology classes at a large southeastern university. The sample was composed of 73.7% non-Hispanic Whites, 15.4% African Americans, 2.3% Asian Americans, 2.3% Hispanics, 1.1% Native Americans, and 5.1% others. Approximately 66.3% of the participants were women, and the mean age was 20.1 years ($SD = 3.2$). In terms of class standing, the sample consisted of 42.9% freshmen, 22.9% sophomores, 21.1% juniors, 12.0% seniors, 0.6% graduate students, and 0.6% others. Participants indicated that they spent an average of 8.9 hours on the Internet per week ($SD = 7.5$). Students participated in the study on a voluntary basis and received extra credit if their psychology professors offered points for research participation.

Design and Stimuli

Two levels of navigational ease (easy and difficult) were combined with two types of text formatting (bulleted and paragraph). A fictitious organization was devised, and two Internet job advertisements were created and linked to four fictitious organizational web pages that corresponded to the four experimental conditions. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions, and a between-subjects design was employed to test the effects of navigational ease and text formatting on potential applicants' evaluations of the Internet recruitment image of the hiring organization.

Regardless of the experimental condition, each of the fictitious organizational web sites and job ads contained the same information. The hiring organization was called the Family Development Association, and its mission was to provide a variety of services to families in need. The job ad posted on this organization's web site broadly described an opening for the position of Outreach and Program Development Associate. To some degree, the position was one that could be tailored to the interests and skills of the employee selected for the job, and it was designed to be flexible so that it would capture the interest of people with a wide variety of career goals. Participants were told that both the company and job ad were real; however, names and web addresses were changed to protect the organization's anonymity.

The navigational ease variable referred to whether the Internet advertisement was easy or difficult to access. This variable was operationally defined in terms of the number of levels (i.e., web pages) participants had to navigate through to obtain the desired information. When participants had to traverse only a few levels, the web page was considered easy to navigate. The web page was classified as difficult to navigate when participants had to obtain a password to access the job ad and the search for the password required participants to visit many different levels. The extra levels consisted of distracter pages, which were real outside web sites that provided general professional development tips for employees (e.g., advice on how to deliver effective presentations) and family care tips for clients (e.g., nutritional information for children). To avoid confounding information about the organization with the navigational ease variable, distracter pages did not provide extra information about the organization and job. Although the same distracter information was available in the easy and difficult navigation conditions, participants in the easy condition did not have to search for a password to view the job ad, so they were less likely to click on the links leading to the distracter pages. Twenty-eight people participated in a pilot test to check the experimental manipulation of the navigational ease variable. Pilot participants were timed to verify that the Internet

job ad could be accessed more quickly in the easy navigation condition than in the difficult navigation condition.

The text format of the job advertisement was presented in either bullets or was organized into paragraphs of text. Pilot work verified that the load time of the job ad was the same across all four of the conditions.

Procedure

Data collection took place in a research laboratory that was located in the university's psychology building. The laboratory was equipped with four Intel™ Pentium® class computers, each within its own cubicle. All four computers were installed with Microsoft Internet Explorer software. Each data collection session included 1 to 4 participants, depending on the number of volunteers who signed up for each time slot. Prior to the participants' arrival, each computer was logged onto one of the fictitious organizational web sites that corresponded to the four conditions.

On their arrival in the research laboratory, participants received instructions asking them to perform the experimental task, which required using a computer in the laboratory to access and review an Internet job advertisement. Participants were told that they were each assessing a different organization's web page, and they were informed to notify the experimenter once they had read the job ad. An experimenter remained in the room during the entire session and recorded the number of minutes it took each person to access the Internet job ad. If the Internet job advertisement had not been found within 15 minutes, the experimenter accessed the job ad for the participant.

