

PRACTICALGUIDE

Recruiting

for Small and
Medium-Sized Businesses

The Fundamentals of Successfully Filling Your
Open Positions

AUTHOR

PhDr. Oliver Scharfenberg

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2026 EDITION

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A note on language: The German original uses various forms to refer to people. Sometimes masculine and feminine forms appear together; elsewhere, I use gender-neutral terms such as “employees” or “team,” and in some places only the masculine form. This mix is intended to make the text easier to read. All references are intended to include people of every gender and identity.

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Disclaimer

The information in this book has been researched with the utmost care and compiled to the best of the author's knowledge. It reflects the legal framework and state of knowledge at the time of publication (May 2026). Because legal requirements—particularly in employment, tax, competition, and data protection law—change continually, and individual provisions may be interpreted differently, all information is provided without warranty.

This book does not constitute legal, tax, or investment advice and is not a substitute for advice on an individual case. Its contents are intended solely to provide general information and guidance for owners, managing directors, and those responsible for human resources in small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs).

For specific legal questions—for example, about drafting job postings, interpreting the EU Pay Transparency Directive, the EmpCo Directive and its applicability to employer certifications and awards, the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG), employment or immigration matters, or using AI in recruiting in compliance with data protection requirements—consult an attorney who specializes in the relevant area of law.

For tax questions, particularly the application of prescribed values for benefits in kind, wage tax allowances, and the wage tax treatment of employee benefits, a tax advisor should be consulted.

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Contents

Introduction	9
About the Author	11
1 General Challenges	13
1.1 Skilled Labor Shortage	13
1.2 Demographic Change	14
1.3 Fertility Rate in Germany, 1991–2024	15
1.4 Globalization and Changing Values	16
1.5 A Strategic Approach	18
1.6 The Candidate Journey	19
2 Who Are You, and What Do You Offer?	24
2.1 Gallup Engagement Index 2024	26
2.2 Measuring Employee Satisfaction	27
2.3 An Employee Survey in Nine Steps	28
2.4 Reviews on kununu and Glassdoor	31
2.5 Your Appeal as an Employer	33
2.6 Employer Certifications and Awards	38
2.7 Four Categories of Employer Certifications and Awards	39
2.8 The EmpCo Directive in 2026	52
3 Who Are Your Competitors?	53
3.1 What Positions Are Your Competitors Advertising?	53
3.2 What Salaries Do Your Competitors Offer?	54
3.3 What Benefits Do Your Competitors Offer?	56
3.4 Competitor Analysis Using kununu	56
4 How Do You Want to Be Perceived as an Employer?	58
4.1 Increasing Your Appeal as an Employer	58
4.2 Employer Brand and Employer Image	60
4.3 Employer Branding	61
4.4 Summary	66
5 Defining Your Target Audiences	67
5.1 Generation X	68
5.2 Generations X, Y, and Z Compared	69
5.3 Generation Y	70
5.4 Generation Z	71
5.5 Employee Benefits	71
5.6 Summary	73
5.7 What Studies Say About Employee Benefits	75

6 Offline Recruiting	76
6.1 Traditional Ways to Recruit Employees	76
6.2 Print Advertising	76
6.3 The Federal Employment Agency	77
6.4 Headhunters	77
6.5 Career Fairs	77
6.6 Employee Referrals	78
7 Online Recruiting	79
7.1 The Careers Section of Your Website	80
Infographic: Seven Success Factors for Your Careers Page	81
7.1.1 Search Engine Optimization	82
7.1.2 Making Jobs Easy to Find	84
7.1.3 A Simple Application Process	84
7.1.4 An Authentic Presentation	85
7.1.5 A Professional Presentation	85
7.1.6 A Named Contact	86
7.1.7 Optimizing for Mobile Devices	86
7.2 Social Media Platforms	87
7.2.1 LinkedIn	87
Infographic: Social Media Platforms for Recruiting	88
7.2.2 XING	93
7.2.3 kununu	96
7.2.4 Facebook	100
7.2.5 YouTube	105
7.2.6 Instagram	110
7.2.7 TikTok	114
7.2.8 Pinterest	118
7.2.9 X, Formerly Twitter	120
7.2.10 Advantages and Disadvantages of Social Media Recruiting	122
7.3 Comparing Job Boards for Employers	123
Infographic: Job Boards: General Platforms	124
Infographic: Job Boards: Industry Specialists	125
7.3.1 Overview of General Job Boards	126
7.3.2 Job Boards: Healthcare	130
7.3.3 Job Boards: IT	133
7.3.4 Job Boards: Students	134
7.3.5 Multiposting	137
7.3.6 Summary: Choosing the Right Platforms	138
7.4 Legal Requirements for Job Postings	139
Infographic: The EU Pay Transparency Directive in 2026	143

Infographic: AGG-Compliant Job Postings	144
8 Recruiting Employees from Abroad	145
9 Building Early Relationships with Skilled Talent	150
9.1 Apprenticeships	150
9.2 Introducing Combined Education Programs	150
9.3 Becoming a University's Practical Training Partner	151
9.4 Support During the Probationary Period and Early Turnover	151
9.5 Onboarding Timeline	152
10 Artificial Intelligence in Recruiting	155
10.1 What AI in Recruiting Actually Means	156
10.2 Where AI Can Help Today	156
10.3 AI Along the Candidate Journey	158
10.4 A Practical Example: A Job Posting in Ten Minutes	159
10.5 Where AI Reaches Its Limits	159
10.6 Legal Requirements to Keep in Mind	160
10.7 Take Discrimination Risks Seriously	162
10.8 A Practical Starting Point for SMEs	162
10.9 Common Mistakes—and How to Avoid Them	163
10.10 Introduce AI in 30 Days: A Roadmap	164
10.11 Summary	165
11 Practical Examples	166
11.1 The Four-Day Workweek	166
11.2 Skilled Trades: When the Workshop Becomes a Stage	168
11.3 Care: A Neighborhood Approach	169
11.4 Manufacturing: The Company Shuttle as a Calling Card	170
12 Eight Steps to More Applications	172
12.1 Taking Stock	172
12.2 The Employee Survey	173
12.3 Roadmap: Eight Steps to More Applications	174
12.4 More Applications from the Right Candidates	175
13 Appendix: Practical Resources	182
13.1 Resource 1: Job Posting for the Skilled Trades	182
13.2 Resource 2: Job Posting for an Administrative Assistant	183
13.3 Resource 3: IT Job Posting	184
13.4 Resource 4: Onboarding Checklist for the First Few Weeks	185
13.5 Resource 5: Guide to Structured Probationary Period Reviews	186
13.6 Resource 6: Employee Job Satisfaction Survey	188
13.7 Resource 7: Tax-Advantaged Benefits	195
13.8 Resource 8: Appealing Employee Benefits	201
Bibliography and Sources	206

Introduction

Finding qualified employees has become an ongoing challenge for many businesses. A glance at the news or the job boards reveals the scale of the problem: more and more employers are looking for skilled workers, and more and more open positions remain unfilled. The central question is therefore not whether the labor market has changed, but how businesses respond.

This book is primarily for owners of small and medium-sized businesses in Germany: skilled trades businesses, medical practices, law firms, service providers, retailers, and small manufacturing and IT companies with roughly five to fifty employees. These businesses feel the labor shortage particularly acutely. They rarely have an HR department of their own, yet they must compete with corporations and midsize businesses that have people dedicated to attracting talent. This book shows you how to attract more applications from suitable candidates systematically and with a manageable investment of time and effort, even without your own HR team.

Recruiting begins with two assessments. First: Who are the people you want to attract? Second: How do those people already perceive your business? Only then should you decide on specific actions and develop a compelling position as an employer. This is about presenting an honest, credible picture of what you offer as an employer, rather than simply promoting yourself. Convincing candidates takes more than appealing promises; it requires quality they can experience in everyday working life. Applicants quickly recognize whether your claims match reality.

I deliberately avoid excessive theory. This book provides a sound understanding of modern recruiting and translates that knowledge into specific steps you can put into practice immediately. You will see how directly professional recruiting affects your business's success—and where you can make the greatest difference.

In small and medium-sized businesses in particular, progress depends largely on the people who keep the business going. Without the right skilled employees, growth, quality, and stability can quickly come under pressure. This practical guide is for anyone who wants to strengthen their business through focused, up-to-date recruiting.

By the time you have worked through this book, you will have a solid understanding of how recruiting and positioning yourself as an employer work. What also matters is consistently putting that understanding into practice in your own business. Only action changes the reality.

About the Author

I have been an entrepreneur for more than twenty years. During that time, I have held a range of responsible positions, including apprenticeship trainer, key account manager, and managing director. These varied perspectives led me to a professional focus that has shaped my work for many years: marketing and employer branding.



PhDr. Oliver Scharfenberg

I began with a degree in business administration and deliberately built on that foundation. At Middlesex University in London, I expanded my expertise with a Master of Business Administration specializing in marketing. I then earned the academic degree PhDr. (Doctor of Philosophy) in economics and management at DTI University. During that period, I learned to combine business practice with academic research methods. In addition to my work as an entrepreneur and consultant, I served as a commercial judge at the Berlin Regional Court, where I dealt extensively with competition law.

Over more than ten years, I have advised more than 750 companies on marketing and employer branding. This broad range of projects has given me deep, practically tested expertise that I now bring to every client engagement.

I help small and medium-sized businesses, larger companies, and public administration organizations position themselves as attractive employers. Together with my team, I help organizations communicate their identity visibly and credibly—and attract the skilled people who will contribute to their long-term success. We always begin with a thorough analysis of the starting situation. From there, we develop and support measures suited to each organization. For transparency, I would also like to mention that I have provided advice and support on employer certifications and awards for many years.

Small and medium-sized businesses face particular challenges in competing for skilled workers, often with limited budgets and no large HR department. That is the starting point for this book. It is intended as an accessible introduction to recruiting. I share the knowledge gained through my consulting work in a form you can use immediately, showing how smaller and midsize employers can attract employees who are truly the right fit.

If you have any questions or suggestions about this book, I would be delighted to hear from you at E-Mail@oliver-scharfenberg.com.

I hope you enjoy reading it, and I wish you every success in putting these ideas into practice in your business.

Sincerely,
Oliver Scharfenberg

1 General Challenges

1.1 Skilled Labor Shortage

From a Skilled Labor Shortage to a General Labor Shortage

In recent years, the skilled labor shortage has become one of the greatest challenges facing business, policymakers, and society. From owner-operated businesses to multinational corporations, employers face the same task: finding qualified employees and retaining them for the long term.

The causes are complex. This is not a single problem, but the combined effect of several developments reshaping the labor market. Demographic shifts, technological advances, changing educational paths, and global and social trends are simultaneously affecting the availability of workers and making the situation more difficult.

Demographic change has a particularly strong effect on the labor market. In industrialized countries, the population is aging while significantly fewer young people are entering the workforce. This reduces the number of workers available to employers. At the same time, digitalization is fundamentally changing many occupations. Employers now need skills and qualifications that education systems in many places are not producing in sufficient numbers.

This reveals a central problem: employers' requirements and the qualifications available in the workforce are increasingly out of step. This gap leaves many positions unfilled even when applicants are available. Some occupations have also lost social standing or hold little appeal for many young people. In certain industries, this intensifies the shortage.

The problem now extends well beyond a shortage of specialized skilled workers. Increasingly, employers also struggle to find staff for jobs that were once relatively easy to fill. The skilled labor shortage is gradually becoming a general labor shortage. The trend is predictable: as the population ages and fewer children are born, the number of working-age people inevitably declines.

Educational paths have also changed significantly. A few decades ago, it was common to begin a trade or business apprenticeship soon after leaving school. Today, many school leavers are drawn to higher education. This has a noticeable effect on the labor market. Traditional apprenticeship occupations and many hands-on jobs increasingly struggle to attract enough new entrants. Meanwhile, demand for workers continues to grow in many areas. When demand rises and supply falls, shortages almost inevitably worsen unless effective action is taken.

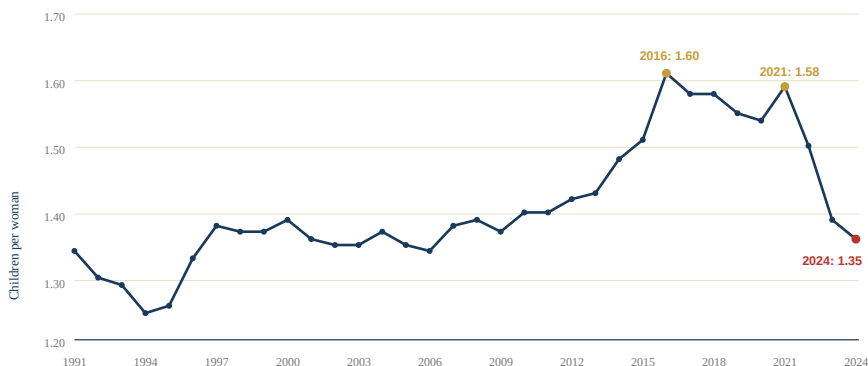
1.2 Demographic Change

Before turning to specific recruiting strategies, it helps to understand the demographic fundamentals. A realistic assessment of the starting situation is essential if you are to draw useful conclusions for your business and make the most of available opportunities.

Discussions of labor shortages almost always bring up demographic change and globalization. This is no coincidence. The population's structure has changed profoundly over recent decades. Older people account for a much larger share, while younger generations are smaller. Medical advances have also increased life expectancy. Better living conditions further contribute to people living longer than in the past. Together, these developments are producing a visibly aging society and permanently changing the labor market.

Fertility Rate in Germany, 1991–2024

Children per woman (total fertility rate)—the demographic background to your recruiting challenge



1994—Low

1.24

Post-reunification low in eastern Germany

2016—High

1.60

Parental allowance and immigration

2021—Peak

1.58

Pandemic effect

2024—Now

1.35

677,117 births

Implications for SMEs: The replacement level is 2.1 children per woman. If the rate remains at 1.35, the working-age population inevitably shrinks—even with steady immigration. Businesses that want to recruit young people from 2030 onward need to build an employer brand today.

Source: Federal Statistical Office (Destatis), total fertility rate, 1991–2024; figures from 2022 onward account for the 2022 census.

At the same time, significantly fewer young people are entering the labor market. Many families now deliberately choose to have one child or no children. Germany's fertility rate has been low for years: in 2024, it stood at just 1.35 children per woman, well below the replacement level of 2.1 needed to maintain a stable population. With around 677,000 newborns, the annual number of births is among the lowest in recent decades. Large families, once more common, are no longer typical. This development reflects personal life choices, but it has tangible consequences for the labor market. The fewer young people there are to join the workforce, the greater the imbalance between the available labor pool and an aging society.

For you as an employer, the implication is clear: you need to become more adaptable. Succeeding in a tighter labor market requires working conditions that accommodate different life stages and expectations. Relying on young talent alone is no longer enough. Retaining experienced employees, preserving their knowledge, and creating opportunities that appeal to younger generations are equally important. Businesses that do both gain a decisive advantage.

1.4 Globalization and Changing Values

Alongside demographic trends, globalization and changing social values are also transforming the labor market. Globalization is often seen primarily as an economic opportunity. For many SMEs, however, it also brings more competition. Markets are more closely connected than ever, and businesses compete directly across national borders. This increases the pressure to define a clear position and become more visible as an employer.

These developments also create new recruiting opportunities. Access to international talent was long largely reserved for major corporations. Today, SMEs can also recruit deliberately across borders. This places greater demands on their organizations, however. To attract skilled workers from abroad, employers need to understand cultural differences, adapt their internal structures, and create a workplace in which people from different backgrounds can collaborate effectively. Issues once treated as optional extras have become real factors in competitiveness.

The shift is particularly evident in location-independent work. Remote work has become an established way of working. Working from home, collaborating virtually, and participating in international teams are now routine in many forward-looking businesses. This expands the geographic reach of recruiting while creating new opportunities to exchange ideas, consider different perspectives, and collaborate in new ways.

More businesses are also using external specialists who work independently of location, such as digital nomads, expatriates, and freelancers who travel continuously. This way of living and working often appeals to highly qualified professionals because it combines considerable freedom with expertise they can apply internationally. It also opens up interesting opportunities for SMEs. Services that are hard to find in the local labor market can be sourced externally in this way.

At the same time, this is a complex area. Tax and legal questions play a significant role in cross-border arrangements in particular. Anyone working as a digital nomad or involved in such arrangements should understand the applicable rules. For German citizens, extended limited tax liability may be especially relevant. Under certain conditions, income or assets may remain taxable in Germany for years after a person moves abroad. Anyone considering this route should therefore seek professional advice early. This is the only way to assess risks realistically and avoid costly mistakes.

1.5 A Strategic Approach

As in every other area of business management, recruiting without a clear structure leaves too much to chance. A strategic approach does not require every step to be set in stone. It provides direction. Recruiting often presents situations that call for quick, decisive action. What you need is a sound foundation that allows you to respond flexibly.

Start by assigning clear responsibilities:

- Who is responsible for each part of the process?
- Who is the central point of contact?
- Who makes decisions, and who prepares the information needed to make them?

Clarity pays off from the moment you define a role. A good job description clearly explains what the position involves, which requirements actually matter, and what you expect from the person who fills it.

The more systematically you organize selection, the easier the eventual decision becomes. Decide early how you will evaluate applications. Structure your interviews. Define the stages of your application process and the ideal timeline for each. This gives you both a clearer overview and greater accountability.

As an owner or managing director, you do not have to handle every task yourself. Many responsibilities can be delegated effectively. What matters is that everyone on the team always has a clear understanding. Everyone involved should know where the process stands, what happens next, and who is responsible for each step. Unclear processes waste time, create friction, and can quickly look unprofessional to outsiders.

The Candidate Journey

From first contact to a signed contract—and what candidates experience at each stage

1

AWARENESS

A candidate notices you.

Job boards, Google for Jobs, social media, local visibility, and referrals. First impressions form in seconds.

What helps: A search-friendly careers page, a social media presence, and an up-to-date kununu profile.

2

INTEREST

Research and evaluation.

The candidate reads the job posting, visits your careers page, searches for your company on Google, and checks reviews. A judgment is often made here.

What helps: Authentic photos, employee perspectives, clearly explained benefits, and responses to kununu reviews.

3

APPLICATION

The first click.

An application form, a resume, and possibly a cover letter. A complicated process means lost applicants. Mobile access is essential.

What helps: A low barrier to entry: a name, phone number, and resume are enough. Drop the cover letter requirement.

4

CONTACT

The first response.

Acknowledgment and a prompt reply. Within 48 hours, candidates decide whether you seem professional.

What helps: A personal phone call instead of an automated email. Speed as a competitive advantage.

5

INTERVIEW

The first face-to-face meeting.

Structured, yet personable. Assess the candidate while showing what working for you is really like.

What helps: Clear criteria, prepared questions, and honest answers to candidates' questions.

6

DECISION

An offer or a rejection.

A decision on both sides. Respectfully worded rejections help build a talent pool for the future.

What helps: Prompt, personal feedback. Rejections that leave the door open: offer to keep the candidate's details on file.

7

GETTING STARTED

Onboarding and the probationary period.

The first day is the second critical moment. Early turnover costs more than the job posting.

What helps: Preparation beginning seven days before the start date, clearly assigned buddies, and structured probationary period reviews.

What many employers overlook: Candidates who receive a rejection also shape your company's public image. Three rejected candidates who were treated fairly often tell more people about you than one successful candidate. The candidate journey is therefore a long-term marketing tool, extending beyond HR.

The candidates' perspective is just as important. Recruiting does not end with selecting suitable people. Every interaction with your business shapes how people see you as an employer. It is worth deliberately examining the application process from their point of view. Ask candidates about their experience. Where was it pleasant, where was it unclear, and where was it unnecessarily complicated? A good candidate experience has an impact well beyond a single hire.

Even when you decide against hiring someone, the impression remains. People who feel they were treated fairly, taken seriously, and kept informed generally speak positively about the business. This strengthens your employer image. It also makes candidates more likely to apply again later or recommend your company to others.

That is what a positive candidate journey is about: the entire path a person follows from their first contact with your company to a possible hire. Every stage matters—the first impression, the clarity of the job posting, the ease of applying, communication along the way, the interview itself, and how you handle offers and rejections. Candidates should feel supported throughout. This improves your image and makes them more willing to choose your company.