After reading the job advertisement, participants were asked to imagine that (a) they were qualified for this job and (b) the job was in their field of interest. Participants were then given the 21-item questionnaire, which was designed to measure their evaluations of the recruitment advertisement (3 items, $\alpha = .87$), their impressions of the hiring organization itself (5 items, $\alpha = .86$), and their willingness to apply to the organization (3 items, $\alpha = .86$). In addition, the questionnaire collected information on participants' demographic characteristics, academic status, and their past experiences with computers and the Internet. Five of the 21 items were obtained from a study conducted by Turban and Keon (1993). Participants used a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) to indicate their responses to the items in the survey. After participants completed this questionnaire, they were debriefed, thanked, and dismissed. Finally, at the end of each session, the experimenter documented the number of levels (i.e., web pages) participants visited by tracking their Internet browser activity. This revealed the web page addresses to which participants had navigated and indicated the number of visits per web page.

RESULTS

Background Analyses

Preliminary analyses were conducted to determine if there were any preexisting differences among the experimental conditions in terms of participant age, gender, and online search experience. The results from two independent samples *t* tests indicated that participant age did not significantly vary across the two navigational ease conditions, $t(173) = 1.37$, $p = .173$, or the two text formatting conditions, $t(173) = -0.37$, $p = .712$. Chi-square tests of independence revealed that gender proportions did not significantly differ across the two

TABLE 1
Effects of Navigational Ease on Measured Variables

Measured Variable	Easy Navigation (n = 86)		Difficult Navigation (n = 89)		df ^a	t	p	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD				
Web pages accessed prior to job ad	10.45	13.99	49.96	42.64	103	-8.09	< .001	.277
Minutes elapsed prior to job ad	2.43	2.88	7.01	5.05	141	-7.41	< .001	.237
Perceived difficulty reaching job ad	1.83	1.30	3.40	1.54	170	-7.32	< .001	.235
Impression of recruitment image	3.06	1.19	2.90	1.19	173	0.89	.189	.004
Impression of organization	3.55	0.73	3.29	0.83	173	2.20	.029	.027
Willingness to apply	4.21	0.74	3.89	0.96	173	2.45	.015	.033

NOTE: Within each navigational ease condition, the data were collapsed across two text-formatting levels.

a. The degrees of freedom within groups were adjusted downward and a separate variances test was employed when the two conditions failed to demonstrate homogeneity of variance. Due to the directional nature of our hypothesis, one-tailed *t* tests were employed to test the effects of navigational ease on the first four variables. The number of web pages accessed prior to the job ad was not tracked for the first 10 participants; therefore $N = 175$ for all but the first variable, where $N = 165$.

navigational ease conditions, $\chi^2(1, n = 175) = .10, p = .748$. Similarly, the two text formatting conditions did not differ in terms of gender proportions, $\chi^2(1, n = 175) = .18, p = .670$. For online search experience, an independent samples *t* test showed that there was no significant difference between participants in the easy and difficult navigation conditions, $t(173) = 0.98, p = .330$. Likewise, online search experience was not significantly different for participants in the paragraph and bulleted text conditions, $t(173) = 0.33, p = .746$. In sum, the experimental groups were quite even in terms of the participants' background characteristics.

Navigational Ease

Three separate analyses were used to ascertain whether the navigational ease variable was manipulated effectively. The first analysis involved looking at the number of web pages each participant visited. As shown in Table 1, the results from an independent samples *t* test revealed that participants in the difficult navigation condition traversed significantly more levels (i.e., web pages) to access the job ad than did participants in the easy navigation condition. For the second analysis, the number of minutes it took participants to locate the job ad were examined. The results of a separate variances independent samples *t* test showed that participants in the difficult navigation condition spent significantly more time trying to access the job ad than did participants in the easy navigation condition (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics). The third and final analysis was accomplished by including an item on the post-task questionnaire that required participants to respond to the following statement: "I had a hard time accessing this company's online job advertisement." Respondents indicated their reactions to this statement using a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). As shown in Table 1, the results of an independent samples *t* test indicated that participants in the difficult navigation condition perceived it to be significantly more challenging to locate the job ad than did the participants in the easy navigation condition.

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Variables Related to Hypothesis 1

<i>Measured Variable</i>	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Online search experience	2.26	1.22	—				
Minutes elapsed prior to job ad	4.76	4.71	-.25**	—			
Web pages accessed prior to job ad	30.81	37.66	-.17*	.85**	—		
Perceived difficulty reaching job ad	2.63	1.63	-.16*	.56**	.54**	—	
Impression of recruitment image	2.98	1.19	.02	-.19**	-.25**	-.21**	—

NOTE: The number of web pages accessed prior to the job ad was not tracked for the first 10 participants; therefore $N = 175$ for all but the first variable, where $N = 165$.