A coherent application process also has a lasting effect. The person you speak with today may become one of your most important employees tomorrow. Experiencing professionalism, respect, and reliability from the outset gives the employment relationship a different starting point. A positive application experience also encourages referrals. Good experiences spread by word of mouth and strengthen your network of potential applicants.

If you have not yet created a complete overview of your open positions, start there. List all vacancies systematically, for example in a spreadsheet. Include not only the job title but also the requirements, location, and posting date. A clear overview makes planning easier and provides the transparency you need.

Next, define the appropriate target audience for each role. Relevant factors include education or training level, region, professional experience, and specialization. Age may also play a role, depending on the position and the approach used to reach candidates, but only where there is an objective reason for considering it. Budgeting is equally important. Recruiting costs should not become apparent only after the process is underway. Depending on your approach, expenses may include job postings, recruiting tools, staffing agencies, and supporting marketing activities. Accounting for these costs early makes planning significantly more efficient.

Once you know your target audience, choose the appropriate channels. The aim is to use the right channels, rather than as many as possible at once. Carefully consider where and how you can reach potential candidates:

- What role do online job boards play?
- How effective is your own website?
- What opportunities do social media offer?
- How well do external service providers actually perform?

Only a clear-eyed assessment will show which channels suit your objectives.

Channels differ in reach, targeting precision, and value for money. That is why you need to weigh your options carefully. We will return to this in more detail in the section on social media, with an overview of the main platforms and guidance on which channels suit particular objectives.

Your website deserves special attention, particularly its careers section. Take a critical look at how your job postings and your business come across to potential employees:

- Is it immediately clear why someone should apply to work for you?
- Can interested candidates see at a glance what distinguishes you as an employer?
- Is your communication authentic?

Compared with competitors, it must be clear why a talented candidate should choose you in particular. This includes responsibilities and development opportunities, as well as benefits and pay. Money is not everything, but it remains an important expression of appreciation and a central factor in candidates' decisions.

It is equally important that your open positions are easy to find. If candidates have to hunt for them, you lose some interested people before the first contact. A clearly organized careers page can solve this. Present your business authentically. Show your team as it actually works. Real photographs of everyday work are more credible than generic, glossy images. Open positions can also be presented in visually appealing ways, such as photo sequences or brief glimpses of daily work. The presentation must remain honest. An artificial facade will collapse once the reality of everyday work becomes apparent.

It also helps to examine competitors, their job postings, and their communication:

- How do other companies position themselves?
- Are they filling similar roles?
- Have they recently laid off staff or expanded?

These observations help you assess current demand for particular qualifications. If other employers offer substantially better conditions, it is hardly surprising that your positions are difficult to fill. Compare salaries alongside working hours, benefits, development opportunities, and the overall way competitors communicate as employers.

Do not conduct this analysis alone. Involve your team and draw on different perspectives. Employees experience your business every day and often see clearly where its strengths and weaknesses lie. Their perspectives help you express your employer value proposition—your core promise as an employer—clearly and credibly. Remember that you are competing directly with other employers.

2 Who Are You, and What Do You Offer?

How potential applicants perceive your business as an employer directly affects its success. Perhaps someone you know has described a job that was unsuitable in several ways, yet stayed anyway. Experience repeatedly shows that people do not leave an employer solely because of individual working conditions. What often matters most is how they are managed, whether they are taken seriously, and whether they generally feel supported in the organization.

Many business owners would be surprised to discover how many employees have already become emotionally detached or are actively considering a move. The Gallup Engagement Index Germany 2024, published in March 2025, reports that 78% of employees do only what is required, while 13% have mentally checked out. Just 9% have a strong emotional connection to their employer—an all-time low. Gallup estimates that disengagement costs the German economy €113 billion to €135 billion in lost productivity each year.

Many employees are simply waiting for the right moment, letting contracts expire, or already exploring opportunities with competitors. For years, studies have highlighted the low levels of emotional attachment in many businesses. A substantial share of employees work without a real sense of connection; some mentally left long ago. This is a serious problem for motivation, willingness to contribute, and productivity. It also shows where action is needed. Employers who are approachable, take a sincere interest, and are visibly present often strengthen their teams more sustainably than they realize.

This matters for more than recruiting. Building trust also gives you an unfiltered view of your own business. The internal perception and external reputation are inseparable. Many employers underestimate this connection. In practice, the reality inside a company almost always affects how it is perceived from the outside.

Later in this book, we will explore in detail how you can shape this process. Fundamentally, it begins with open, honest communication, both internally and externally. Credibility develops only when your message matches reality. Marketing and communication therefore need to be considered together: both shape how your business is seen as an employer. Look closely. Weaknesses can be addressed only once they become visible.

To be perceived positively, you need to be visible. Today, visibility takes several forms. A strong digital presence matters, as do face-to-face encounters at career fairs, industry events, or local networking gatherings. You can spark interest and build trust only if potential candidates notice you in the first place.

A clear understanding of the fundamentals of modern recruiting helps. At its heart is a simple but decisive question:

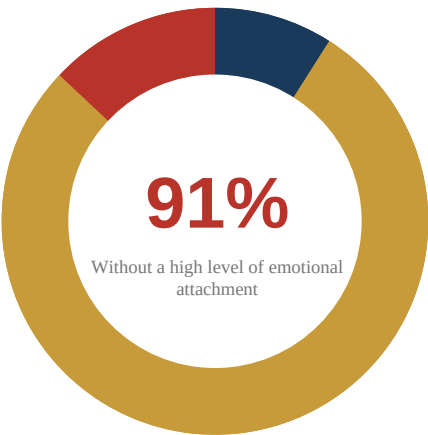
- What makes your business truly attractive from an applicant's perspective?

This is where the real work begins. The task is to create a workplace that convinces people and meets their needs, rather than merely paint a flattering picture.

Start with the areas you can influence directly, such as the work environment and company culture. Employees do not want to be forced into a rigid system. They expect an environment that takes their circumstances seriously, allows them to develop, and recognizes individual strengths. Recognizing and deliberately developing potential within your team improves both performance and commitment.

Gallup Engagement Index 2024

Employee engagement in Germany reaches an all-time low—and what it means for recruiting



€113–135 billion

Annual productivity losses due to disengagement (range: €113.1–134.7 billion in 2024)

2.9 days

Fewer days absent per year among highly engaged employees

21%

Have complete trust in their direct manager

- 9% Highly engaged—lowest level since 2001
- 78% Low engagement (“doing only what is required”)—a record high
- 13% Mentally checked out

What this means for recruiting: When you seek applicants, you compete in a market where part of the workforce at nearly every second competing company has mentally distanced itself from its employer. An authentic culture has become an economic factor: it reduces turnover and sick leave and creates the conditions for employees to recommend the business.

Source: Gallup Engagement Index Germany 2024, published March 2025; approximately 1,700 respondents surveyed in November and December 2024.

Benefits that make a real difference in everyday life are equally important. Additional benefits work only when employees find them tangibly relevant. Flexible arrangements for both working hours and work location are especially sought after. In many fields, working from home is already part of modern working life rather than a bonus. Meaningful health initiatives and professional development opportunities also matter. Employers seeking to reach younger audiences in particular should take sustainability and environmental awareness seriously. For many applicants, these are real tests of whether a company's actions are credible.

You can demonstrate these commitments through sincere corporate social responsibility efforts or specific sustainability measures. This means responsible business conduct on social and environmental issues, going beyond symbolic messages. Businesses that act honestly in these areas take responsibility while strengthening their appeal as employers. To attract more applications from qualified candidates, communicate these issues clearly and credibly. This is particularly effective when recruiting marketing and employer branding are carefully aligned. The next chapter addresses exactly that.

2.2 Measuring Employee Satisfaction

A realistic assessment of your current position as an employer requires an honest review. A systematically designed employee survey provides a reliable foundation. It gives you direct insight into how your workforce sees the business and enables you to base improvements on concrete feedback rather than assumptions.

An Employee Survey in Nine Steps

A proven process

PHASE 1: PREPARATION (1–3)

1 Define the objective 1

What do you want to learn? Leadership, workload, culture—each objective calls for different questions.

PHASE 2: IMPLEMENTATION (4–6)

2 Choose the format 2

Digital, paper, or a combination. Keep participation simple and anonymity credible.

PHASE 3: EVALUATION (7–9)

3 Develop the questions 3

Use a concise questionnaire, a five-point scale, and established models such as Q12 or DIQP.

4 Set the timeframe 4

Define a clear survey period, typically two to three weeks, so employees can plan to participate.

5 Consider outside support 5

For sensitive topics or small teams, an external provider strengthens neutrality.

6 Launch the survey 6

Explain why it matters. Managers should make clear that honest answers are welcome.

7 Analyze the responses 7

Anonymize the findings and summarize the key insights in a readable report.

8 Identify actions 8

Define specific improvements and prioritize them. Start where you can make the biggest difference, rather than trying everything at once.

9 Share the results 9

Communicate the main findings and next steps openly. Silence is the worst option.

The decisive point: A survey that leads to no action is worthless—and worse, it actively causes harm. Your message to applicants becomes credible only when you act on the findings internally.

Anonymous, Clear, and Transparent

Begin by deciding exactly what you want the survey to reveal. Then choose the most suitable format, whether an online survey, a paper questionnaire, or a personal interview. Participation should be straightforward for every employee. Questions must be easy to understand and quick to answer. The survey itself sends an important signal: employees' views matter, and you are deliberately involving them in the company's development.

Reliable results depend on the following, among other factors:

- **Anonymity:** Protect participants' identities so they can answer honestly.
- **Clarity:** Word every question clearly so it can be answered unambiguously.
- **Transparency:** Explain the objective, process, and intended use of the results openly.
- **Relevance:** Ask only about issues that genuinely matter to daily work and relationships within the business.
- **Representativeness:** Give every employee the opportunity to participate.

More reserved employees and those who want to raise sensitive issues particularly need this reassurance. Only then can they voice criticism without fearing negative consequences. Many businesses still underestimate the value of these surveys. They offer a real opportunity to give employees a voice and noticeably improve internal communication.

Being open about the survey's purpose is equally important. Employees should understand why you are conducting it, what will happen to the results, and how they will benefit.

Survey, Analyze, and Communicate Regularly

An anonymous satisfaction survey should be more than a one-time project. It delivers its full value when repeated at regular intervals. This lets you identify developments early, detect changes in morale, and act before dissatisfaction takes hold. Once team morale has seriously deteriorated, putting things right usually takes much more effort.

How you handle the findings is as important as the survey itself. Do not file away what employees have entrusted to you. Summarize the results anonymously and discuss them openly with the team. Ideally, present the findings together with initial ideas for solutions or clear next steps. This shows that the survey was more than a formality. Employees see that their feedback is taken seriously and that management is willing to make specific improvements.

A Possible Process for an Employee Survey

A clearly structured process helps employees accept the survey and ensures that it runs smoothly. One proven approach is as follows:

- Define the objective: Specify exactly what you want to learn, for example about leadership quality, workload, or company culture.
- Choose the right format: Decide whether the survey should be digital, on paper, or a combination of the two.
- Develop appropriate questions: Prepare a concise set of relevant questions and choose suitable response scales, such as a five-point scale from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”

- Set the survey period: Define a clear timeframe so employees can plan to participate and the survey retains their attention.
- Consider external support: Where useful, engage an outside provider to further safeguard neutrality and anonymity. External expertise can be especially helpful in designing questions and conducting the survey.
- Launch the employee survey: Introduce it to the company and clearly explain why participation matters.
- Analyze the results: Anonymize the responses and summarize the main findings in an easy-to-read report.
- Identify actions: Translate the findings into specific improvements and prioritize the next steps.
- Communicate the results: Tell employees openly what the main findings are and which actions will follow.

Bonus material: The accompanying link provides a professional employee survey template, including sample questionnaires in several languages, to support you in practice.

<https://www.diqp.eu/arbeitgebersiegel-top-arbeitgeber/muster-einer-mitarbeiterbefragung/>

2.4 Reviews on kununu and Glassdoor

kununu and Glassdoor are among the best-known employer review platforms. Current and former employees use them to share their experiences anonymously. Potential applicants often consult these sites early in their research. People trying to understand an employer look for insights that go beyond polished marketing messages.

These reviews can also be valuable to you as a business owner. They provide unfiltered feedback about everyday work—sometimes appreciative, sometimes critical. That is precisely their value. They often give a very clear picture of the actual mood within the company.

However, you should not accept every review as fact without examining it. Because users can generally publish content freely, the authenticity of individual statements cannot always be established with certainty. This makes a measured, factual response to what is written about your business all the more important.

Negative comments can, of course, deter applicants. Qualified candidates read carefully. Even so, ignoring or dismissing criticism would be a mistake. In a public environment where almost everything is reviewed, how you respond matters more than the mere existence of criticism. A professional response demonstrates composure. Positive feedback strengthens your image while also motivating your team and reinforcing prospective candidates' favorable impressions.

Your response is therefore as revealing as the review itself. There will always be criticism. What matters is whether you listen, respond thoughtfully, and show a willingness to talk. Factual, respectful replies demonstrate that you take feedback seriously and are willing to address problems.

You do not have to accept false factual claims or content that harms your business without recourse. Under certain conditions, employers can take legal action against posts on review platforms and demand their removal, particularly when authors remain anonymous and the business cannot verify the claimed employment relationship or the allegations.

Buying positive reviews from service providers is strongly discouraged. Encourage your own employees to write reviews. Their authentic voices give your presence the greatest credibility. As an employer, you can take various steps to encourage employees to share their experiences.

2.5 Your Appeal as an Employer

A company's appeal as an employer does not depend on a single factor. It emerges from the interaction of many elements that make the business attractive to current and prospective employees. These include the everyday work environment, specific working conditions, the company's public image, work-life balance, pay, and opportunities within the business.

Businesses seen as attractive employers benefit in several ways. Satisfied employees are usually more committed, more motivated in their daily work, and more likely to identify with the company over the long term. An employer's appeal is therefore a major factor in attracting qualified workers and reducing turnover, extending well beyond image.

Why Your Appeal as an Employer Matters So Much

When suitable skilled workers are scarce, this issue takes on substantial strategic importance. In many industries, committed, qualified employees determine quality, innovation, and competitiveness. Businesses that retain good employees operate more reliably, perform better, and are more successful over time.

The familiar term "war for talent" aptly describes the intensity of competition for suitable candidates. Digitalization is also increasing the technical demands of many occupations. Businesses need specialists who can keep pace with these changes or help shape them. To remain viable, employers must be able to attract such people. Globalization and demographic developments are likely to increase the pressure on the labor market rather than ease it.

For you as an employer, this means creating a compelling impression both inside and outside the company. Offering a good job is not enough. The company as a whole must be perceived in a way that makes qualified people actively choose to join it.

How the Labor Market Has Changed

The balance in the labor market has shifted fundamentally. In many fields, applicants now hold the stronger position. Employers face far greater pressure to explain what they offer, distinguish themselves, and present an appealing proposition. Attracting employees takes more than a job posting and an employment contract.

Businesses therefore need to develop their appeal deliberately. Employers that establish a credible position and create a workplace people genuinely find attractive have a much better chance of both attracting and retaining the right talent.

Researchers began studying employees' expectations systematically some time ago. They often distinguished between "hard" factors, such as pay and contract terms, and "soft" factors, such as workplace atmosphere, leadership, and appreciation. This distinction remains useful because it identifies the elements that make an employer attractive.

What Makes an Employer Attractive

One major factor is the quality of the workplace itself—not just the equipment and facilities, but the entire work environment. Flexible schedules play a large part. A pleasant atmosphere, supportive colleagues, and a working day shaped by more than pressure and routine are equally important. Many employees also place great value on balancing work and their personal lives. Job security is an important consideration for many target audiences as well.

Leadership also has a substantial effect. A manager's approach strongly influences how the employer is perceived. Managers are judged on results and on how they communicate, whether they provide direction, and whether they recognize performance. Employees want feedback, clarity, and respect. When these are missing, perceptions of the company almost always suffer.

The role itself also affects a job's appeal. People want more than tasks to complete. They seek meaningful, varied work that lets them make a real contribution. Many value autonomy, quick decisions, and structures based on trust rather than excessive control.

The company's image is another factor. It includes what the business stands for, its industry, perceptions of its products or services, and how credibly it lives up to its values. Sustainability, responsible conduct, and the handling of social issues are increasingly important. An accessible location and modern infrastructure also create a positive impression. All these softer factors strongly influence whether an employer is seen as appealing.

Some studies, by contrast, have assigned less weight to compensation and traditional advancement opportunities. The composition of the groups surveyed may help explain this. People with many years of work experience often assess certain factors differently from those starting their careers or younger skilled workers.

For experienced employees, pay increases, benefits, or internal promotions may sometimes be less decisive than they are for younger generations. Younger audiences often give substantially more weight to development opportunities, training, meaningful work, and environmental responsibility. This means there is no universal definition of an attractive employer. It always depends in part on whom you want to reach.

How to Increase Your Appeal as an Employer

A high-quality workplace and a positive atmosphere directly improve how your business is perceived. Flexible work schedules are now widely expected rather than treated as an extra advantage. A respectful, personable team atmosphere also contributes significantly to employees' sense of identification with the company.

A leadership style that provides direction and builds trust is equally important. Open communication is central. Employees want to understand what is happening in the business, where it is heading, and what decisions are being made. They also need managers who listen, take feedback seriously, and do not view criticism as an attack. Praise and recognition should be as natural as openness to new ideas and suggestions for improvement.

Trust is essential. Giving employees room to shape their work and showing confidence in their abilities strengthens motivation and personal responsibility. Constant oversight from above usually has the opposite effect. People are more engaged when their work is interesting, when they can influence outcomes, and when they see that their efforts make a difference.

Development opportunities also remain relevant, although their importance varies by audience. Anyone seeking professional or personal growth should find real opportunities. Training, advancement prospects, and the chance to move into other roles internally benefit both sides. Businesses secure the skills they need, while employees see that their development is supported.

Reaching out actively to your own workforce is especially effective. Regularly ask about satisfaction, expectations, and individual needs. Honest dialogue between managers and employees helps you identify problems and take action before commitment fades or good employees mentally check out.

Soft Factors and Economic Reality

Many studies clearly show that employers are seen as attractive particularly when the soft factors are strong. Work environment, leadership quality, the nature of the role, and company image have a substantial effect on how an employer is rated.

It would nevertheless be shortsighted to conclude that pay and development prospects are secondary. Economic conditions have changed. Rising living costs, inflation, and greater financial uncertainty are shifting many employees' priorities. A convincing overall offering must therefore build emotional attachment while providing financial security.

Recent collective bargaining agreements and strike action have also led to noticeable pay adjustments in many industries. These changes send a signal across the labor market. Public-sector positions in particular become more attractive as a result. Private-sector employers must therefore remain competitive on pay if they want to avoid falling behind.

High job security, long regarded as a particular advantage of public-sector employment, is now being complemented by more attractive pay in many areas. This adds to the competitive pressure on other employers.

A business that wants to remain an attractive employer over the long term should not rely on individual strengths alone. The overall picture matters. A culture of appreciation, market-rate pay, credible development prospects, and a compelling work environment need to fit together. Only then can the business appeal to both experienced professionals and new talent, across generations.

2.6 Employer Certifications and Awards

Employer distinctions, certifications, and awards are now available in large numbers. Managing directors, HR professionals, and employer branding teams can struggle to keep track of them. A clear-eyed assessment is essential: an award does not automatically provide a tangible benefit. Whether the investment pays off depends on your starting position, objectives, and target audience.

A good place to begin is with your current view of the market:

- How well known are you as an employer?
- What is your employer image?
- Do you have sufficient visibility and enough applications from qualified candidates?

Businesses that are already highly visible and have a strong, positive reputation often gain only limited benefit from another award. The situation is frequently different for SMEs. A business that is not widely known can gain credibility through a reputable certification or award. It can reassure potential applicants, provided it is relevant and used effectively in communication.

Four Categories of Employer Certifications and Awards

What to consider before signing up—not every award has equally strong evidence behind it

GOLD STANDARD Representative employee survey—gold standard The entire workforce is surveyed anonymously. The award reflects employees’ actual views and also serves as a diagnostic tool for HR. EVIDENCE ★★★★★
Self-assessment with or without verification The company supplies information that the awarding organization checks. Useful for establishing an initial position, but limited without an independent applicant perspective. EVIDENCE ★★★
Sample-based survey Only a small selection of employees is surveyed, providing little scientific reliability. Employees may question who was allowed to participate and why. EVIDENCE ★★
Study- or review-based award Based on external data such as anonymous online reviews. It is often unclear whether the reviews come from actual employees. This can look more like selling an award. EVIDENCE ★

Note on the EmpCo Directive, applicable from September 27, 2026: Sustainability labels without a transparent certification system will be prohibited. Whether employer certifications and awards are subject to the same strict requirements remains an open legal question. When selecting a provider today, choose a sound methodology: an anonymous survey of the entire workforce, independent third-party assessment, and transparent criteria.

An award should match the qualities you want to stand for as an employer. Choose it deliberately to reinforce what matters to your positioning.

Consider a practical example. Suppose your target audience analysis shows that family-friendly working conditions are especially important to potential applicants. First, assess honestly how family-friendly your business actually is:

- Where are you already doing well, and where are the gaps?

Certification makes sense only once this foundation is sound. Some specialized awards address precisely this need. They combine certification with a thorough analysis, often based on anonymous employee surveys and additional discussions with HR. You receive more than an award badge: you gain a clear view of what is already working well and where improvements are needed.

A positive assessment leads to the award, for example as a “Family-Friendly Employer.” Alongside the analysis of your employee survey, you usually receive communication materials: award badge graphics, acrylic display stands, certificates, and press support. These can help you make your strengths visible and use them deliberately in your employer communications.

Other awards, such as those recognizing overall HR excellence or the quality of apprenticeship training, follow the same principle. They generally begin with analysis, assessment, and identifying opportunities to improve. Certification is the result of a successful process. The main differences concern the focus: different awards emphasize different topics and therefore address different audiences.

For prospective apprentices, a similar survey and recognition as a “Top Ausbildungsbetrieb” [Top Apprenticeship Employer] may be appropriate.

The range of awards is broad. Some recognize the overall quality of HR practices, while others focus on particular aspects of an employer’s appeal. Established providers in German-speaking countries include:

- kununu Top Company: Based on reviews on the kununu platform, with no separate survey.
- DIQP (Deutsches Institut für Qualitätsstandards und -prüfung e.V.): Offers specialized awards such as “Top Arbeitgeber” [Top Employer], “Familienfreundlicher Arbeitgeber” [Family-Friendly Employer], and “Top Ausbildungsbetrieb” [Top Apprenticeship Employer]. For more information, visit <https://www.diqp.eu/>.

The right certification or award depends on your company’s size, industry, and target audience. For younger talent, a company’s readiness for the future and the values it stands for are increasingly important. A diversity award, for example, signals inclusion and equal opportunity—provided those values are actually practiced within the business.

Three Perspectives: Employers, Employees, and Applicants

An employer certification or award never affects just one group. It concerns three groups with different expectations: employers themselves, their employees, and the applicants they hope to attract. This was a central finding of my study of employer certifications and awards, in which I examined more than sixty schemes and conducted an experiment with 1,093 participants. Previous research had rarely considered these groups’ requirements separately, even though they differ substantially. Anyone selecting or using an employer award should understand all three perspectives.

The Employer's Perspective

Employers primarily expect a certification or award to deliver measurable recruiting benefits: more applications from qualified candidates, greater visibility in the labor market, and a tangible advantage over competitors. This expectation is especially important for SMEs that lack the brand recognition of large corporations. In my study, simply adding an employer award badge to a job posting increased the likelihood that a candidate would apply by approximately sixteen percentage points. Employers also gain considerable value from the employee survey analysis and the recommendations it supports. Certification therefore provides more than an external signal; it is also a diagnostic tool for HR.

The Employee's Perspective

Employees experience a certification or award differently from their employer. The logo matters less to them than the fact that they are being asked for their views at all. An anonymous, representative survey signals that employees' voices are taken seriously and their opinions carry weight. Employees want to help improve their workplace and contribute to the company's development. When findings are shared openly and visibly translated into changes, employees feel truly valued. This strengthens commitment and motivation. Conversely, an award that leads to no action disappoints: asking for feedback and then failing to act undermines trust.

The Applicant's Perspective

From the outside, applicants have limited ways to assess what a company is really like. They want an independent assessment of the employer and an honest look at daily working life. A reputable employer certification or award addresses this need. It reduces the information imbalance between the company and the applicant and provides a reliable signal of quality. However, applicants must be able to understand how the award was earned. A transparent results page showing the employee survey's main findings is therefore more effective than a logo alone. Open communication builds trust long before the first interview.

What Employer Certifications and Awards Are Based On

The market contains an overwhelming variety of employer certifications and awards, with widely differing methodologies. Examine these carefully to assess an award's credibility:

- **Self-assessment with verification:** Some awards rely primarily on information supplied by the company and subsequently checked by the awarding organization.
- **Representative employee survey:** This is considered the gold standard. Ideally, the entire workforce is surveyed anonymously, so the award reflects employees' actual views.
- **Selective surveys:** Some providers survey only a small selection of employees, substantially limiting the scientific value of the results. This approach should be avoided, as it can also raise serious questions among employees about who is allowed to participate, who is not, and why.
- **Study- and review-based awards:** Other awards rely on external data, such as anonymous online reviews or general market studies. These methods can look more like selling an award than conducting a serious scientific analysis. Awards based solely on online platforms are generally neither representative nor valid. This is understandable, since it is often entirely unclear whether reviews come from verified employees of the company. Employers often use these awards to avoid surveying their own workforce.

Choosing an Employer Certification or Award for Your Target Audience

An employer certification or award is a communication tool, not an end in itself. Its message must therefore match the expectations of the people you want to reach.

Before beginning certification, get to know your target audience. If your findings show that potential applicants place the greatest value on security and reliability, a general quality certification may be appropriate. If work-life balance matters most, choose an award that credibly demonstrates and reinforces that aspect.

Possible specializations: Providers offer awards tailored to particular themes. Common examples include:

- “Familienfreundlicher Arbeitgeber” [Family-Friendly Employer]: Focuses on balancing work and family life. Particularly effective for employers with a high proportion of female professionals or parents in their workforce, for whom flexibility is a major decision factor.
- “Top Arbeitgeber” [Top Employer]: A comprehensive award emphasizing overall employer appeal, company culture, and benefits. It signals attractiveness across a broad range of areas.
- “Top Ausbildungsbetrieb” [Top Apprenticeship Employer]: Assesses the quality of apprenticeship training and support for young talent. A suitable award when recruiting apprentices.

My Study of the Effectiveness of Employer Certifications and Awards

For my PhDr. thesis at DTI University, I conducted an empirical study of the effectiveness of employer certifications and awards. The results challenge the assumption that these awards are merely decorative. Instead, they show that a reputable award can serve as an independent signal of trustworthiness.

The study's main findings were:

- A signal of trustworthiness: From the outside, applicants have few ways to judge what working at a company actually feels like. An independent award based on a sound methodology indicates that the employer's claims about itself have been checked.
- More applicants: In the experiment, candidates were approximately 16 percentage points more likely to apply to a job posting displaying an award badge than to an otherwise identical posting without one.
- A quality filter: Highly qualified professionals who can choose their employer use awards as a filter. Assessed companies tend to be perceived as more professional and more appreciative of employees.
- An advantage for small businesses: For SMEs without the brand recognition of a DAX-listed corporation, an award can be a relatively quick way to establish credibility in the market.

Recognition as a top employer is an intermediate step rather than the finish line. The real value lies in what you learn from the survey. Employees' feedback shows where your company is already convincing and where it can improve. Use those insights to further increase satisfaction within your team.

High employee satisfaction has demonstrable benefits. It strengthens attachment to the company, reduces turnover, and increases motivation. To succeed as an employer today, you need to be visible, stand for clear values, and be willing to undergo independent assessment. This increases the likelihood that candidates will deliberately choose you in a competitive labor market, rather than merely notice you.

When building communication around an award, go beyond press relations. What matters is a coordinated presence across all relevant channels, including your website and social media. The message must be consistent everywhere. Plan that communication carefully and early.

A high-quality employer certification can help you present existing strengths credibly and professionally. When choosing a provider, consider the long-term effect on your employer brand as well as the immediate impact.

Checklist for Selecting Employer Certifications and Awards

The following checklist has proved useful in my research and consulting work. It helps you assess an award objectively before investing time, money, and reputation. The more points a provider can address convincingly, the stronger the basis for the award.

- **Methodology:** Does the award rely on an anonymous survey of the entire workforce, or are only selected voices included? A representative survey is the gold standard. Selective or voluntary surveys produce distorted results.
- **Transparent assessment criteria:** Are the criteria publicly available before you participate? Reputable providers disclose which topics are assessed and how each is weighted.
- **Fit with your industry and size:** Is the award suitable for a business of your size and in your industry? An award designed primarily for large corporations rarely fits a skilled trades business with twenty employees.
- **Useful insights:** Beyond the award itself, do you receive a substantive analysis with specific recommendations? A good survey also serves as an internal diagnostic tool. If you gain no actionable insights, that is a warning sign.

- **Cost structure:** Are costs clearly disclosed and reasonable in relation to the benefit? Be wary of providers that later require additional purchases for logos, press support, or “premium packages.”
- **Recognition among your target audience:** Do your ideal candidates know the award?
- **Validity and reassessment:** How long does the award remain valid, and under what conditions can it be renewed? Regular recertification, for example every one or two years, increases its value as evidence.
- **Usage rights:** May you use the award badge digitally and in print, such as on your website, in job postings, and in press releases? Restricted rights can significantly reduce the value of the investment.
- **A relevant focus:** Does the award’s focus—family friendliness, sustainability, or excellent apprenticeship training—match your company’s actual strengths? An award must reflect everyday reality or it will feel contrived.

Checking these points systematically before deciding helps you avoid costly mistakes and select an award that truly strengthens your employer brand, beyond simply putting a certificate on the wall.

Competition Law and Employer Certifications and Awards

Advertising publicly with an employer award brings you within the scope of German competition law. There is no separate law solely for employer awards. The central legal framework is the Unfair Competition Act (UWG). In principle, German law allows anyone to award a quality label or employer certification, provided no legal provisions are violated. Awarding the distinction itself is unrestricted. Legal requirements become relevant when it is used.

Case law establishes a clear standard: award criteria must be transparent and understandable. Clear information must explain how an award is earned, which criteria are assessed, how they are weighted, and what methodology supports the assessment. Failing to disclose this, or creating the impression of a “neutral and objective assessment” when no such assessment occurred, risks being considered misleading under Section 5 of the UWG. Courts have repeatedly found this wording misleading where advertising with an award created a false impression of independent assessment.

An illustrative example is the Saarbrücken Higher Regional Court’s judgment of January 28, 2015 (case no. 1 U 100/14). An advertising claim using a TÜV certification mark was found misleading under Section 5(1), sentence 2, no. 1 of the UWG because it led the average consumer to believe that TÜV had assessed the company’s services itself. In fact, the mark was based only on a subjective customer survey analyzed by TÜV. The same principle applies to employer awards: if an award is based on an employee survey, say so. Do not present it in a way that falsely suggests an independent third-party assessment of working conditions.

Practical Tips for Using Employer Awards in Compliance with the Law

Consulting experience and relevant case law provide several practical guidelines:

- Always link to a transparent results or award page. When using the award badge on your website or in a job posting, provide a direct link to the awarding body’s page showing the methodology, award criteria, and results. This removes the basis for potential allegations of misleading advertising.

- Clearly explain the basis for the award. If it is based on an employee survey, state that explicitly.
- Observe the assessment period and validity dates. Employer awards are usually granted for a limited period. Do not advertise an expired award. Regular recertification, for example through a new employee survey every one or two years, is methodologically sound and legally important.
- Use the award in the proper context. It applies only to the entity that received it. If only one location or subsidiary was certified, do not use the award for the entire corporate group.
- Examine self-awarded distinctions critically. If an award relies essentially on self-reported information, make that clear in your communications. Marketing a self-awarded distinction as “verified” or “certified” without substantive third-party assessment can expose you to a formal cease-and-desist demand.
- Keep all supporting records. Retain the award certificate, survey analysis, and assessment criteria. If you receive a formal cease-and-desist demand, these documents allow you to demonstrate that the award was properly obtained.
- Treat recertification as a requirement. Long-term use of an award requires continued compliance with the underlying standards. A one-time award does not justify indefinite advertising. Some reputable providers therefore require repeat assessments.

The EmpCo Directive: What Changes in September 2026

The European Union's EmpCo Directive—Directive (EU) 2024/825, “Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition”—deserves particular attention. It was adopted in March 2024 and implemented in Germany through the Third Act Amending the UWG, published in the Federal Law Gazette on February 19, 2026, and taking full effect on September 27, 2026.

The directive primarily targets greenwashing: misleading environmental and sustainability claims, and sustainability labels without a transparent certification system. The extent to which traditional employer awards and claims about an employer's appeal fall within its scope has not yet been conclusively resolved. In particular, discussion centers on “social washing”: advertising with unsupported or sweeping claims about fair working conditions, social responsibility, or a positive company culture. Employer awards and comparable quality labels may therefore also be assessed against the EmpCo Directive's requirements in the future.

From the current perspective, three points are especially relevant to employers:

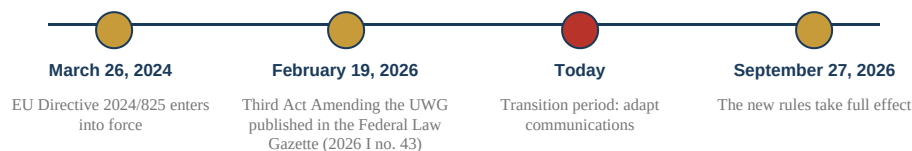
- A certification system as the standard. Sustainability labels will have to be based on a transparent certification system. Whether the same strict requirements will apply to employer awards remains an open legal question. Employers using an award should nevertheless ensure, and be able to demonstrate, that it rests on a documented methodology and an external assessment.
- Broad advertising claims become riskier. Unsupported descriptions such as “sustainable employer,” “socially responsible,” or “fair” could fall under the stricter rules on misleading advertising in Section 5 of the UWG. How broadly courts will interpret those rules remains to be seen. Employers should provide concrete evidence for their claims or use more restrained wording.

- Promises about the future need a plan. Claims such as “family-friendly by 2027” or “a diverse employer by 2030” require careful scrutiny and make sense only when backed by a specific, documented implementation plan.

For selecting an employer award, this means that businesses which have already chosen a scheme with a transparent methodology, independent third-party assessment, and clearly disclosed criteria are likely to be well positioned. Those relying on purely promotional awards should check by September 2026 whether their awards meet the foreseeable new requirements. Otherwise, they may face formal cease-and-desist demands, injunction claims, and fines.

The EmpCo Directive in 2026

What changes for sustainability claims from September 2026—and what this could mean for employer awards



What Could Become Particularly Relevant to Employer Awards

01

A certification system as the standard

Sustainability labels without a transparent certification system will be prohibited. Whether the same strict requirements apply to employer awards remains an open legal question. Businesses reconsidering their options today should choose a sound methodology.

02

Broad claims become riskier

Unsupported terms such as “sustainable employer,” “socially responsible,” or “fair” could fall under the stricter Section 5 of the UWG. Provide concrete evidence or use more restrained language.

03

Future promises need a plan

Claims such as “family-friendly by 2027” require careful scrutiny and make sense only when supported by a specific, documented implementation plan.

What to do now: Check the methodology behind existing employer awards: an anonymous survey, independent third-party assessment, and transparent criteria. Review careers pages, job postings, and social media profiles for broad claims. When uncertain, seek advice from a specialist in competition law. Violations can lead to formal cease-and-desist demands and fines.

Source: Directive (EU) 2024/825; Third Act Amending the UWG (Federal Law Gazette 2026 I no. 43, published February 19, 2026). Legal position as of May 2026.

3 Who Are Your Competitors?

It may initially surprise someone responsible for hiring, but the reality is clear: you have many competitors, all seeking the best talent. Knowing your market and your competitors is essential to making attractive offers.

Many business owners make the mistake of considering only direct competitors in their own industry. Recruiting works differently. If you are hiring an office professional, you compete not only with other skilled trades businesses but also with local tax advisory firms, insurance agencies, and online retailers. Your recruiting competitors are defined by the people you want to hire, rather than by your industry.

Start with a simple exercise: for every open role, list three to five realistic alternatives a candidate in your region could choose. Those are your actual competitors in the labor market. Then the real research begins.

3.1 What Positions Are Your Competitors Advertising?

Review competitors' job postings regularly. Look beyond job titles and pay attention to the details: How do they address potential applicants? Which qualifications are required, and what development opportunities do they promise? These comparisons help you write more precise postings of your own, with a clear, distinctive proposition that stands out.

Which tools can you use for systematic research? The following sequence has proved effective:

- Indeed searches within a postal code radius. Enter the job title and filter for a radius of 25 or 50 kilometers. You can immediately see which employers in your region are advertising similar roles and how many positions are open. This gives you a realistic picture of the level of competition.

- StepStone and kununu. Both platforms allow searches by industry and region. kununu also shows competitors' reviews, providing a second source of insight.
- Google Jobs. A Google search for "Bürofachkraft Köln" ("office professional Cologne") prominently displays open positions. Look at which employers appear consistently.
- Your direct competitors' careers pages. Bookmark five to ten competitors and visit their careers pages every two months. You will see when they recruit, how their presentation changes, and which new benefits they add.

Record your findings in a simple table: competitor in column 1, open role in column 2, salary if disclosed in column 3, benefits in column 4, and distinctive features of the messaging in column 5. After three months, you will have a reliable picture of your market.

3.2 What Salaries Do Your Competitors Offer?

Money remains a central factor when people choose a new job. It is therefore essential to monitor competitors' market-rate salaries. Industry reports and feedback from interviews can help you gain an advantage. You do not necessarily need to outbid every offer. The aim is a fair, market-competitive package that shows you value employees' contributions and understand prevailing pay levels.

Reliable sources for researching salaries in Germany include:

- Gehalt.de. A free search by job title and region, showing the median and the upper and lower quartiles. The figures rely on employees' self-reported data: imperfect, but useful as a benchmark.

- StepStone Gehaltsplaner. Similar to Gehalt.de, often with slightly more conservative figures.
- kununu Gehaltscheck. Requires you to enter salary information yourself, but provides very current data.
- Glassdoor. An international provider with less extensive coverage in Germany, but often useful for IT roles and larger midsize businesses.
- Lohnspiegel.de. Provided by the Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut (WSI) of the Hans-Böckler-Stiftung. Methodologically sound and representative.
- Collective bargaining agreements for your industry. Even if your company is not bound by an agreement, collectively agreed pay provides a firm floor for your negotiations.

A practical tip: Also review job postings on the Federal Employment Agency's website. More postings there now include salary information, and many businesses use its free posting service. This provides an additional view of the lower end of the market.

How you use these data is critical to your success. Three tips:

- Look at the upper quartile as well as the median. Small businesses paying barely above the median rarely win the competition for talent. Those paying in the upper quartile have a clear advantage.
- Account for regional differences. Salaries in Munich, Cologne, Halle, and rural Brandenburg can differ by as much as 30%. Search specifically for your region.
- Consider the whole package. If you cannot offer a higher salary, your benefits, working hours, or variety of responsibilities must make up the difference.

3.3 What Benefits Do Your Competitors Offer?

Small extras often make the final difference. Look at the benefits competitors routinely offer. Do they advertise flexible schedules, commuting allowances, or modern preventive health programs? Knowing what others offer helps you develop benefits that make a real difference. You can create value that goes beyond looking good on paper and makes you distinctive to both applicants and your existing team.

A systematic benefits analysis has four steps:

- List competitors' ten most common benefits. Review five to ten current job postings from your region for each competitor.
- Mark the benefits you already provide but may not actively promote. Many small businesses have attractive working conditions; what they lack is visibility for those conditions.
- Identify one or two additional benefits you could offer with little effort. They need not be expensive packages: a gas voucher, an extra hour off on an employee's birthday, or a coffee subscription for the team. Small gestures can have a big effect.
- Identify a clear point of difference. What does your business offer that no other employer in the region provides? It might be a flexible schedule, a distinctive way of sharing in the company's success, or one free professional development course each year.