* $p < .05$ (one-tailed). ** $p < .01$ (one-tailed).

Based on these three analyses, it was concluded that the navigational ease variable was manipulated effectively.

Hypothesis 1 stated that participants would form more favorable impressions of web pages with easy navigation than of web pages with difficult navigation. An independent samples t test was employed to test this hypothesis, using a .05 criterion of statistical significance. Contrary to Hypothesis 1, the results from this analysis showed that there was no significant effect of navigational ease on participants' perceptions of the recruitment image. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics.

As shown in Table 2, the results from follow-up correlation analyses indicated that participants with more online search experience located the company's job advertisement in less time and traversed fewer levels than did inexperienced participants. Moreover, individuals who spent more time and traversed more levels in search of the job ad were more inclined to admit that it was challenging to access the job ad and formed less favorable impressions of the organization's recruitment image. This pattern of results lends partial support to Hypothesis 1, even though participants in the easy and difficult navigation conditions did not report significantly different evaluations of the company's recruitment image.

Before examining Hypothesis 2, exploratory analyses were conducted to determine whether navigational ease had any unexpected effects on the impression of the hiring organization and willingness to apply for a job. The results of these analyses are shown in Table 1. Participants in the easy navigation condition perceived the Family Development Association more favorably than participants in the difficult navigation condition. Similarly, participants in the easy navigation condition indicated a greater willingness to apply for the position advertised by the Family Development Association.

Text Formatting

Hypothesis 2 stated that participants would form more favorable impressions of job advertisements presented in bulleted rather than paragraphs of text. An independent samples t test was employed to test this hypothesis, using a .05 criterion of statistical significance. As shown in Table 3, the results indicated that the text formatting of the job advertisement did not significantly influence participants' evaluations of the company's recruitment image. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not supported. Moreover, the text formatting of the job ad did not have any unexpected effects on impressions of the hiring organization or the willingness to apply for a position.

TABLE 3
Effects of Text Formatting on Measured Variables

<i>Measured Variable</i>	<i>Paragraph Text</i> (<i>n</i> = 87)		<i>Bulleted Text</i> (<i>n</i> = 88)		<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Perceived attractiveness of job ad	2.52	1.19	2.57	1.26	173	-.275	.392	.000
Impression of recruitment image	2.99	1.17	2.97	1.22	173	.125	.450	.000
Impression of organization	3.43	0.79	3.41	0.80	173	.116	.908	.000
Willingness to apply	4.07	0.81	4.03	0.93	173	.264	.792	.000

NOTE: Within each text formatting condition, the data were collapsed across two levels of navigational ease. Due to the directional nature of our hypothesis, one-tailed *t* tests were employed to test the effects of text formatting on the first two variables.

DISCUSSION

Due to the advent of the Internet, many organizations are relying less on traditional recruiting media (e.g., recruiters and job ads) and are increasingly using their own personal web pages to attract applicants. Whereas previous research has identified characteristics of traditional recruiting strategies that play an instrumental role in shaping potential applicants' perceptions of recruitment image, very little research has been done to ascertain what aspects of electronic recruiting are important.

The present study begins to address this gap in the literature by examining the effects of two web site design features on participants' impressions of a company's online recruitment image. First, this study examined the role of navigational ease. Our findings provide partial support for the contention made by Zusman and Landis (2002) that web sites with easy navigation lead to more favorable impressions of recruitment image than of web sites with difficult navigation. Although participants in the easy and difficult navigation conditions did not report significantly different evaluations of the Internet job ad, the results did indicate that more favorable perceptions were formed by individuals who traversed fewer levels (i.e., web pages) and spent less time trying to locate the job ad.