3.4 Competitor Analysis Using kununu

Systematically analyzing competitors' kununu profiles is an often underestimated opportunity. The reviews provide current and former employees' unfiltered perspectives rather than advertising messages. That makes kununu particularly valuable for competitor analysis.

Specifically, examine:

- The overall rating and number of reviews. A company with 4.2 stars and 200 reviews provides a different level of evidence from one with 4.8 stars and only 5 reviews.
- Ratings across individual categories. If a competitor scores much lower for “management behavior” than for “working conditions,” that offers useful insight for your own messaging.
- Criticism in negative reviews. These reveal competitors’ weaknesses. If they are frequently criticized for irregular hours or a lack of appreciation, you can highlight your own strengths in those areas in job communications.
- The company’s responses to reviews. Does management reply objectively and professionally, or not at all? This also reveals something about its communication culture.

Follow these steps consistently for three months and you will have a clear picture of your market. You will know your actual competitors, what they offer, where their weaknesses lie, and how you can stand out. That is the foundation of a successful recruiting strategy.

Competitors’ Communications

What exactly do your competitors communicate? What do their careers pages look like, and what ideas could you adopt, improve, or refine? Take inspiration without copying. An approach that works for a 200-person company can feel artificial and excessive in a business with 15 employees. Look for elements that suit your size and culture.

4 How Do You Want to Be Perceived as an Employer?

Many chapters in this book address the same central question:

- How can you become a better employer?

The focus is always your appeal to current and future employees. Stay realistic, however. No business can implement every measure immediately, and not every approach suits every company equally well. Find a path that fits your resources, company culture, and target audience's expectations.

The best starting point is an honest employee survey. It identifies the areas most in need of action and the issues that actually matter to your workforce. You can prioritize effectively only when you understand what is on employees' minds. Many choices depend on individual circumstances, but some improvements work in almost any business.

4.1 Increasing Your Appeal as an Employer

For many businesses, greater flexibility has become one of the foundations of an attractive workplace. Flexible hours and, where the role permits, location-independent work are especially relevant. Expectations in this area will continue to rise. Good solutions improve your position in the competition for skilled workers and often increase satisfaction within your existing team.

Training and development opportunities are equally important. People looking for meaning and a future in their work pay close attention to whether an employer helps them grow or leaves them standing still. Add fair pay and useful benefits such as an occupational pension plan or employee discounts, and you have a solid foundation for a strong position as an employer.

Work-life balance also carries more weight than it did a few years ago. Many employees are no longer willing to put work ahead of everything else. This does not mean they lack commitment. On the contrary, people who feel supported by their employer are often more motivated and dependable. Sabbaticals, more generous vacation policies, and health programs can make a substantial difference. They improve well-being and can reduce absences and help sustain performance. Social or environmental engagement may also give applicants another reason to take a closer look at a company.

Many employers put themselves under unnecessary pressure here, believing they must change everything in very little time. That rarely makes sense. Addressing the most important issues thoroughly and consistently is much more effective than introducing halfhearted offerings in many areas. Aim for gradual improvements suited to your industry, size, and actual resources.

The four-day workweek is a good example. Experts debate it intensely, yet many practical experiences are positive. Greater satisfaction, less stress, and better work-life balance are frequently reported. Reducing excessive workloads can help lower the risk of burnout. Individual pilot projects also show that productivity need not decline and may even rise in certain circumstances. For many candidates, this arrangement still represents a real advantage. It may, however, become much more widespread in some industries in the coming years.

4.2 Employer Brand and Employer Image

Employer brand and employer image are often treated as interchangeable in everyday discussion. Effective employer branding requires a distinction between them.

Your employer brand is the image you deliberately set out to build. It concerns how your target audience perceives you as an employer. You define what the business stands for, the values it communicates, its working culture, and the advantages it offers employees. These include development opportunities, benefits, and your approach to leadership. The employer brand is the strategically designed part of your positioning.

Your employer image, by contrast, is the perception that already exists in the minds of employees, the public, and applicants. What matters is how people actually experience the company day to day, rather than what you would like to say about it. Improving this image requires a willingness to look closely.

Regular anonymous employee surveys are particularly valuable. They reveal blind spots and identify weaknesses employees may have felt for some time without discussing them openly. Collecting feedback is only part of the task; how you respond matters just as much. Discussing findings openly and responding in a way employees can understand actively involves your team in change. It strengthens trust and credibility. External sources such as kununu, Glassdoor, and social media also offer important clues to how the company is perceived beyond its own walls.

The employer brand represents your strategic ambition; the employer image reflects the actual response to it. Successful employer branding brings the two as close together as possible. The smaller the gap between your intended impression and people's actual perception, the more convincing you become as an employer.

Other definitions support this perspective. All refer to a company's identity as an employer: the combined picture of values, culture, experiences, and promises that differentiates you from other employers and makes you relevant to applicants and employees.

4.3 Employer Branding

The labor market is changing rapidly, bringing concepts such as employer branding increasingly into focus. The aim is to present the business as an attractive, trustworthy employer. The resulting employer brand gives the company a clear identity and makes it readily recognizable.

Internal and external communication are essential. A simple job posting is no longer enough to find qualified employees, so employer branding helps you actively shape a positive image and present yourself as an appealing place to work. To build a sound foundation, ask:

- What sets us apart?
- How do people in the labor market currently see us?

Consider your specific target audience. Through which channels do they find you, and what exactly do they expect from their future employer?

Professional literature offers many definitions of employer branding. They share the same goal: positioning a company as an employer so that it appeals to suitable candidates. Textbooks and professional publications describe it in the following ways, among others:

- A process in which a company develops a distinctive employer brand that reflects its identity and values and has an effect both internally and externally.
- A company's strategic approach to attracting skilled workers, building their commitment, and retaining them over the long term.
- The full set of measures intended to strengthen an employer brand and increase its appeal to potential applicants.
- A strategic process in which a company defines and communicates its identity as an employer to create a positive perception among current and prospective employees.

The Deutsche Employer Branding Akademie (DEBA) provides a detailed definition. It understands employer branding as developing, implementing, and measuring an employer brand strategy intended to produce lasting improvements in recruiting, employee retention, willingness to perform, company culture, and company image, while indirectly influencing business results and brand value.

The employer brand represents your strategic ambition; the employer image reflects the actual response to it. Successful employer branding brings the two as close together as possible. The smaller the gap between your intended impression and people's actual perception, the more convincing you become as an employer.

Making Implementation Successful

Effective employer branding begins with a clear message. It must fit your target audience and be easy to understand. This improves the quality of incoming applications and saves time and money by reaching people who are truly suited to your business.

Credibility is essential. The promises you make publicly must be evident in daily working life. Values, mission statements, and claims about culture need to do more than sound appealing. They must appear in daily interactions, management behavior, and actual working conditions. Every business has strengths and weaknesses. Building deliberately on what already works is generally more promising than trying to reinvent everything at once.

SMEs and Large Corporations

Small and medium-sized businesses often look closely to large corporations for inspiration. That is understandable: many large organizations set professional standards in employer branding. Simply copying them rarely makes sense, however. What works for a corporation does not automatically suit an SME. The more important question is what makes your own business distinctive. SMEs often have strengths that large organizations cannot offer in the same way, including local connections, faster decisions, close working relationships, and greater flexibility in daily operations.

Regardless of business size, communication remains central. Employer branding depends on dialogue, internally and externally. That includes responding openly and constructively to criticism. Social media now plays a major role in shaping public perceptions. We will explore this in more detail later. For now, it is clear that younger audiences in particular use these channels to research, observe companies, exchange experiences, and form opinions. Understanding and making deliberate use of these digital interactions can make your employer branding much more effective.

- What steps and activities does employer branding involve?

Several basic stages help you define your employer brand clearly and use it deliberately to retain existing employees and attract new talent. Alongside strategy, it is important to choose actions that suit both your business and your target audience.

Defining Your Employer Value Proposition

Begin by asking what your business actually stands for as an employer. At the heart of your employer brand is the employer value proposition, or EVP: the core promise you make to people interested in your company.

Employees invest time, knowledge, experience, and commitment in your business.

- What do they receive in return that is not available everywhere in the same form?
- Which values define your business?
- What outlook underpins your leadership, culture, and collaboration?
- Do you have a long-term vision that provides direction and appeals to ambitious people?
- To sharpen your identity, it can also help to ask the reverse question: What do you explicitly not want your business to stand for?

This distinction often makes clear what truly differentiates you from other employers.

Planning Your Communication Channels

Developing a strong EVP is only the first part of the task. Many businesses invest considerable energy at this stage, then lose momentum when it comes to communication. Yet communication determines whether the message reaches anyone.

Ask specifically whom you want to reach and where your target audience comes into contact with your business. The right channels vary considerably with the talent you seek. They might include a compelling careers page, a company blog, a newsletter, a focused social media presence, or participation in career fairs. Fit matters more than the number of channels. Your audience must actually use the platforms, and your approach must reflect your EVP.

Defining Your Content Strategy

Once you have selected the right channels, use them purposefully. The next step is to create content that brings your employer brand to life.

A good blog post, for example, can show how your company works, the values that shape it, and what applicants can expect. Such content helps people find their bearings and is convincing when it offers insight rather than merely repeating claims. Featuring satisfied employees makes your communication particularly credible. They are often the strongest ambassadors for your employer brand.

Interviews with team members can give outsiders a realistic impression of everyday work. On social media, short, direct formats often work especially well, such as behind-the-scenes glimpses or brief videos featuring the team. Consistency matters. Sporadic posting leaves you indistinguishable from others. Regular, relevant content builds reach, trust, and, over time, a dependable pool of potential applicants. The same principles apply to offline formats, including your presence at company recruiting fairs and the materials you use there.

4.4 Summary

The points above form the foundation for all further recruiting activities.

- What is the current situation in your business?
- How is morale within the team?

Traditional internal employee satisfaction surveys are a proven way to answer these questions. They reveal the state of the working atmosphere and identify specific areas for improvement.

The essential point is that feedback must be more than a formality. What matters is how you use the information and act on the insights you gather. Thoroughly analyzing feedback and suggestions can deliver measurable long-term benefits.

External review platforms such as kununu and Glassdoor are popular with employers and employees alike. Remember that you are expected to respond to feedback, whether praise or criticism. Social media is often overlooked in this context, yet valuable comments can appear there and offer important insights. We will explore the many possibilities of social media in more detail later.

5 Defining Your Target Audiences

Three generations in particular share today's workplace: Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z. Each brings its own views on work, leadership, and career development. To understand what today's skilled workers expect, it is worth looking more closely at how these generations differ and what they have in common.

The underlying pattern is familiar. Older employees gradually leave the labor market, and younger people take their place. The same was true in previous decades. What is new, however, is the scale of the shift in attitudes toward work. Generations Y and Z, in particular, bring different priorities, expectations, and views of their own role into the workplace.

A Profound Shift in Values

Younger generations differ markedly from their predecessors in many respects. There are understandable reasons for this: they grew up in different social, economic, and technological circumstances. Their upbringing, global crises, digitalization, social media, and changing approaches to life have strongly shaped their attitudes toward work.

As baby boomers and Generation X give way to millennials and Generation Z, both the makeup of the workforce and the values within companies are changing. Many ways of working and employment conditions that earlier generations took for granted—and that worked well for many years—now meet resistance much sooner or are becoming noticeably less important. Expectations of employers have shifted fundamentally. As a business owner, you need to understand what younger skilled workers actually expect today and what conditions they consider essential when deciding to join a company and stay.

5.1 Generation X

Generation X includes people born between 1965 and 1980. Their views on work and society developed during a period of major upheaval. The oil crisis, the Cold War, and technological change all influenced this generation. In the workplace, they therefore often act as a bridge between different approaches. They not only experienced the transition from traditional, analog structures to the digital workplace but also actively helped bring it about in many companies.

Expectations and Values

For many members of Generation X, a healthy work-life balance is a priority. They value working conditions that allow them to reconcile family, personal interests, and their careers. Having their performance noticed and recognized matters just as much. They also want to develop their expertise and keep progressing professionally. When working with others, they generally prefer clear, direct communication. They appreciate structure, provided it does not unnecessarily limit their ability to work independently.

What They Look for in an Employer

To appeal specifically to this generation, offer reliability above all. Fair pay, dependable employment conditions, and a stable work environment are especially important. Flexible arrangements, such as working from home or part-time schedules, also matter where the role allows them. Many people in this age group expect their experience to be taken seriously. Employers who visibly value their expertise and offer concrete opportunities for further development address a key concern.

Generations X, Y, and Z Compared

Expectations, values, and effective recruiting approaches at a glance

X

Generation X

1965–1980

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

The oil crisis, the Cold War, and the transition from an analog to a digital workplace.

EXPECTATIONS

Work-life balance; recognition of performance; professional development; clear communication; autonomy at work.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD OFFER

Fair pay and stability; work-from-home and part-time options; visible appreciation of experience; clear development opportunities.

Y

Millennials

1980s–Early 2000s

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

The rise of the internet, mobile technology, and social media.

EXPECTATIONS

Meaningful work; work-life balance; development opportunities; flat hierarchies; regular feedback.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD OFFER

An open, transparent culture; the ability to work from different locations; a modern work environment; sincere recognition.

Z

Generation Z

Late 1990s–Early 2010s

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

Smartphones, social media, and constant digital connectivity as a normal part of life.

EXPECTATIONS

Diversity and inclusion; sustainability; meaningful tasks; flexible work arrangements; a digital work environment.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD OFFER

Credible values in practice; an inclusive culture; social responsibility; mentoring and development support; modern digital tools.

5.3 Generation Y

Generation Y, usually called millennials, broadly includes people born between the 1980s and the early 2000s. They grew up with the rise of the internet, digitalization, and an increasingly connected world. Many experienced and helped shape the early development of social media, mobile technology, and digital communication.

Expectations and Values

For Generation Y, work is rarely just a source of income. Many millennials want their work to have meaning and align with their personal beliefs. A healthy work-life balance is also important to them, along with clear development opportunities, interesting assignments, and a work environment built around collaboration rather than rigid hierarchies.

What They Look for in an Employer

To attract Generation Y, make an open, transparent company culture part of everyday working life. For many, flexible hours and the ability to work from different locations have long been key factors in choosing an employer. Companies also appeal to this generation when they offer a modern environment that encourages creativity, initiative, and personal growth. Communication is particularly important. Regular feedback, sincere recognition, and leadership whose decisions they can understand matter far more to this generation than they typically did in earlier workplaces.

5.4 Generation Z

Generation Z generally includes people born between the late 1990s and the early 2010s. They grew up with smartphones, social media, and constant digital connectivity. For them, digital communication is an ordinary part of daily life.

Expectations and Values

This generation places great value on diversity, inclusion, and sustainability. Many young skilled workers expect flexibility and a workplace that visibly shares their values. They want their professional and personal lives to fit together in a meaningful way. Many also seek work they find purposeful and that ideally makes a positive contribution.

What They Look for in an Employer

Companies seeking to appeal to Generation Z must show credibly what they stand for. An inclusive culture, a visible sense of social responsibility, and a sincere commitment to environmental and long-term issues all play a major role. Flexible work arrangements, modern digital tools, and real opportunities to develop—through mentoring or targeted support, for example—are equally relevant. This generation also expects the technology that supports collaboration to work smoothly. Employers who use digital tools confidently and professionally have a clear advantage.

5.5 Employee Benefits

In a competitive labor market, a handful of standard benefits is often no longer enough to stand out from other employers. The competition extends well beyond large corporations. Smaller businesses also need to consider which additional benefits truly matter to their target audience. Benefits should serve more than prospective applicants: they are just as important for retaining current employees over the long term.

A detailed overview of the most important benefits, including the tax rules applicable in 2026, appears in Resource 7. It covers benefits in kind, mobility, health, family support, retirement benefits, professional development, and employee discounts, along with the relevant limits and legal provisions.

Assess carefully which offerings prospective employees actually find attractive. Even more important, however, is delivering those benefits consistently. Well-written careers content achieves little if the reality later disappoints. Trust is fragile in this context. Raising expectations and then failing to meet them can damage your credibility far faster than you can repair it.

The following are currently among the most sought-after additional benefits in small and medium-sized businesses:

- Flexible working hours: Flextime and self-managed working hours.
- Location flexibility: Remote work and work-from-home options.
- Retirement benefits: Occupational pension plans.
- Health: Workplace health management and specific health and wellness programs.
- Development: A wide range of professional development opportunities, training, coaching, and mentoring.
- Family and personal support: Family-friendly arrangements, such as childcare and support during parental leave, as well as help with caring for relatives.
- Time off and rest: Additional vacation days and flexible vacation policies.

- Team building: Shared events and activities that strengthen a sense of belonging.
- Financial extras: Employee discounts on the company's products or services, free meals, or meal vouchers.
- Work arrangements: Part-time and job-sharing options.
- Fitness: Sports activities and subsidized fitness memberships.

Which benefits particularly appeal to which groups? Many benefits can be attractive to employees in general. Flexible hours, for example, almost always have appeal. Young skilled workers, however, now expect considerably more than a few standard offerings. Parents, too, pay close attention to whether an employer understands their circumstances and provides enough flexibility to balance family and work. The same applies to work-from-home and remote work options, particularly in marketing, IT, and other knowledge-based roles.

Occupational pension plans and well-organized workplace health programs are especially valued in demanding occupations. They also matter to people who plan for the long term and want security. Those starting their careers or seeking specific development opportunities, by contrast, are often more interested in training, skills development, and other forms of professional support. Some benefits are almost self-explanatory. Family-friendly arrangements are a clear example: for employees who have children or want them, these arrangements provide real relief and often play a decisive role in choosing an employer.

5.6 Summary

There is little point in ignoring changes in the labor market or continuing to use outdated methods to appeal to new target audiences. Three issues are especially important to the generations discussed here: work-life balance, flexibility, and purpose. Generations Y and Z, in particular, expect their employer to provide both an income and an environment that supports their personal development.

Earlier generations were often more influenced by the belief that life should fit around work. Today, many people approach their lives differently. Companies should respond by developing their working environments accordingly. This includes flexible arrangements, modern ways of collaborating, and—where possible—work-from-home or remote work options. Flexible hours and project-based structures are also becoming more important, as is the confident use of digital technology. To attract and retain young talent, offer an environment that makes use of their skills and meets their expectations of a modern workplace.

What Studies Say About Employee Benefits

Infographic — Three recent studies show where benefits make a difference and where companies are missing opportunities

Over the past few years, benefits have gone from an exception to a standard offering. At the same time, several major studies show that many companies are unaware of the tax options available and often do not know what their employees really want. Three recent studies provide a useful overview.

6.6

Average number of benefits per company (Roland Berger 2024/25).

86%

Employees who receive benefits; only 48% use them regularly (Circula 2023/24).

82%

HR managers who find the benefits market difficult to navigate (Roland Berger 2024/25).

Roland Berger: “Strategies for HR Leaders and Benefit Providers — Market Trends 2025”

1,700 HR managers in Germany, Q4 2024—the most extensive market analysis of employee benefits to date

Companies pursue clear strategic goals through benefits: greater employee retention and satisfaction (89%), better work-life balance (79%), and improved well-being (77%). Yet tax advantages are frequently overlooked: 27% are unaware of the tax-free allowances for health promotion, and 15% do not know about salary conversion options. Today, 90% of companies favor tailored offerings over a blanket approach.

Circula Benefits Report, in Partnership With YouGov

1,000 employees without management responsibilities and 251 HR and finance decision-makers; representative by company size and region

Employees’ wish lists are led by mobility subsidies (40%), flexible work arrangements (36%), and retirement benefits (33%). The study’s central message is that companies underestimate the importance of communication and easy access. Offering benefits without explaining them means missing out on their potential impact.

WTW Global Benefits Attitudes Survey 2024

Approximately 2,000 employees in Germany, as part of an international survey of 45,000 respondents in 30 countries

Pay and job security remain key factors in attracting and retaining employees, while flexible work arrangements and well-being continue to gain importance. In Germany, 25% of employees are actively looking for another job, and a further 12% are open to offers. This 12% is particularly relevant to employers: these employees are often motivated, qualified, and receptive to the next step in their careers.

All three studies point to the same conclusion: benefits work because they fit the target audience, are easy to access, and are actively communicated—not simply because they exist. For SMEs, this means favoring a few benefits that suit the company and its workforce over a broad selection that goes unused in everyday life.

Sources: Roland Berger (ed.), “Strategies for HR leaders and benefit providers: Market trends 2025,” February 2025; Circula GmbH / YouGov, “Benefits-Report 2023/24”; Willis Towers Watson, “Global Benefits Attitudes Survey 2024.” See the original studies for methodological notes and detailed figures. As of May 2026.

6 Offline Recruiting

6.1 Traditional Ways to Recruit Employees

Although digital recruiting plays a central role today, traditional methods are far from obsolete. Offline recruiting is more than a holdover from the past. In many cases, it offers a more direct, personal way to reach people where they live, work, and explore their options. Traditional channels continue to show their strengths, especially in local recruiting and among groups who do not spend much time on digital job platforms.

6.2 Print Advertising

Job postings in newspapers and trade magazines remain part of many companies' recruiting toolkit. Although much of recruiting now takes place online, print can still be useful, especially in local markets or when reaching very specific audiences. Printed advertisements often convey a sense of reliability and credibility that people do not always perceive in the same way online.

To stand out among the many messages competing for attention, a print ad needs a clear design and precise wording. Space is limited and often expensive, making it all the more important to convey your company's main advantages and the role's essential requirements concisely. Linking print to digital channels—for example, with a QR code—is a practical approach. This takes interested readers directly from the ad to your careers page and makes the next step much easier.

6.3 The Federal Employment Agency

The Federal Employment Agency is another traditional channel. The process is familiar: employers register open positions, and the system suggests suitable candidates. Its main advantage is access to people who are already actively looking for work. Initial screening is also often provided, which can reduce your internal workload.

Keep your expectations realistic, however. Its reach is generally strongly regional, and the process can take longer than other channels. It can nevertheless work well for locally based companies or positions that do not need to be filled urgently.

6.4 Headhunters

Working with a recruiting agency or headhunter can be useful if you want to broaden your search in a targeted way. A major advantage is that you can reach candidates who are not actively looking but would be open to a suitable opportunity. This extends your search well beyond traditional job postings.

A good headhunter provides more than contacts. They can support the entire selection process, from initial outreach and interviews through contract negotiations, substantially easing the burden on your company. This approach also costs more than many other methods. Finding the right person can often take longer, too.

6.5 Career Fairs

Career fairs let companies present themselves in person and speak directly with prospective applicants. Whether regional or industry-specific, they create a setting in which both sides can quickly get a sense of whether the role, company, and individual are a good fit. In addition to supporting recruiting, these appearances also strengthen the company's employer image.

Meeting face-to-face makes it easier for interested people to approach you. Questions can be answered readily, and both sides gain an immediate first impression. Participating in a career fair does require careful planning, however. Booth fees, materials, and staff time should not be underestimated. Your reach is also limited to people who actually attend.

Nevertheless, a carefully chosen fair can be well worth the investment if you make professional use of it. As with every traditional recruiting channel, there is no single best solution. What matters is the fit with your company, target audience, and budget. Combining established offline methods with digital tools is often particularly effective.

6.6 Employee Referrals

Recruiting has changed considerably in recent years. Demographic shifts, technological developments, new social patterns, and changing expectations across generations mean that traditional methods alone are often no longer enough. They now need to be combined thoughtfully with modern approaches. This does not mean that traditional channels have generally lost their relevance.

Employee referral programs draw on your existing team's networks. Employees suggest suitable people they know and actively support recruiting. This approach is attractive financially and often highly effective. People referred by an employee usually already have some idea of the company and team culture. As a result, there is often a stronger foundation of trust from the outset.

7 Online Recruiting

A large share of recruiting now takes place online. Technological change has greatly increased the importance of digital channels, making them central to many companies' recruiting strategies. Employers looking for staff today can hardly avoid digital recruiting, especially if they want to reach younger audiences.

We have already looked at what different generations expect from employers. As the number of people in employment declines and strong candidates have more options, companies face growing pressure to make themselves visible and attractive. To be relevant to young talent, you need a presence where they seek information and interact with others. In many cases, that means social media.

Digital communication is therefore an integral part of successful recruiting. Many members of Generations Y and Z examine potential employers closely before applying. A convincing online presence can make a significant difference. Digital recruiting also comes with its own demands, which employers need to understand and manage professionally.

Before we go further, a brief overview is useful. Social media revolves around networks, direct interaction, and the public sharing of impressions and opinions. Social media marketing has therefore long been an established part of modern communication. Platforms such as LinkedIn, XING, and Facebook are established channels for visibility, interaction, and employer communications. Each has different user groups and its own conventions. Understanding how these channels work and how to use them effectively gives you a strong foundation for successful recruiting.

7.1 The Careers Section of Your Website

The careers section of your website often determines whether initial interest turns into an application. Candidates want to understand early on how a company works, what its culture is like, and whether its values match their own. This makes an authentic presentation of your company culture especially important.

Alongside general information, communicate your vision and mission clearly and understandably. An open, welcoming presence makes people more likely to see you as an attractive employer. The aim is to make your strengths visible in ways that matter to your particular audience. A good careers page improves the recruiting process and strengthens your company's overall public presence.

Two factors are especially important: ease of use and the impression your brand creates. Good usability helps visitors find what they need quickly. Confusing navigation or hard-to-find information causes many prospective applicants to leave early. Consistent branding matters just as much. A recognizable identity, visual clarity, and an emotional connection all help applicants feel that your company speaks to them.

In a digital working world, companies need a strong online presence. Your careers section plays a key role. It is worth building it to appeal to applicants and ensure that search engines and services such as Google for Jobs can readily identify its content.

Above all, open positions must be immediately visible. No one wants to spend time clicking through a website just to find out whether any jobs are available. Applying must be quick and very easy.

Seven Success Factors for Your Careers Page

The digital storefront for your recruiting

1

1 — 7.1.1 Visibility: Search Engine Optimization

Relevant keywords, descriptive URLs, and schema markup for Google for Jobs. A clear job title.

2

2 — 7.1.2 Ease of Finding Jobs: Clear Navigation

Open positions immediately visible. Careers section prominently placed in the main navigation.

3

3 — 7.1.3 Ease of Getting Started: A Simple Application Process

Mobile-friendly, without unnecessary required fields. A name, phone number, and resume are often enough. Every click has a cost.

4

4 — 7.1.4 Credibility: An Authentic Presentation

Real insights instead of generic stock photos. Show your history, values, and awards.

5

5 — 7.1.5 First Impressions: A Professional Presentation

Clear structure, complete content, and honest language. Be specific and approachable.

6

6 — 7.1.6 Reliability: A Named Contact

A specific person with a name, photo, and contact information. Makes it easier to get in touch and the company more approachable.

7

7 — 7.1.7 Accessibility: Mobile First

Smartphone optimization is essential. Responsive design, fast loading, and ease of use.

★

Measuring Success: What to Track

Careers section views; form abandonment rate; conversion rate; application sources.

★

Tool Tip: WordPress With a Job Plugin

Simplifies management, filtering, and schema markup. JobPosting schema helps Google.

Rule of thumb: Your careers section determines whether initial interest becomes an application. Neglecting it wastes the effort you put into job postings and social media campaigns. It is worth building this section with even greater care than the rest of your website.

7.1.1 Search Engine Optimization

Search engine optimization helps make your website—and your careers page—visible in search engines. This is especially relevant to job postings. The goal is to draw as many suitable applicants as possible to your vacancies and keep the path to applying as short as possible. Google for Jobs plays an important role here. It highlights job opportunities directly in search results and can substantially increase reach and visibility.

The Basics: Keywords and Job Titles

For people to find your job postings, the basics need to be right. Relevant search terms are essential. Use the terms job seekers actually search for, incorporating them naturally into headings, descriptions, and page content. Moderation matters: repeating keywords excessively does more harm than good. Thorough keyword research, supported by tools or expert advice, is therefore often a useful first step.

The job title matters at least as much. It should state clearly and unambiguously what the position involves. Ideally, it will identify the role or specialization you are seeking. Vague or artificially inflated titles tend to confuse people and make jobs harder to find.

Behind the Scenes: URLs and Metadata

Technical details also affect visibility. A clear, descriptive URL looks more professional and helps search engines understand the page. Web addresses that include the job title and follow a clear structure are far more useful than unreadable strings of characters.

Metadata, such as the title tag and meta description, also matters. These texts often appear directly in search results, making them a person's first encounter with your job posting. They should be informative, precise, and appealing. Good metadata improves click-through rates and often overall visibility as well.

Mobile Optimization and Technical Support

Because many people look for jobs on their smartphones, a mobile-friendly website is essential. If your site does not work smoothly on mobile devices, you will quickly lose prospective applicants. Mobile usability also matters to search engines.

If your website runs on WordPress, for example, specialized job plugins can simplify many tasks. They help you display, manage, and organize job postings. Schema markup can also be particularly useful. This is structured data behind the website that gives search engines additional information, such as the location, employer, or salary. It increases the chances of your posting appearing prominently in enhanced search results.

The Job Posting: Content and the Application Process

Your job postings also need compelling content: a clear description of the work, understandable requirements, and a clear explanation of your benefits. Filters, categories, and a well-organized layout help applicants find suitable opportunities quickly.

Be specific about benefits. A list alone is less persuasive than a clear explanation of what employees actually gain. Whether you offer work-from-home options, professional development, or health programs, people need to understand the value and find the offering credible.

The application process itself is especially important. The simpler and easier it is to use, the more likely you are to receive applications. A clearly organized online form with few obstacles should now be standard. Consider whether traditional requirements, such as a detailed cover letter, are really necessary. Accessible alternatives, including brief profiles and simplified applications, lower the barrier to getting started and make that first step easier, especially for highly sought-after talent.

7.1.2 Making Jobs Easy to Find

Interested people must be able to find your job opportunities directly. In a labor market where strong candidates are highly sought after, the ease of the search often determines whether someone considers your company or moves on immediately.

Your careers section is therefore much more than a page listing vacancies. It is the digital storefront for your recruiting. A thoughtful structure and search-friendly design increase visibility and help you reach people whose skills and values fit your company more precisely. This lays the foundation for strengthening your team with the right employees over the long term.

7.1.3 A Simple Application Process

Make it as easy as possible to begin an application. Many candidates now search on their phones, between other activities, with little patience for unnecessary obstacles. The simpler the process, the more likely they are to submit an application.

Every additional click, unnecessary required field, and confusing form increases the risk of people dropping out. A streamlined application process demonstrates from the first contact that your company works in a modern way and respects applicants' time.

7.1.4 An Authentic Presentation

When presenting your company as an employer, go beyond job descriptions. Share your history, your industry, and the influences that have shaped the business. This builds a connection, allowing prospective applicants to identify with your company instead of simply taking in factual information.

Do not hesitate to showcase your successes. If your company has awards, certifications, or notable achievements, make them visible on your website. This evidence strengthens your image and, above all, your credibility. Seeing what you have achieved helps people trust you sooner. That trust is often what prompts them to apply.

7.1.5 A Professional Presentation

A professional careers page requires much more than an appealing design. Applicants often draw conclusions about how your company works from the structure, clarity, and completeness of its content. A clear, well-organized page immediately suggests that your company works methodically and takes applications seriously.

Credibility is especially important. Whenever possible, avoid generic stock photos with no connection to your company. Show real glimpses of working life instead. Photos of your team, actual workstations, or the workshop, office, warehouse, or production area make the company tangible and help people feel connected.

Being professional does not mean being distant or artificial. Write clearly, specifically, and directly. Explain what the role involves, what you expect, and what applicants can actually expect when they join you. An honest, accessible presentation is more likely to attract people who fit your company, rather than people simply looking for any job.

7.1.6 A Named Contact

Many applicants appreciate finding a specific contact person on the website. Provide clear contact details. A dedicated person who answers questions and, when needed, guides applicants through the process builds trust and makes it easier to reach out. This gives the company a more approachable, dependable presence.

Honest insights into daily work, through photos or short videos, are equally helpful. They give prospective applicants a realistic picture of the environment, team, and company dynamics. The impression is even more convincing when employees share their own experiences or present current projects. This is exactly what many candidates most want to know: What will day-to-day work there actually be like? Few things answer that question as convincingly as a firsthand glimpse.

7.1.7 Optimizing for Mobile Devices

Mobile use is still often underestimated. Many people reach for their phones much more frequently than their laptops. Your website therefore needs to work smoothly on mobile devices. Its layout should automatically adapt to different screen sizes—this is what responsive design means. Neglecting this area risks frustrating users and reducing your visibility in search engines.

WordPress is an established option for building such websites. Many web designers use it because it is flexible, user-friendly, and easy to maintain without extensive technical work. Its wide range of extensions is a major advantage. Specialized job plugins let you manage and filter job postings and link them to suitable application forms.

Technical markup behind the website also plays an important role. Structured data and schema markup help search engines classify content correctly. The appropriate JobPosting schema can clearly identify information such as job title, work location, and salary. This helps Google recognize a job posting more quickly and display it more effectively. Modern tools make this possible without extensive programming knowledge.

For all the available technology, one principle remains: the applicant's perspective comes first. Consistently organize your entire online presence around applicants' needs. Your application process can then become what it should be: fast, understandable, and a positive first experience with your company.

7.2 Social Media Platforms

7.2.1 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is one of the most important platforms for social media recruiting. For many companies, it has become a central channel for reaching skilled workers and attracting new employees. It often allows them to do so relatively efficiently because many users approach the platform with a clear professional focus.

It is worth taking a closer look at what makes LinkedIn relevant, where its opportunities lie, and what limitations you should understand. As with any channel, success depends on how purposefully and professionally you use the platform, as well as the platform itself.

LinkedIn's substantial growth as a professional network is clear. Compared with traditional networking, it offers much faster and often more efficient access to contacts worldwide. It makes it easy to showcase and build on expertise, career experience, industry contributions, and professional networks. This is precisely what makes LinkedIn attractive to companies and talent alike.

Social Media Platforms for Recruiting

Nine platforms compared: audiences, strengths, and suitability for recruiting

Platform	Who Uses It?	Strengths	Limitations	Suitability
LinkedIn — professional network	Skilled professionals and managers; especially strong among ages 35–49; international	Proactive candidate sourcing, broad reach, professional exchange	Intense competition for talent; profile maintenance requires time	★★★★★
XING — DACH network	Ages 25–45, from students to managers; focused on Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (DACH)	Strong regional fit; straightforward interface	No international reach; premium access often expensive	★★★★☆
kununu — employer reviews	Applicants, current employees, and former employees in the DACH region	Builds trust; relevant early in decision-making; market monitoring	Negative voices carry more weight; anonymity; legal complexity	★★★★☆
Facebook — social network	Broad demographic; stronger among older audiences than younger ones	Local groups; targeted advertising	Younger users moving elsewhere; substantial community management workload	★★★★☆
YouTube — video platform	Younger millennials and Generation Z; broad audience	Second-largest search engine; storytelling; lasting visibility	More demanding production; long-term strategy required	★★★★☆
Instagram — images and short videos	Younger audiences, Generations Y and Z; visually oriented	Employer branding; glimpses of daily work; reach through Reels	Highly visual; limited impact without consistency	★★★★☆
TikTok — short videos	Generation Z and younger millennials; local reach possible	High organic reach; authenticity matters more than production polish	Distinctive platform conventions; difficult without young talent on the team	★★★★☆
Pinterest — visual inspiration	Predominantly women; strong representation of creative professions	Steady reach; well suited to visual and creative industries	Little direct dialogue; difficult to build relationships	★★★☆☆
X — formerly Twitter	Older audience than TikTok or Instagram; urban; politics and business	Speed; public debate; industry networking	Short-form content; pressure to respond; risk of misunderstanding	★★★☆☆

Rule of thumb: The suitability stars are a reading aid, not a quantitative measurement. What matters is where your specific audience is actually active and whether you can consistently produce appropriate content for that platform.

In a working world that is increasingly international, fast-moving, and connected, LinkedIn has become a central resource for many companies seeking qualified people. Detailed profiles, targeted search filters, groups, and industry-specific content make it easier to identify and approach suitable contacts. The platform brings professionally compatible people together, often more directly and quickly than traditional methods.

What Is LinkedIn?

To use LinkedIn effectively, first understand what defines the platform. It goes far beyond a social network for careers and job changes. At its core are professional networking, knowledge sharing, and visible expertise.

Personal presentation plays a major role. Users showcase their experience, skills, interests, and career goals. For applicants, this creates an opportunity to become visible to relevant employers. For companies, it substantially shortens the route to suitable talent.

LinkedIn stands out from many other platforms through its clear focus on professional exchange. Posts, articles, and comments encourage discussion of industry issues, developments, and perspectives. This creates an active environment for sharing knowledge, expressing views, and making connections. LinkedIn serves as a job board, professional network, industry publication, and communication platform.

Who Uses LinkedIn?

LinkedIn is primarily used by people who want to establish their professional identity, build connections, find a job, or recruit skilled workers. A large share of users are actively developing their careers. The 35–49 age group is particularly well represented, although the age range is much wider. Younger people starting their careers, experienced specialists, and managers also use the platform.

This mix is precisely what makes LinkedIn interesting to companies. Whether you need early-career talent, experienced specialists, or candidates for leadership roles, it gives you access to a wide variety of audiences.

The range of professional fields is broad, too. LinkedIn extends well beyond IT and conventional office work. Finance, healthcare, marketing, manufacturing, and the skilled trades are also represented. Qualifications range from apprenticeships to advanced expertise. This makes LinkedIn a versatile environment for targeted recruiting.

How Far Does LinkedIn Reach?

If you are wondering whether LinkedIn is relevant to your business in German-speaking markets, consider its reach. It is now firmly established in the DACH region and has reached a scale that makes it a significant recruiting channel. Its importance continues to grow as social media takes on a larger role in recruiting overall.

For companies, the main implication is that an active presence can substantially increase visibility. LinkedIn gives small and medium-sized businesses, in particular, the chance to attract attention beyond their local area. It can put you in touch with prospective applicants you might never reach through traditional channels. This makes it an important tool for raising awareness of your employer brand beyond your region.

How Can You Recruit New Employees Through LinkedIn?

LinkedIn recruiting is particularly effective when you use its features deliberately. This means having HR staff or company leaders actively search, review profiles, and approach relevant people directly. Traditional resumes remain valuable, but LinkedIn allows a much faster, more dynamic process.

Three areas matter most: job postings, networking, and your company profile.

The Jobs Feature

LinkedIn lets you publish open positions, target them to particular audiences, and filter them by relevant criteria. A precise, appealing job description is essential. The clearer the requirements, the easier it is to identify suitable candidates.

Networking and Proactive Outreach

LinkedIn depends on direct contact. Industry-specific groups, discussions, and professional posts are especially valuable. People who participate, comment, or contribute their own ideas are more likely to be noticed. This often attracts attention before a candidate has even seen a specific job posting.

Your Profile as a Digital Business Card

Your company page is only part of the picture. The personal profiles of the people doing the recruiting matter, too. Your company profile should immediately show what the business stands for, what its culture is like, and what applicants can expect. A neglected profile can quickly feel like an abandoned space. Regular updates strengthen your employer brand and make people more likely to view you as an attractive employer.

Bringing these three areas together—building a compelling profile, publishing relevant content, and actively engaging with others—can significantly improve your recruiting through LinkedIn.

What Are LinkedIn's Advantages and Disadvantages?

Like any recruiting tool, LinkedIn has strengths and limitations. Consider both realistically.

One potential drawback often comes from the audience rather than the platform. Other networks may be more established in particular regions or industries. If your target audience prefers those platforms, even an excellent LinkedIn profile will have limited value. Always start by finding out where the people you want to reach spend their time.

The advantages are substantial, however. LinkedIn offers enormous reach, direct access to relevant skilled workers, and many ways to develop professional relationships systematically. Active users can often identify candidates faster than through traditional channels. There is also an impact on your image: a visible, professionally maintained LinkedIn presence makes a much stronger impression than a neglected profile or complete absence from professional networks.