Second, this research examined the effect of the text formatting of a job advertisement on potential applicants' perceptions of the hiring company's online recruitment image. Unexpectedly, the results indicated that viewing a job advertisement in bulleted text rather than paragraphs of text did not improve participants' evaluations. These results contradict Metz and Junion-Metz's (1996) anecdotal claim that bulleted text is preferred over paragraphs of text. Similarly, our findings clarify the confounded results of the Zusman and Landis (2002) study, which demonstrated that average online job advertisements containing attractive fonts, colors, layouts, and bulleted text were evaluated more favorably than the unattractive black and white ads in paragraph format. Our findings suggest that the effect uncovered in Zusman and Landis's (2002) study was not a function of bulleted text alone. Rather, people probably preferred the average Internet job ads due to the effects of the appealing fonts, colors, layouts, or one or more of these variables in combination with bulleted text (i.e., perhaps bulleted text formatting affected perceptions of online job ads by interacting with one or more of the other web page design features).

In addition to testing the two previous hypotheses, we conducted exploratory analyses that investigated the effects of navigational ease and text formatting of a job ad on partici-

pants' impressions of the hiring organization and their willingness to apply for a position with the hiring company. Text formatting did not affect participants' evaluations of the hiring organization or their willingness to apply for a position. Navigational ease significantly influenced participants' evaluations of the hiring organization and their willingness to apply. Individuals in the easy navigation condition viewed the hiring company more favorably and were more inclined to admit that they would apply for the position being advertised. This finding is congruent with the results of an unpublished study by Cober et al. (2002), which suggests that the frustration experienced by individuals who cannot access the desired information on a company's web site may have adverse consequences from the standpoint of recruitment and selection. Perhaps people believe that the search for the job advertisement signals the quality of the organization or the difficulty that will be experienced in the overall application process. This perception may, in turn, lead to a decrease in the willingness to apply for the position being advertised. Future research examining the reasons why navigational ease influences impressions of an organization and their willingness to respond to an online job advertisement would be informative.

When interpreting the results of this study, one should be aware of the conditions that may restrict the generalizability of these findings to other people and settings. Approximately 95% of the participants in the present study were included in the age range of 18 years to 25 years. Thus, it may not be reasonable to assume that the results can be applied to older individuals, because they may differ from the participants used in this study on a variety of dimensions (e.g., characteristics important for shaping positive recruitment images, online search experiences, etc.). Furthermore, participants in this study were not necessarily looking for employment opportunities. Importantly, Zall (2000) pointed out that using Internet job ads is an effective means of targeting passive job seekers (individuals who are not directly looking for employment). Because our study sample consisted of more passive than active job seekers, one cannot confidently conclude that our findings would extend to active job seekers.

In terms of the experimental setting, individuals searched for the Internet job ad in the presence of the experimenter and in the presence of one, two, or three additional individuals, depending on the number of participants who signed up for the experiment. The computers used by participants to access the job ads were located within their own cubicles to create the sense that the individuals were working in the room alone, making this environment more similar to an Internet search that may occur within someone's home, work office, and the like. Despite this effort, however, searching for jobs on the Internet in the privacy of one's home or work office may be slightly different than doing this in the laboratory. This too should be kept in mind when generalizing the findings to other settings. Research examining online job search behaviors outside the laboratory would provide a valuable compliment to the current study.

Finally, the design of the web site used in this study may have reduced our ecological validity somewhat. To avoid confounding information about the organization with the navigational ease variable, distracter pages did not provide extra information about the organization and job; instead, they were outside web pages that contained information for the company's fictitious clients and employees. Although we were successful in manipulating the navigational ease variable without directly providing additional information about the Family Development Association, it should be noted that most organizations would not have had links to such outside web sites. In the real world, navigational difficulty may truly lead applicants to gain extra information about the company in question. As is often the case with laboratory research, we sacrificed some degree of external validity in exchange for increased internal validity. To expand what is known about applicants' evaluations of the Internet job

advertisements in an ecologically valid setting, future research should investigate these design features with real organizational web pages. Moreover, in addition to investigating the effects of text formatting and navigational ease on participants' perceptions of recruitment image, there is a plethora of web page design features mentioned by Metz and Junion-Metz (1996) that should be examined.