For many modern recruiting strategies, LinkedIn is therefore an integral part of the approach. Relying exclusively on offline methods means giving up a substantial share of your potential reach.

How Can You Expand Your Reach on LinkedIn?

Simply having a presence on LinkedIn is not enough. To reach skilled workers, you need to build visibility actively and purposefully. Only then does a profile become a useful destination for prospective applicants.

Your Profile as a Digital Showcase

Online first impressions often form within seconds. Your profile should therefore be complete, professional, and clearly positioned. Start with a good profile photo, an informative header, and a clear description of your role or company. If visitors cannot immediately understand what you stand for, you will quickly lose their attention.

Use the header and About section for more than formal details. Explain what defines you as an employer, the values your company holds, and why people should take an interest in you.

Publish Relevant Content Consistently

LinkedIn reach depends primarily on a steady flow of relevant content. Regular posts keep your company profile visible. Their value matters more than their volume. Content should be useful, interesting, or thought-provoking for your audience. Superficial messages rarely make a lasting impression.

7.2.2 XING

What Is XING?

When LinkedIn comes up, XING is usually mentioned as well. The two platforms have much in common. Many companies therefore use both, while others deliberately choose one to suit their recruiting goals. XING is also a professional network, although its practical emphasis differs.

On XING, users can create conventional professional profiles, maintain contacts, and search for new career opportunities. Professional exchange, career planning, and networking are central, alongside visibility to potential employers. For companies, the platform provides a useful foundation for strengthening an employer brand and expanding business contacts. Professional groups, industry events, and discussion forums provide additional opportunities for focused exchanges.

One advantage of XING is its clear, streamlined interface. It is easy to navigate and has a deliberately businesslike, professional feel. This makes it easier to get started, particularly for companies with limited digital recruiting experience or a preference for straightforward tools. With a well-executed approach, good results can often be achieved with manageable effort.

Who Uses XING?

XING focuses on German-speaking markets rather than an international audience, which may work to your advantage. If you are primarily seeking skilled workers in Germany, Austria, or Switzerland, it is a natural choice. Not every position requires an international search. A regional or language fit is often much more important.

Most users are between 25 and 45, so you mainly reach people in an active phase of career development. Qualifications also vary widely: students, people entering the workforce, experienced skilled workers, managers, and highly specialized professionals all use the platform. Overall, XING attracts a particularly large number of users with solid to advanced educational qualifications.

The gender distribution is relatively balanced, though differences remain across industries. XING is also used for much more than job searching. Increasing numbers of companies use it deliberately to develop their employer brand and increase market visibility. It therefore continues to provide a stable foundation for recruiting and employer branding in the DACH region.

How Far Does XING Reach?

With a large German-speaking user base, XING remains one of the DACH region's most relevant professional networks. It is well established among both skilled workers and companies. In Germany, especially, it continues to play an important role in professional networking and conventional job searches.

Local groups and topic-specific pages are particularly useful for employers. They allow highly targeted outreach, sometimes down to individual cities or metropolitan areas. This makes it easier to be visible where prospective employees actually live and work.

XING is especially relevant when your focus is firmly on German-speaking markets. If you want a targeted regional or national search and do not need international reach, the platform's focus can be a considerable advantage.

How Does Recruiting Through XING Work?

Like LinkedIn, XING offers a range of features to support recruiting systematically. Companies can publish job postings, search for suitable profiles, and increase visibility through professional groups and topic-specific areas. The ability to analyze postings and understand their performance is also useful: it shows what is working and where improvements would help.

XING also has an events feature that can be used strategically. Companies can organize professional events, networking sessions, recruiting events, or information evenings and approach prospective candidates directly. These formats are especially useful when you want to introduce your company as an employer and create opportunities for personal contact.

Using these options purposefully can gradually increase your company's visibility. This strengthens your presence on the platform and can encourage more prospective applicants to learn about your business and make initial contact.

What Are XING's Advantages and Disadvantages?

A common criticism is its limited geographic focus on German-speaking markets. Whether that is a disadvantage depends heavily on your audience and the position you need to fill. Many companies find this focus helpful. Some find the pricing model less convincing. Premium features may be useful, but they do not pay off for every company. Smaller businesses, in particular, should assess whether the additional value justifies the expense. XING can nevertheless be used effectively without extensive paid extras.

Its strengths include easy networking with skilled professionals and managers, along with a clear regional fit. For many DACH businesses, this is a real advantage. Purposeful use of the available features can make XING an efficient part of your recruiting strategy.

The essentials are a well-maintained company page, appealing job postings, and active participation on the platform. Consistent use can build visibility and help you reach relevant talent.

7.2.3 kununu

kununu has established itself as the leading employer review platform in German-speaking markets. It is an important source for skilled workers seeking a realistic picture of a company. Reviews, salary information, and insights into application processes provide a much more transparent basis for assessment than many company websites alone.

The principle is simple: current and former employees, applicants, and apprentices can share their experiences publicly. This range of voices is what makes the platform so relevant. It gives prospective applicants a nuanced picture of how people experience a company in daily life.

Companies should see kununu as a strategically important channel, rather than simply a risk. A well-maintained profile with credible information can make a significant contribution to a visible, clearly understood employer brand.

What Is kununu?

kununu is an employer review platform. Applicants, current employees, and former employees can share their experiences with companies. Reviews use a star system, among other methods, supplemented by comments and assessments in various categories.

The reviews go beyond an overall impression. Categories include company culture, pay, career opportunities, and the application process. kununu provides a picture of sentiment that many users believe is closer to reality than traditional employer communications.

For people looking at a company from the outside, this offers valuable insight. They can quickly see how an employer is perceived, where its strengths lie, and which areas attract repeated criticism.

Who Uses kununu?

kununu's users are diverse. Reviews come from current and former employees, apprentices, and applicants. Applicants in particular often provide valuable insight into the application process and the company's first impression.

This variety creates a broad picture of the different stages of contact with an employer. The age distribution is also relatively balanced. Younger generations often use online review platforms as a matter of course, but interest in employer transparency now extends well beyond any one age group.

How Far Does kununu Reach?

kununu has substantial reach in German-speaking markets and should not be underestimated. Many applicants now research prospective employers thoroughly before applying. Review platforms often appear early in that research. People searching for a company therefore frequently find its kununu profile as well.

Its strong presence in the DACH region makes kununu relevant to many employment decisions. Profiles become especially important when applicants begin seriously considering a company. For employers, this is a valuable opportunity to make a positive impression through an active, credible presence.

How Can You Use kununu for Recruiting?

Only responding when negative reviews appear is not a useful approach to kununu. A proactive approach is much more effective. Start with a well-maintained employer profile featuring a current logo, accurate contact details, and information that gives a clear picture of your company.

Because kununu depends on real experiences, it helps when current employees also share theirs. Authentic reviews increase credibility and help present a more balanced picture. Employers who communicate transparently strengthen their position in the competition for talent.

How you handle feedback matters especially. Respond to praise as well as criticism. Factual, respectful replies show that you take feedback seriously and address it openly. Prospective applicants often see this as a strong indication of how communication and culture actually work within the company.

What Are kununu's Advantages and Disadvantages?

Like any review platform, kununu brings opportunities and risks. A frequent concern is that negative voices are louder and more visible than satisfied ones. The resulting picture can sometimes be unbalanced. Anonymous reviews can also be difficult to interpret or verify.

There can be legal challenges, too. Not every review can be clearly substantiated, and complaints do not always prompt an immediate response from the platform. Legal remedies are available, however, when content is demonstrably false, defamatory, or unverifiable.

This makes thoughtful use of the platform all the more important. Reply respectfully, examine criticism objectively, and consider whether comments point to real weaknesses. You can also encourage current employees to submit reviews, provided the internal atmosphere supports this. That helps create a more nuanced picture.

Despite these risks, kununu offers significant advantages. It creates transparency, gives prospective applicants real insight, and provides employers with valuable feedback on strengths and weaknesses. Good reviews can substantially strengthen your employer branding and increase your appeal in the labor market.

kununu is now often a regular part of candidates' employer research. Applicants learn about the role and almost always investigate the company behind it. That is why you should not neglect your profile. Even a free account can be effective if it is maintained and actively used.

Timing matters. If there are significant internal tensions, address them before actively asking employees for reviews. The broader point is that kununu exists whether or not you choose to use it. Paying attention, responding, and acting strategically allows you to influence how others see you instead of leaving that impression to chance.

7.2.4 Facebook

Facebook's many communication options have made it one of the defining platforms of the digital age. It has long been used for more than personal interaction. Companies, organizations, and brands also use it to connect with their audiences and share content widely.

Despite many changes, Facebook remains one of social media's highest-reach platforms. For businesses, an active presence means access to a channel capable of reaching a very large number of people.

What Is Facebook?

Facebook began in 2004 as a network for college students and became a global social media platform within a few years. The ease of sharing photos, messages, comments, and group content quickly made it part of many people's daily online lives.

Today, Facebook serves a much broader audience than it did at the outset. It reaches people across many age groups. The spread of smartphones has also greatly changed how people use it. Because it is always available on mobile devices, Facebook accompanies many users throughout the day.

This combination of reach, relevance to daily life, and constant availability matters to companies. It makes Facebook a channel they can use strategically for communication and visibility.

Who Uses Facebook?

In Germany, Facebook use is now concentrated largely among Generation X and many millennials. For many people in these groups, it was one of their first major social networks and remains an established part of their online lives. The platform reaches approximately 30 million monthly active users in Germany.

For years, however, some younger audiences have been leaving the platform or spending more time on other channels. Younger users increasingly gravitate toward platforms built around short videos, quick entertainment, and trends. Facebook nevertheless remains relevant because of its broad reach and established usage habits.

Its users are highly diverse, spanning age groups, educational paths, and professional backgrounds. Facebook therefore represents a broad cross-section of society and, depending on your audience, can be a useful part of your recruiting and brand communications. Thoughtful employer communications can still reach a large number of prospective candidates there.

The Age Profile of Facebook Users in Germany

For small business owners in Germany, national figures matter more than global ones. Facebook currently reaches around 30 million monthly active users in Germany. Their age distribution is quite different from what many people expect:

- Generation X, born 1965–1980: By far the most active user group. Around 55% use Facebook regularly. For many, it was their first social network and remains one of the most important.
- Millennials, born 1981–1996: Usage remains very high, at around 65%. This group uses Facebook for personal interaction and increasingly for professional contacts and groups.
- Generation Z, born 1997–2010: Only around 25% still use Facebook regularly. Younger audiences gravitate more toward Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Snapchat.
- Ages 55 and older: A growing group uses Facebook for news, local groups, and personal interaction. The platform is less relevant to active job searches among this group.

This is a key insight for employers. If you need apprentices or very young talent, Facebook is not the first channel to choose. If you want to reach experienced skilled workers and managers between 35 and 55—a key audience for many small businesses—Facebook is a highly relevant recruiting channel with substantial local reach.

How Far Does Facebook Reach?

Think back to Facebook's origins as a network for college students. People used it to talk after class, discuss coursework, and share personal matters with fellow students.

Since then, both the platform and its reach across society have changed fundamentally. Facebook has become mainstream. Usage remains substantial in German-speaking markets. In Germany, around 30 million people actively use it each month. It also retains a strong presence in Austria and Switzerland despite competition from Instagram and TikTok.

This reach is especially useful for jobs with a local recruiting focus. Many positions are aimed at candidates in the DACH region rather than a worldwide audience. Facebook provides a solid basis for reaching these groups specifically. The key is to use it strategically and consistently, rather than occasionally. Only then does it become an effective recruiting channel.

How Can You Use Facebook for Recruiting?

Your recruiting efforts should be as dynamic as the platform itself. Social media changes constantly. This can seem daunting, but it also helps explain why it stays relevant. Successful Facebook recruiting requires you to follow developments and adapt your presence accordingly.

Start with a professional company page that is clear, well maintained, and welcoming. Your logo, imagery, and wording should present a consistent company identity. Since Facebook and Instagram both belong to Meta, connect the channels. This also reaches audiences who spend more time on Instagram and significantly increases your visibility.

Treat Facebook as more than a place to publish job postings. It is particularly well suited to bringing company culture to life. Show how your business works, what it stands for, and what makes it an attractive place to join. Information alone is not enough. Your content must generate interest and give a credible impression.

Authenticity is more persuasive than staging. Posts should show your company realistically. Recruiting is about reaching the right people, not maximizing reach at any cost. Visibility has value when it reaches suitable candidates.

Interaction is another key factor. Comments, shares, likes, and private messages are reactions, but they also send signals to the platform. The more genuine interaction your content generates, the more likely it is to be shown to additional users. Although Facebook's algorithm differs from those on other platforms, the principle remains: engagement creates relevance.

What Are Facebook's Advantages and Disadvantages?

Do not expect Facebook recruiting to succeed without effort. It can be a powerful tool, but it needs sustained attention. Without good content, regular maintenance, and active communication, its impact is usually limited.

Generic posts and occasional activity are insufficient. Effective Facebook recruiting requires substantive content, a clearly recognizable company culture, and a willingness to respond to people. That takes time, staff capacity, and content resources. Facebook usually works best as part of a broader social media strategy.

One of its strengths is fast, direct communication. Initial contact on Facebook is often more informal than on traditional business networks. This makes approaching you easier and encourages straightforward interaction. Companies with experience in digital recruiting can usually apply that knowledge effectively on Facebook. The platform also makes it possible to spot trends early and respond flexibly.

Facebook's future is often debated critically, with frequent predictions of declining relevance. It is indeed losing appeal among very young audiences. It nevertheless remains relevant to many other age groups and continues to be useful in employer branding. One point is clear: without an active, committed communication strategy, lasting impact on Facebook is difficult to achieve.

7.2.5 YouTube

YouTube plays a particularly important role for younger audiences. It has fundamentally changed how videos are produced, distributed, and watched. This has made it one of the most important digital channels.

People watch video content more intensively than ever. The term “YouTube generation” exists for good reason. It primarily describes the overlap between younger millennials and older members of Generation Z: people who grew up with this way of consuming media. They are now entering the labor market in greater numbers and increasingly taking on more demanding positions.

As the world’s second-largest search engine, YouTube is highly relevant to a modern digital recruiting strategy. Employers focused on visibility and communication should take it seriously.

What Is YouTube?

YouTube is much more than a video library. It is a social network, search engine, and media channel. Users can upload, comment on, share, subscribe to, and organize content in their own playlists. This combination of simplicity and versatility is a major reason for its continued success.

For companies and creators, YouTube also provides well-organized channel management and various ways to present content professionally. Regular publishing can build a community and lasting visibility. The platform is more than a storage space for videos: it is a place to attract attention, interact with people, and establish your identity.

Who Uses YouTube?

YouTube's core audience consists of young adults between 18 and about 34. Generations Y and Z are especially well represented. For many, YouTube is an ordinary part of daily online life.

The platform is also widely used beyond younger audiences. Older groups regularly watch content there. "YouTube generation" nevertheless remains an apt term for the young adults who grew up with it and use it as a matter of course.

The gender distribution is relatively balanced overall, with differences across subject areas. Of particular interest to recruiters is the broad range of educational backgrounds. YouTube reaches almost every group, from school and college students to college graduates, skilled workers, and managers. This diversity makes it relevant to a wide range of recruiting goals.

How Far Does YouTube Reach?

YouTube is one of the world's largest digital platforms and is exceptionally popular in Germany. Its enormous reach continues to grow despite competition from other video formats. A constant flow of new content keeps the platform active and evolving.

Crucially, people use YouTube as a search engine as well as a video platform. They actively look for information, brands, companies, and accounts of other people's experiences. Someone interested in your company may well search for its name there. Even conventional Google searches frequently lead directly to relevant videos.

Usage is also intensive. Many users regularly spend a substantial share of their online time on YouTube. Smartphones amplify this effect by making videos available at any time, on the move or during a short break. This matters to employers because video content is often particularly memorable. Delivering a message visually and emotionally increases the chance that people will remember you over time.

Everything suggests that video will continue to grow in importance for recruiting. YouTube offers a powerful platform for it, reaching different age groups and allowing well-made content to have a lasting impact.

How Can You Use YouTube for Recruiting?

As on other platforms, begin with a professionally built channel. Design, structure, and regular maintenance form the foundation. Keep expectations realistic: good content is not automatically discovered. Competition is substantial, so allocate time and resources carefully.

Your company becomes relevant on YouTube when its content offers clear value. Videos need substance, visual appeal, and language that resonates with your audience. They also need to be easy to find. Search engine optimization matters as much on YouTube as on your website. Relevant keywords in titles, descriptions, and the way content is organized help improve visibility. Avoid exaggerated wording and text artificially overloaded with keywords.

Consistency matters equally. One video a month will rarely be enough to remain relevant over time. Your channel should also offer more than a collection of job postings. Videos should help applicants understand who you are as an employer, how the business works, and what daily life there feels like.

This is YouTube's real strength: video communicates work culture and the working environment much more directly than static text or advertisements. That foundation can then support targeted campaigns and connections with other platforms.

Working with influencers or content creators can also be worthwhile in some cases. Approach this professionally and realistically. Creators run businesses and expect appropriate payment for their work. If you want professional results, budget accordingly. For smaller companies, working with micro-influencers can make sense when their audience, style, and reach are a good fit.

One useful option is an authentic, firsthand look at the workplace, with a creator documenting a day or a short internship at your company. Credibility is always essential. Artificial staging can quickly look unconvincing, especially on video. YouTube is also well suited to promoting events, workshops, and glimpses of everyday work, creating early points of contact with prospective applicants.

The technical work of creating advertisements is now relatively straightforward. Content can be prepared using tools such as Canva or produced professionally. Make sure the design, music, typography, and imagery fit your brand identity. Licensed stock video can supplement content when you lack your own footage. Because many people watch without sound, captions should be standard.

Follow a clear sequence. First, define your audience and the campaign's specific objective. Then produce the content. Next, set up the video campaign in your advertising account, establish the budget and duration, and select appropriate audience targeting, such as age, gender, interests, or relevant search terms. Launch the campaign only after these steps are complete.

What Are YouTube's Advantages and Disadvantages?

YouTube offers substantial opportunities for employer branding, but it requires patience and a consistent strategy. It is better suited to long-term brand building than quick, isolated successes.

One major challenge is the high standard of quality. Competition is intense, and users are accustomed to professional content. To gain visibility, you need to invest in content, presentation, and consistency. Legal requirements also matter, particularly copyright for music and images. Failing to handle these properly can quickly become expensive.

The advantages are considerable. YouTube gives you access to an enormous user base. Above all, it lets you show company culture and daily work in ways that conventional job postings rarely can. Good videos engage emotions, create a sense of connection, and often remain visible for a long time. Once well positioned, they can generate reach for years and continue strengthening your employer brand.

The Audience: Who Uses YouTube?

Its user base is well suited to modern recruiting:

- **Emerging talent**—Generation Z and millennials: For people ages 16–35, YouTube is the primary medium for exploring careers. They look for real insights and people or experiences they can relate to.
- **Skilled workers**: Specialists use the platform for technical learning and how-to content. Demonstrating your expertise can position you as an attractive employer.
- **Passive candidates**: The algorithm also shows your content to people who are interested in your industry but are not actively looking for work. This can encourage talent who ignore traditional job boards to consider a move.

- Conclusion: YouTube is an extremely valuable way to reach people where they choose to spend their time. It is an ideal tool for building an emotional connection before they ever apply.

What Are YouTube's Advantages and Disadvantages?

A clear disadvantage is the enormous competition. YouTube is crowded, professional, and highly competitive. Many companies hesitate to begin because they fear that the effort will be too great and results too slow. YouTube does require patience. Visibility takes long-term thinking and consistent work. Rules and technical requirements can also seem confusing to newcomers. Copyright is another sensitive area. Improperly licensed content, particularly background music, can quickly create legal problems.

YouTube also offers major opportunities. Companies willing to engage seriously with the platform—or assign the work to professionals—can benefit substantially. You can reach a very large audience and tailor content precisely to particular groups. Despite the formal requirements, there is considerable room for creativity. Realistic planning is essential. YouTube is not a quick-results channel, but it can be a highly effective long-term recruiting tool.