In conclusion, this study uncovered several new findings, which might provide some practical guidance to companies wishing to enhance their recruitment images and to attract more applicants. Specifically, the findings support the notion that companies should not concern themselves over whether their Internet job advertisements are presented in bulleted text or paragraphs of text; this does not create any significant differences in the way the recruitment image is perceived. Second, companies should build web sites that are easy to navigate so prospective applicants can access desired information with minimal effort. This is important because the navigation of the web site affects potential applicants' view of the Internet job advertisement, evaluations of the hiring company, and their willingness to submit job applications.

REFERENCES

- Breaugh, J. A. (1992). *Recruitment: Science and practice*. Boston: PWS-KENT.
- Cober, R. T., Brown, D., Levy, P. E., Cober, A. B., Kermes, J., & Baznik, D. (2002, April). *The effects of job-seeker reactions to corporate employment web sites*. Paper presented at the 17th Annual Meeting of the Society for Industrial-Organizational Psychology, Toronto, Canada.
- Connerley, M. L., & Rynes, S. L. (1997). The influence of recruiter characteristics and organizational recruitment support on perceived recruiter effectiveness: Views from applicants and recruiters. *Human Relations, 50*, 1563-1586.
- Crispin, G., & Mehler, M. (1997). Recruiting rockets through cyberspace. *HR Magazine, 42*, 72-77.
- Gatewood, R., Gowan, M., & Lautenschlager, G. (1993). Corporate image, recruitment image, and initial job choice decisions. *Academy of Management Journal, 38*, 414-427.
- Holbrook, M., & Lehman, D. (1980). Form versus content in predicting starch scores. *Journal of Advertising Research, 20*, 53-62.
- Kaplan, A. B., Aamodt, M. G., & Wilk, D. (1991). The relationship between advertisement variables and applicant responses to newspaper recruitment advertisements. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 5*, 383-395.
- Kay, A. S. (2000, March 20). Recruiters embrace the Internet. *Information Week, 778*, 72-80.
- Marcus, A. (2001, February 5). Is island too small for HR and headhunters? *Electronic Engineering Times, 1152*, 129-133.
- Metz, R. E., & Junion-Metz, G. (1996). *Using the World Wide Web and creating home pages: A how-to-do-it manual*. New York: Neal-Schuman.
- Recruiting. (1999, December). *PC Computing, 12*, 2-7.
- Rogers, D. P., & Sincoff, M. Z. (1978). Favorable impression characteristics of the recruitment interviewer. *Personnel Psychology, 31*, 495-504.
- Rynes, S. L., Heneman, H. G., III, & Schwab, D. P. (1980). Individual reactions to organizational recruiting: A review. *Personnel Psychology, 33*, 529-542.
- Spector, P. E. (2000). Selecting employees. In P. E. Spector (Ed.), *Industrial and organizational psychology: Research and practice* (2nd ed., pp. 125-151). New York: John Wiley.
- Turban, D. B., & Keon, T. L. (1993). Organizational attractiveness: An interactionist perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 78*, 184-193.
- Web recruiting advantages: Trends impacting web recruiting*. (2001). Retrieved September 2001, from <http://www.hrsmart.com/recadv.html#Anchor-Trends-5185>
- Zall, M. (2000, June). Internet recruiting. *Strategic Finance, 81*, 67-75.
- Zusman, R. R., & Landis, R. S. (2002). Applicant preferences for web-based versus traditional job postings. *Computers in Human Behavior, 18*, 285-296.

Phillip W. Braddy (B.A., East Carolina University) is a graduate student in the industrial-organizational psychology master's program at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina.

Lori Foster Thompson (Ph.D., University of South Florida) is an assistant professor of psychology at East Carolina University. Her research examines the effects of technology on people and organizations, and she also studies careers. Her work has appeared in a variety of publications, and she regularly presents research at national and international conferences.

Karl L. Wuensch received his Ph.D. in experimental psychology from Miami University, Oxford, Ohio. He is a professor in the department of psychology at East Carolina University. His current research interests include human-computer interactions, forensic psychology, multivariate statistics, ethical ideologies, and attitudes about nonhuman animals.

William F. Grossnickle (Ph.D., George Washington University) is a professor of psychology at East Carolina University. His research interests include training, selection, performance appraisal, and human-computer interactions.