7.2.6 Instagram

Instagram is one of the most important platforms for visual communication. Its users are, on average, considerably younger than Facebook's and open the app much more frequently. For many, Instagram is firmly embedded in daily online life and used intensively.

What Is Instagram?

Instagram began primarily as a photo-sharing platform. Over time, it added more video formats. Today, Reels—short, dynamic videos whose format is strongly reminiscent of TikTok—are especially prominent.

At its core, Instagram is about sharing moments, impressions, and content visually. From the beginning, its emphasis was less on private exchanges among close contacts, as on Facebook, and more on public presentation, inspiration, and visibility. This helped create its strong influencer culture. Depending on account settings, content can be shared privately or publicly, reaching either a limited circle or a broad community.

Over the years, Instagram has consistently catered to a young, trend-conscious audience. Alongside Reels, Stories are a defining format; they disappear automatically after 24 hours. Longer video formats have further developed the platform's visual character.

Who Uses Instagram?

Instagram's audience is predominantly young. Many members of Generation Z and younger millennials are now also active on TikTok or moving there, although the two platforms are often used together.

The gender distribution is fairly balanced overall. Differences tend to reflect people's interests and the content they consume. Some topics attract particular groups more strongly, but such patterns should never be treated as universal. Individual usage ultimately determines the picture.

Educational background is also relevant to recruiting. Many users hold upper-secondary school qualifications or have an academic background. Influencers and content creators strongly shape Instagram, and opinion leaders are especially prominent. This also makes the platform relevant to employer communications.

How Far Does Instagram Reach?

Instagram reaches a very large number of active users in Germany, making it one of the country's most important social platforms. This offers considerable potential for small and medium-sized businesses in particular. Its reach is broad, usage is intensive, and the platform is firmly embedded in many people's online routines.

It is therefore unsurprising that many companies have integrated Instagram into their communication strategies. The volume of published content is only part of the picture; active use is what matters most. Large numbers of people log in every day, view posts, and interact with content. This sustained presence makes Instagram valuable for recruiting and brand communications.

How Can You Use Instagram for Recruiting?

Used strategically, Instagram can be a highly effective recruiting channel. A company profile alone is not enough. You need relevant content that provides insight and speaks to the people you want to reach.

An authentic look behind the scenes is especially effective. Use photos and videos to show daily work, team activities, internal processes, and company culture in practice. Stories work well for recurring features such as team interviews, insights into apprenticeship programs, short series about daily work, and employee introductions. Creative formats bring your company to life.

Watching competitors can also be useful. Observe what works for others and develop your own ideas from it. Straightforward copying is quickly noticed and feels generic. An original approach, by contrast, can substantially strengthen your employer brand.

As on other platforms, working with influencers or content creators can be worthwhile on Instagram. The platform is particularly well suited to this. Actively encouraging interaction is equally important. Invite your community to comment, like, and ask questions. Live formats are especially useful. Announce live sessions and make time for questions to learn what prospective applicants actually want to know.

Purposeful use of hashtags is another way to improve visibility. Choose relevant hashtags that fit the content. A combination of broad and specific terms has proved effective: broad terms can generate reach, while more targeted hashtags increase local or industry relevance. English-language hashtags are common on Instagram and can be useful. Include German-language terms as well if you want to reach people specifically in the DACH region.

What Are Instagram's Advantages and Disadvantages?

Instagram stands out from many platforms through its high engagement rate. Good content often quickly attracts likes, comments, and shares. Combined with its broad reach, this makes it a powerful tool for modern recruiting. Users are also generally receptive to brands on Instagram. Many actively follow company profiles that offer relevant or appealing content.

Instagram can also offer attractive economics. Influencer marketing, in particular, often produces a solid relationship between investment and results. This makes the platform appealing for employer branding as well as conventional brand communications.

There are challenges, however. Building visibility can be difficult at first. Instagram rewards content that already generates interaction, often making it harder for small companies to get started. Competition is also intense. Many companies compete for attention, making quality, consistency, and creativity especially important.

The algorithm is another source of uncertainty. It changes regularly in response to user behavior, trends, and technical adjustments. This makes the platform demanding, particularly for those without social media management experience. Even so, the overall picture remains positive. A professionally managed account with strong content can be well worth the effort over time, provided costs and benefits are assessed realistically from the start.

7.2.7 TikTok

TikTok was initially associated with a very young audience. That picture has broadened considerably. Its users are still young on average, but the platform is growing beyond that age group. Its popularity continues to increase, with no end to this development currently in sight. TikTok was conceived as a video platform from the beginning.

What Is TikTok?

TikTok first became known for very short videos. It has since evolved substantially. Alongside conventional short videos, other formats are now widely used, including photo sequences combined with music and text.

These photo videos have strategic value. They consist of several images that advance automatically or are swiped through manually. Music, text overlays, and the visual sequence create a dynamic experience despite the still images. Time spent on the post is particularly important. Reading text and moving through the content keeps users engaged longer, which the algorithm rewards.

TikTok covers a broad range of content: entertainment, education, lifestyle, humor, and specialist topics coexist. Trends are important. Creatively adapting popular sounds, challenges, or formats can help increase visibility.

At the heart of TikTok is the For You page, which delivers content precisely according to user behavior. Likes, comments, shares, and viewing time influence what someone sees next. This algorithmic precision keeps people highly engaged with the platform. It also makes TikTok relevant to modern employer branding by delivering content directly to people who may find it useful or interesting.

Who Uses TikTok?

TikTok continues to be strongly shaped by young audiences. Many users are about to begin, or have just begun, an apprenticeship, college, or their first job. Older groups are also using it increasingly.

The ease of creating short videos and the strength of algorithmic distribution have made TikTok much more than a channel for teenagers. The usage habits it has created now influence other platforms, too. Short vertical videos have become established everywhere.

The core audience nevertheless remains young. People ages 16–24 are especially prominent, while the share of older users continues to rise. For recruiting, this means TikTok primarily reaches tomorrow's skilled workers, but increasingly also older audiences when your content matches their interests. The gender distribution is broadly balanced, with a slightly higher proportion of women.

How Far Does TikTok Reach?

TikTok is known for its momentum and the ability to generate substantial reach quickly. Few platforms currently make it so easy for an individual post to reach large numbers of people. This does not mean one video will automatically bring a flood of applications. It does show that creative content and thoughtful planning can quickly produce meaningful visibility.

TikTok is especially useful for recruiting when you build a professional channel and publish quality content regularly. Consistency is essential: posts should be reliable and recognizable, rather than occasional. Because the audience uses mobile devices extensively and is active on weekends, planning content across the entire week can make sense.

TikTok can also provide substantial organic visibility without paid advertising. That makes it attractive to companies seeking to build reach on a limited budget.

Working with creators is another important consideration. Young audiences in particular often trust credible individuals more than conventional company communications. Partnerships can be worthwhile if they fit the audience and the brand. Creativity remains essential, however. Generic content is unlikely to attract attention on TikTok.

Hashtags also matter, but use them selectively and sparingly. Too many can do more harm than good. A focused selection of relevant terms has proved effective. TikTok-specific features such as Stitches, Duets, and live sessions encourage interaction and lend themselves to recruiting activities, including online job events and question-and-answer sessions.

How Can You Use TikTok for Recruiting?

TikTok is particularly well suited to short, direct, honest glimpses into working life. You can show what teamwork, company culture, and the work environment actually look like in your business. This immediacy is one of the platform's greatest advantages.

Your presence becomes especially effective when employees participate. Let team members speak, and show project work, shared activities, and brief moments from the working day. This content feels approachable and builds trust. Prospective applicants gain a far more realistic impression than from conventional job postings.

Authentic partnerships with relevant creators can also be useful. They help you connect with younger audiences who often view conventional company messaging skeptically.

What Are TikTok's Advantages and Disadvantages?

TikTok's principal strengths are reach, momentum, and audience fit. If your company needs young talent, it is a highly relevant channel. The platform grows with its users and continues to evolve. Investing early in good content can pay off over the long term. Direct communication is generally simple and accessible, and initial contacts are often much more informal than on traditional platforms.

There are challenges as well. Not every interaction represents serious interest in applying. Assessing potential contacts and determining their suitability takes time. Broad reach also carries risks: criticism, negative comments, and public outrage can spread quickly. You need a confident approach to public communication and a clear communication strategy.

7.2.8 Pinterest

Pinterest's audience is older on average than that of many other platforms. At its core, Pinterest functions as a visual search engine. Users create digital boards to collect, organize, and save content for future projects or interests. These thematic collections can also be discovered and reused by others.

What Is Pinterest?

Pinterest primarily helps people gather ideas, find inspiration, and organize content by topic. Boards provide a clear overview and make it easier to group content by interest. People with similar preferences discover one another this way, although the platform is not primarily designed for direct social interaction.

Pinterest has a broad international presence and is available in many languages and countries. It hosts an enormous amount of content and has become an established destination for visual inspiration.

Who Uses Pinterest?

Pinterest is used predominantly by women, partly because of its main topics, including lifestyle, fashion, travel, DIY, and home decor. Its audience is nevertheless highly diverse in education and professional background, ranging from apprentices and skilled workers to college graduates.

Creative fields such as photography, design, art, and skilled crafts are particularly visible. Other sectors use Pinterest, too. People in education, healthcare, business, and technology turn to it for inspiration, ideas, and solutions to specific problems. This breadth of topics makes the platform more interesting than it may initially appear.

How Far Does Pinterest Reach?

Pinterest is often said to be losing relevance, but user trends suggest the opposite. Usage is stable and growing in some areas. Many people access Pinterest on mobile devices, making it even more convenient in daily life.

This stability also reflects the different purpose Pinterest serves compared with many traditional social networks. It meets a need for inspiration, planning, and visual guidance rather than competing directly for the same type of attention. Many people therefore use several platforms alongside one another and value their different functions.

How Can You Use Pinterest for Recruiting?

Start by setting up a professional business account. Then publish content regularly that reflects your industry and presents your company credibly. Well-written descriptions with relevant keywords help your content remain discoverable through visual search.

You can, of course, publish specific job postings as Pins. Your profile should offer more than vacancies, however. Interested people first need a sense of the company. Give them insights into your team, work processes, and culture.

Creating relevant themed boards and using group boards can help increase visibility and interaction. Working with suitable creators can also strengthen your employer brand's presence in relevant subject areas.

What Are Pinterest's Advantages and Disadvantages?

Pinterest depends on visually appealing content. If you present it well and tailor it to your audience, the platform can deliver solid organic reach. Direct interaction is generally limited, however. Users save, bookmark, or like content but are less likely to engage in real conversation.

That is also the platform's main limitation. Relationships matter in employer branding, and building a direct connection with prospective applicants is harder on Pinterest than on other networks. If your company does not operate in a strongly visual or creative field, other platforms may be more effective for building relationships.

7.2.9 X, Formerly Twitter

X is built primarily around fast communication. Short text posts, images, and videos can be shared, commented on, and adapted in real time. It is known for bringing information to light quickly. Breaking developments often appear there before they reach traditional news formats.

Who Uses X?

The gender distribution on X is relatively balanced. Users are significantly older on average than those on TikTok and often older than Instagram users as well. This matters when considering the platform for your recruiting strategy.

Educational backgrounds also vary widely. Users include school and college students, skilled workers, and experienced professionals. Politics, business, journalism, and social media are especially prominent topics. X primarily attracts people who want rapid information, participation in debate, and an opportunity to express their views.

How Far Does X Reach?

X retains relevant reach in Germany, although exact figures vary by source. Usage sometimes fluctuates more sharply than on other platforms, partly in response to the news cycle. Activity increases noticeably during periods of intense social or political developments.

The platform is also used more heavily in major cities than in rural areas. This partly reflects differences in interests and usage patterns. With its strong emphasis on speed and current events, X particularly appeals to people who respond quickly to developments or closely follow public debate.

How Can You Use X for Recruiting?

To become visible on X, take an active part in discussions. Occasional posts are not enough. Engage with relevant topics, add context to posts, and make direct contact through messages or mentions.

Use content that prompts a response, such as insights from your team, brief observations from daily work, or perspectives on industry issues. The aim is real interaction as well as reach. Communication on X works especially well when it is direct, timely, and conversational.

What Are X's Advantages and Disadvantages?

X's greatest advantage is speed. Content can spread very quickly, creating opportunities to gain visibility and start conversations. This can be useful in industries shaped by current events, debate, and public perception.

The brevity of much of the content also creates limitations. It is harder to convey complex information or assess candidates reliably through short exchanges. There are also risks of misunderstanding, misinformation, and unintended reactions. Using X requires a readiness to respond quickly and communicate attentively. This can be demanding for companies with limited resources.

7.2.10 Advantages and Disadvantages of Social Media Recruiting

Social media has long been part of everyday life for a great many people: Generation Z, millennials, Generation X, and some older groups as well. Younger audiences in particular, who are especially relevant to many vacancies, use digital networks naturally and intensively.

For companies, social media provides direct access to large portions of their target audience. The platforms' reach speaks for itself. Connecting quickly with prospective candidates has never been easier. Companies often gain a second benefit because the same presence also supports customer communication.

Professional use of social media can be much more efficient than traditional advertising. Although platforms operate differently, many fundamentals are similar. Flexibility is a major advantage. Content can be adjusted at short notice, campaigns changed quickly, and creative ideas put into practice promptly. The effect on brand awareness is especially valuable: a strong, visible presence increases your appeal as an employer and strengthens customer loyalty.

There are significant challenges, however. A public presence requires the ability to handle criticism, negative comments, and sometimes unreasonable attacks. Public negativity takes time and energy and demands a professional response. Data protection is another concern. Companies must protect sensitive information and maintain clear processes for managing risks.

The workload is another issue. Many small and medium-sized businesses still underestimate the sustained effort social media requires. Channels need maintenance, content needs planning, and comments and reactions need timely replies. Over the long term, this is difficult to manage properly without community management and clearly assigned responsibility.

A sound strategy is equally important. Without a clear audience, market monitoring, and ongoing analysis, social media often lacks direction. Publishing content alone is not enough. Successful communication requires monitoring, evaluation, and a willingness to adjust activities continually. That is why social media management has become a specialized professional responsibility. Even so, ignoring social media completely is more problematic than attempting to use it without a strategy.

7.3 Comparing Job Boards for Employers

Job boards are digital platforms that help employers reach suitable talent directly. The conventional starting point is a specific job posting. The benefit is clear: structured access to a large pool of potential applicants, with filters that let you target your audience precisely. This applies to highly specialized roles and common positions alike.

Digital job postings are now standard. They are faster, more flexible, and considerably more practical than many earlier recruiting methods. You can publish vacancies on your own website, careers portals, or external job boards. External portals in particular have grown substantially in importance in recent years. Their major advantages are reach and speed. A few clicks can put your posting in front of many people, and you can update it whenever requirements change or new information becomes available.

These platforms also appeal to applicants. Search filters and categories make it easier for them to find jobs that truly match their qualifications and experience. This directly affects the quality of applications received because some initial screening has already taken place.

Job Boards: General Platforms

Pricing models, target audiences, and recommended uses for the leading providers relevant to SMEs

Platform	Pricing	Target audience	Especially well suited for
Google for Jobs	Free	Active job seekers, people open to changing jobs, and people starting their careers	Reach through Google Search with correctly implemented schema markup
Indeed	Freemium	Broad audience, from people starting their careers to experienced professionals	SMEs with limited budgets; solid baseline reach
StepStone	Paid	Professionals and managers; roles with higher qualification requirements	Qualified candidates and employer branding
Monster	Freemium	Wide age range and substantial professional expertise	Loyal user base and targeted distribution
LinkedIn	Pay-per-click	Professionals and managers worldwide; particularly strong among ages 35–49	Proactive outreach, active sourcing, and branding
XING (Onlyfy)	Paid	Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (DACH); ages 25–45; mid- to high-level professionals	Regional or national searches without an international focus
Federal Employment Agency	Free	Active job seekers, regional candidates, and career changers	Regional searches without time pressure
Yourfirm	Paid	Professionals and managers in small and medium-sized businesses	Specializes in SMEs rather than large corporations; personalized support
Jobware	Paid	Professionals and managers, particularly in technical fields	Multiple awards and strong service for SMEs
meinstadt.de	Paid	Regional candidates, vocationally trained workers, apprentices, and career changers	Strong local reach; ideal for SMEs in skilled trades and retail
stellenanzeigen.de	Paid	Broad audience, from skilled workers to specialists	Extensive partner network and multimedia job postings
Workwise	Success-based	People starting their careers and skilled professionals	Commission payable only on successful placement; applicant tracking system included

Recommendation for SMEs: Start with a broad platform such as Indeed or Google for Jobs, then add a platform specializing in small and medium-sized businesses, such as Yourfirm or Jobware. If you are recruiting regionally, do not overlook meinstadt.de and the Federal Employment Agency. Both offer low-cost or free options and are often underestimated.

Job Boards: Industry Specialists

Where general job boards reach their limits: platforms for healthcare, IT, students, skilled trades, hospitality, and logistics

HEALTHCARE

Platform	Focus	Target audience	Distinctive feature
Ärztstellen	Physicians	Physicians in all specialties	Affiliation with Deutsches Ärzteblatt
Zahn-Lücken	Dentistry	Dentists and dental professionals	Free apprenticeship postings
MediJobs	Healthcare broadly	Physicians, nursing staff, therapists, and administrative staff	Candidate database and industry news
Pflegepiraten	Nursing	Nursing staff looking to change jobs	Fees payable only on successful placement
MFA Mal Anders	Medical and dental practices	Medical and dental assistants	Clear specialization in medical assistants (MFA) and dental assistants (ZFA)
Gesundheitsjobs.de	Nursing and therapy	Nursing staff, therapists, and administrative staff	Separate sections for job seekers and employers

IT PLATFORMS

Platform	Focus	Target audience	Distinctive feature
Honeypot	Developers	Software development, data science, and product management professionals	Dedicated contact person and webinars
IT-Treff	IT and telecommunications	IT professionals and an active community	Technical articles, training, and events
GULP	IT and engineering	Specialists for permanent positions and project assignments	Also suitable for short-term project assignments
WeAreDevelopers	Developers	Discerning developer community	Employers are screened in advance

STUDENTS AND PEOPLE STARTING THEIR CAREERS

Platform	Focus	Target audience	Distinctive feature
Campusjäger (Workwise)	Students	Internships, part-time student positions, and thesis projects	Applicant tracking and active sourcing included
Praktikum.info	Internships	Interns, thesis projects, and part-time jobs	Free basic use
Jobmensa	Part-time student positions	Students and short-term assignments	Fast, flexible postings

SKILLED TRADES AND CONSTRUCTION

Platform	Focus	Target audience	Distinctive feature
Handwerkerjobs.de	Skilled trades broadly	Journeypersons, master tradespeople, and apprentices	Specializes in all skilled trades
Jobs-im-Handwerk	Skilled trades	Qualified workers in all trades	Precise regional targeting and SME-friendly pricing

RESTAURANTS AND HOTELS

Platform	Focus	Target audience	Distinctive feature
HOGAPAGE	Hotels and restaurants	Service staff, chefs, and hotel professionals	Market leader in hospitality
Hotelcareer	Hotels	Hotel professionals and managers	International reach in the hotel industry

LOGISTICS AND TRANSPORTATION

Platform	Focus	Target audience	Distinctive feature
Trucker-Jobs.com	Drivers	Professional drivers and freight forwarding staff	Specializes in the entire DACH region
Jobboerse-Logistik	Logistics broadly	Warehousing, dispatch, and supply chain professionals	Industry focus, with specialist articles and events

Job postings can also incorporate multimedia elements, such as photos or videos, to attract additional attention.

This approach does have drawbacks, however. Competition is intense, and your job posting competes with many others. To keep it from getting lost in the crowd, you need to maintain it regularly, keep it up to date, and allow for some administrative work.

7.3.1 Overview of General Job Boards

The following section introduces a range of job boards and career platforms to help you assess which channels are the best fit for your company. The right platform always depends on your industry, requirements, and target audience. This comparison will help you understand the different models and how you can use them.

• Google for Jobs

Google for Jobs is an extension of Google Search rather than a traditional job board. It was developed to display job postings directly in search results. For job seekers, this makes finding suitable opportunities particularly quick and convenient.

Employers benefit considerably as well. Key information, such as salary, work schedules, and requirements, can appear directly in the results. Combined with Google's enormous reach, this makes it a powerful channel. With the right technical setup, you can reach a large number of potential applicants with relatively little effort. Your posting must be properly structured, however, so that Google recognizes it as a job opening and displays it correctly.

Who uses Google for Jobs? Primarily people actively looking for a new position, but also people who are open to changing jobs without actively searching. Many recent graduates and others starting their careers also use it to enter the job market.

• **Indeed**

Indeed is an established global job board that has connected employers and job seekers since 2004. It operates in many countries and across nearly every industry. It is also one of Germany's best-known job boards. Its audience is broad, ranging from people starting their careers to experienced professionals.

As an employer, you can publish job postings on Indeed. The basic service is free, with additional fees primarily applying when you want to increase a posting's visibility. This is particularly attractive for small and medium-sized businesses, which can achieve solid reach even on a limited budget. Indeed also uses algorithms to match postings with relevant users as closely as possible.

Who uses Indeed? A wide range of people: active and passive job seekers, recent graduates, experienced professionals, career changers, people interested in part-time work, and those looking for freelance projects.

• **Monster**

Monster is one of the best-known online job boards and an early pioneer of digital recruiting. Although some other platforms have a larger reach, Monster has a long-standing market presence and a loyal user base spanning a wide range of ages and substantial professional expertise.

It also offers basic job postings, supplemented by paid options for greater visibility. One advantage is its targeted distribution: postings can be placed precisely to reach the intended audience. Additional services, such as applicant tracking tools, can also ease the workload during the selection process.

• **LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is a professional network rather than a traditional job board, and it plays a major role in recruiting and career development. Employers and professionals connect through profiles, content, and professional discussions as well as job postings. With its large volume of advertised positions, LinkedIn has long been an established part of the job market.

Because the platform is used primarily for professional purposes, competition for strong candidates is intense. Yet that same reach creates significant opportunities. A strategic approach to your profile, content, and job postings can help you reach candidates who are an excellent fit.

Pricing is generally based on clicks, making it relatively transparent. Companies can choose among different models to suit their needs, allowing them to use the platform selectively even with smaller budgets.

• **XING**

Founded in 2003, XING is often compared with LinkedIn. Its main distinction is its regional focus. XING concentrates on German-speaking countries, particularly Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. It therefore remains an attractive option for recruiting in the DACH region.

Job postings are published through its associated service, Onlyfy. Various pricing models and discounts are available for companies filling several positions at once. One significant development was allowing people to view job postings without registering, making them much more accessible to prospective candidates.

Who uses XING? People starting their careers, recent graduates, experienced professionals, active and passive job seekers, part-time workers, freelancers, and people looking to move into a different industry.

• **StepStone**

StepStone is one of Germany's best-known and leading job boards, especially for professionals and managers. It serves companies of different sizes and is particularly useful when you need qualified candidates.

The platform charges a fee and offers various pricing models, including options suitable for smaller companies. StepStone is particularly relevant for positions with more demanding qualification requirements. It also offers services beyond job postings that can support employer branding.

Who uses StepStone? People starting their careers, college graduates, experienced professionals, freelancers, people seeking part-time work, career changers, executives, and managers.

• **Federal Employment Agency**

The Federal Employment Agency is Germany's central government institution for job placement. Companies of any size can publish vacancies free of charge and receive support in finding suitable candidates.

Its reach is generally broad because many active job seekers are registered with it. Placement services, however, often have a stronger regional focus. For highly specialized positions in particular, it can make sense to use the agency as an additional channel rather than your only one.

Who uses the Federal Employment Agency? Primarily active job seekers, including skilled professionals, graduates, people looking for a change, and those seeking a new career direction. The agency also plays an important role in helping people with disabilities find work.

Find the Best Job Boards for Your Industry: More Targeted Results Through Specialization

In some fields, general job boards are no longer enough. Where demand is especially high or roles are highly specialized, industry-specific platforms can be a better choice. This is particularly true when the skills you need are scarce and your outreach must reach a precisely defined audience.

That precision is often crucial in healthcare and IT. Professionals in these fields frequently use their own online communities and pay close attention to the quality of the approach. The same applies to students. If you are looking for students to work part-time or for people to fill German mini-jobs, you will usually reach them more effectively through channels designed for university life or the early stages of a career.

Specialized platforms are particularly effective when combined with credible signals of trust. If an industry-specific posting is backed by independent employer certification or clear employer positioning, candidates are often considerably more likely to make contact. The following overview therefore covers selected platforms for healthcare, IT, and students.

7.3.2 Job Boards: Healthcare

Few industries face greater staffing pressure than healthcare. Medical assistants, nursing staff, and physicians remain in short supply in many places. Yet some organizations continue to recruit successfully through targeted efforts. Specialized platforms are an important part of that success. The following portals are among the relevant resources in this sector.

• **Ärztstellen**

This platform is closely associated with Deutsches Ärzteblatt and consequently has a high profile in the medical community. It specifically serves physicians across a wide range of fields, from general practice to highly specialized disciplines.

One advantage of Ärztstellen is its combination of digital and traditional distribution. Postings can appear both online and in print, reaching different age groups within the medical profession at the same time.

Its detailed filters allow searches to be narrowed by region, German federal state, and employment type, helping postings reach a more relevant audience.

• **Zahn-Lücken**

As its name suggests, this platform focuses on dentistry. It connects employers with both dentists and other dental professionals.

One particularly useful feature is the ability to advertise apprenticeships free of charge, making it easier to reach young talent. The portal is also relevant for experienced professionals. Employers can highlight their postings to attract more attention. Its deliberately simple design makes the platform easy for applicants to use.

• **MediJobs**

MediJobs covers a broad range of healthcare professions, from physicians and nursing staff to therapists and administrative personnel. It supports targeted searches within different specialties and provides access to an extensive candidate database.

One advantage is direct contact between employers and interested candidates. The platform also provides regular updates on developments in the healthcare market, which can help employers plan strategically. Networks and partnerships with other medical institutions can further improve the quality of their job postings.

- **Pflegepiraten**

Pflegepiraten specifically targets nursing staff looking to change jobs. It covers hospitals, outpatient services, and care facilities. Its pricing model is particularly attractive because fees are payable only after a successful placement, keeping financial risk low.

The platform visibly emphasizes the needs of nursing staff as well as employers' requirements. That perspective makes it attractive to applicants and strengthens its appeal among its target audience.

- **MFA Mal Anders**

Medical practices, as well as hospitals, are urgently seeking qualified medical assistants. MFA Mal Anders specifically serves medical assistants (MFA) and dental assistants (ZFA), giving employers focused access to these professional groups. Employers can choose among posting options with different features and prices. This clear specialization gives the portal a stable, relevant user base.

- **Gesundheitsjobs.de**

Gesundheitsjobs.de brings together numerous healthcare vacancies, primarily for nursing staff, therapists, and medical administrative personnel. The platform has clearly separate sections for job seekers and employers.

Pricing can be customized. Although this may initially seem somewhat complex, it ultimately allows for tailored solutions. For employers seeking solid reach in healthcare with little effort, it is a practical, accessible channel.

7.3.3 Job Boards: IT

Finding suitable IT professionals is especially challenging for many companies. Specialized IT platforms can make the process faster and more targeted. They offer precise search features, are better aligned with the industry, and often make it easier for applicants to get started.

- **Honeypot**

Honeypot is an established European platform for developers. Many well-known companies use it to reach technology talent. Candidates from Germany and the Netherlands are particularly well represented, and international professionals also use it actively.

Its focus is software development, data science, design, and product management. After registering, employers receive support from a dedicated contact person. Webinars and events encourage professional exchange and provide additional visibility.

- **IT-Treff**

IT-Treff focuses on information technology and telecommunications. Alongside job postings, it offers industry news, technical articles, and practical guidance for employers and applicants. Its search features make it possible to narrow down suitable profiles precisely.

Its active community is a particular advantage. Companies publish their postings within a professional network rather than an anonymous environment. Training, events, and webinars further reinforce its reputation as an established professional community.

• GULP

GULP is an established staffing provider for IT, engineering, and life sciences. It connects specialists with employers for both permanent positions and project assignments. Even if you need only short-term support for a project, GULP is an excellent resource.

GULP draws on a vast database of skilled professionals, which generally makes its placement service highly reliable. Personalized advice is another valuable feature available when needed. It can be particularly helpful when your recruiting has stalled but you urgently need IT specialists.

To attract the best people for your vacancies, publish traditional job postings. Describe the requirements precisely; a clear job description is especially important in technical fields. GULP also hosts meetups and events for IT experts, helping your company build a professional network.

• WeAreDevelopers

WeAreDevelopers is best known as a major European developer conference. A network has grown around the event and now includes an established job board. The platform serves a discerning community and emphasizes quality. Companies must meet certain requirements before they can advertise there.

That screening makes the platform particularly attractive. It offers not only reach but also a level of quality that carries considerable weight in the developer community.

7.3.4 Job Boards: Students

If you want to attract young talent, digital channels are almost always the way to reach them today. Traditional media play only a minor role with this audience. To reach students, students seeking part-time positions, or people starting their careers, you need to be present where they actually look for guidance and opportunities.

Specialized student job boards are therefore an important tool for making suitable connections quickly. They help you find young talent whose skills and values fit your company. The same principle applies here, however: do not rely on a single channel. A combination of approaches is usually much more effective, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses.

- **Campusjäger**

This platform is particularly useful for filling internships, part-time student positions, or company-based thesis projects. Its entire design is tailored to younger users. From the outset, it asks what they are looking for, such as an internship, a student job, a permanent position, or their first job after graduation.

With just a few details about their location and field of study, applicants are directed to suitable opportunities. That is exactly what students and young talent expect from a job platform today: speed, clarity, and no unnecessary steps. The employer side is equally well organized.

Campusjäger now operates under the Workwise brand. It offers much more than job postings, including support for applicant tracking, employer branding, and active sourcing. Its solid reach in Germany makes it an attractive option for reaching university talent.

- **Praktikum.info**

People looking for an internship, a thesis project, or a part-time job often come across Praktikum.info. Employers can get started easily and publish postings quickly. Its free basic service is particularly attractive, already offering useful filters and access to a relevant audience.

For small and medium-sized businesses, the strong presence of large employers can be a challenge. Reach may also be limited in highly specialized niches. Even so, the platform is worthwhile, particularly when your posting is clearly written, attractively presented, and tailored to its audience.

- **Jobmensa**

Jobmensa also focuses on internships, thesis projects, and part-time student jobs. It has a strong user base in Germany and is particularly useful when you need student support on short notice. Many students use it specifically to find a suitable part-time job or practical work experience quickly.

Flexibility is one advantage. Postings are easy to manage and can target different fields of work. Reach can vary by region, which is not always ideal. Even so, Jobmensa remains a useful channel for companies seeking a quick, straightforward solution.

- **StudentJob**

StudentJob is an established platform for students, graduates, and people starting their careers. Its search is deliberately simple, requiring only a few details to return relevant results. Opportunities include internships, part-time student positions, and other part-time jobs.

Employers can advertise to a relevant audience without unnecessary complexity. The site's functional design helps both parties reach their goals quickly. This can be particularly helpful for smaller companies. Where large corporations are less dominant, a good opportunity has a better chance of standing out.

- **Local University Job Boards**

If your company is in a university town or a metropolitan area with colleges and universities, check their job boards as well. Their reach is naturally smaller than that of major job boards, but that can be an advantage.

Proximity to a university often creates direct points of contact through regional career fairs, university events, or campus-related activities. Students find this appealing because it often leads to connections that extend beyond their studies. Companies with local ties frequently find highly motivated young talent from their immediate area this way.

7.3.5 Multiposting

Multiposting is an effective way to significantly expand your recruiting reach. It means publishing a job posting on several relevant channels instead of just one platform. Relying on a single channel is particularly risky in a rapidly changing market.

The aim is not to scatter content indiscriminately. The quality of the posting still matters most. Multiposting means deliberately publishing a well-prepared job posting on several platforms at the same time. Specialized tools and service providers now make that process considerably easier.

The advantages are clear. You increase visibility, reach a larger relevant audience, and save time over the long term. Although automated processes require some initial familiarization, the efficiency gains are usually apparent quickly. They considerably reduce the workload for the people coordinating postings in your company.

There is also the benefit of a consistent public presence. When your postings are consistent across channels, your company appears more professional and deliberate. Combined with an applicant tracking system, multiposting allows you to manage incoming applications in a much more structured way. You can maintain an overview even when response volumes are high. Many of the platforms already discussed fit well into this approach. Companies that use multiposting consistently often fill vacancies faster because the right person is more likely to see the posting.

Broadbean and eQuest are among the best-known solutions in this field. These tools let you publish vacancies on multiple job boards at once with relatively little effort.

7.3.6 Summary: Choosing the Right Platforms

How important is it to choose the platforms that truly fit your company?

Having established the importance of social media and online visibility in modern recruiting, the next crucial step is choosing the right channels. It is understandable to want a presence everywhere. For small and medium-sized businesses, however, that can quickly become overwhelming. It makes more sense to start with two or three channels and maintain them consistently. Trying to be active everywhere at once often spreads your resources too thin, increasing the workload while delivering less impact than you could achieve.

To identify the right channels for your strategy, review the most widely used social media platforms. Compare your current position with where you want to be:

- **Current position:** Analyze your market as it stands. What are your competitors doing on social media? What internal resources—time, staff, and budget—do you have, and where might the constraints be?

- **Desired position:** Define your goals. Which audience is truly relevant to your industry and your company? What specific results do you want to achieve?

Match these criteria against the features of each platform. Which channel actually suits your audience? How do successful competitors use these platforms?

Once you have identified suitable channels, they must not run in parallel. Long-term success requires regular monitoring and continuous improvement of your recruiting channels. Keep track of their performance, weaknesses, and changes.

Clear metrics are the best way to do this. How many applications come in? How closely do they match the advertised position? How many lead to an actual hire? This analysis helps you recruit more systematically. It also saves time and money over the long term by allowing you to identify weak channels early and improve them or stop using them.

Always keep the central principle of this book in mind: a genuine understanding of your audience gives you a clear advantage. Pay attention to demographics, interests, and typical behavior. Not every channel works equally well for every audience. Ultimately, one question matters: which channel reaches the people who will truly move your company forward?

7.4 Legal Requirements for Job Postings

A good job posting has two jobs: to attract suitable applicants and to keep you out of trouble. The second is often underestimated. Yet one careless phrase can be enough to leave you facing a lawsuit. Writing “young, dynamic team” practically invites older applicants to seek compensation under the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG). This is no theoretical risk. Some lawyers look specifically for cases like these.

• **The AGG: The Basics Everyone Needs to Know**

The General Equal Treatment Act, or AGG, has been in place since 2006. It prohibits discrimination based on gender, age, ethnic origin, religion, disability, and sexual identity. That may sound obvious, but companies still regularly run into trouble in practice.

Here is what you need to know: the law already applies at the job posting stage. Discriminatory wording can expose you to compensation claims of up to three months' salary for each rejected applicant under Section 15(2) of the AGG. Applicants do not even have to prove that they would actually have been hired. It is enough for the wording to be treated as an indication of discrimination.

The most important pitfalls highlighted by recent court decisions are:

- **Gender.** Since 2019, “(m/w/d)” —male, female, diverse, or “(m/f/d)” in English—has been mandatory. “(m/w)” alone is no longer sufficient. Gender-neutral job titles, such as “cleaner” or “care worker,” are also safer than gender-specific wording such as “female early childhood educator” or “male bricklayer,” unless a particular gender is an essential requirement.

- **Age.** Avoid phrases such as “young team,” references to people starting their careers tied to a specific number of years, or “with 5 to 10 years of professional experience.” Court decisions are not entirely consistent: in 2024, the Rhineland-Palatinate Regional Labor Court accepted a posting specifying “up to approximately 6 years of professional experience” because it did not set a fixed upper limit. Still, that is hardly a safe approach. Use “some professional experience preferred” instead.

- **Origin.** “Native German speaker” is not acceptable. If German-language skills are genuinely required, write “excellent written and spoken German.” This specifies a language requirement rather than a person's origin.

- **Disability.** Phrases such as “physically fit” are problematic if the job does not strictly require it. You may include this requirement for physically demanding work, but consider carefully whether it is truly necessary. Applicants with severe disabilities have special legal protections and may claim compensation if they are rejected without justification.

My practical advice: have someone who is not involved in filling the position review your posting. A fresh reader often notices wording that you would never have considered problematic.

• **The EU Pay Transparency Directive: What Changes in June 2026**

This is where things get interesting. The EU adopted the Pay Transparency Directive in 2023: Directive (EU) 2023/970. It must be transposed into German law by June 7, 2026, making it an immediate concern as this book is published. What does that mean in practice?

As an employer, you will be required to tell applicants the starting salary or a salary range before the interview under Article 5 of the directive. You can include this information in the job posting or provide it with the interview invitation at the latest.

You will also no longer be allowed to ask applicants about their current or previous salary. That question was standard practice for decades. “What do you currently earn?” will soon be off-limits, and for good reason. Asking women about their previous pay and using it as the basis for a new salary simply perpetuates structural disparities.

There will also be reporting requirements, although these apply only above a certain company size. Employers with 100 or more employees must report regularly on the gender pay gap. For most readers of this book, that will not be relevant. Below that threshold, the new obligations primarily affect recruiting.

Even while Germany’s implementing legislation is still being finalized, you should start taking the following steps:

- Set realistic salary ranges for your typical positions. “€45,000 to €80,000” looks unprofessional. “€45,000 to €52,000, depending on experience” is more appropriate.

- Break the habit of asking about current pay during interviews. Instead, ask candidates about their salary expectations for the advertised position.

- Establish straightforward criteria for determining salary levels. Experience, responsibility, specialized expertise—you need an objective basis. If an applicant later asks why a colleague in the same role earns more, you must be able to give a well-supported answer.

One frequently overlooked benefit of transparency is that job postings with salary information demonstrably attract more applications from better-qualified candidates. Openness signals confidence and saves you from processing applications from people whose expectations exceed your budget. In that sense, the new rule works in your favor.

• **A Practical Checklist Before You Publish**

Before publishing a job posting online, run through these points:

- Does the job title include “(m/f/d)” —the English equivalent of “(m/w/d)”?
- Are all requirements genuinely related to the work?
- Does the posting avoid references to age, such as “young team” or “entry-level candidates with X years of experience”?
- Are language skills stated as a requirement rather than a reference to origin?
- Does it include a salary or salary range, which will be mandatory by June 2026 at the latest?
- Is there a clear, consistent application process that handles applicant data in compliance with the GDPR?
- Is applicant data deleted within the applicable timeframe after the process ends—typically six months after rejection, or longer in special cases?

That may sound like a lot at once. In reality, after three job postings you will have internalized the checklist. It is worth the effort. A single AGG lawsuit can easily cost more than an entire year’s job posting budget.

The EU Pay Transparency Directive in 2026

What employers need to change in recruiting starting in June 2026

**June 7,
2026**

Deadline for transposing Directive (EU) 2023/970 into German law. Its main obligations apply to every employer, regardless of size. Reporting requirements are phased in for employers with at least 100 employees; see point 4.

1

Disclose salary information before the interview

Applicants must receive the starting salary or a salary range no later than the interview invitation. Realistic ranges, such as “€45,000–€52,000, depending on experience,” filter out candidates whose expectations exceed the budget before the interview.

2

Do not ask about current salary

“What do you currently earn?” will no longer be permitted. Instead, ask about salary expectations for the advertised position.

3

Use clear, defensible pay criteria

If pay varies, you must be able to explain why. Experience, responsibility, specialized expertise—there must be an objective basis that you can substantiate if asked.

4

Reporting requirements: phased in from 100 employees

Gender pay gap reporting is phased in: 250 or more employees, annually starting June 7, 2027; 150–249 employees, every three years starting June 7, 2027; 100–149 employees, every three years starting June 7, 2031. This will not affect most SMEs for the time being.

An overlooked benefit: Job postings with salary information demonstrably attract more applications from better-qualified candidates. Openness signals confidence and avoids applications from people whose expectations exceed your budget. The rule works in your favor.

Source: Directive (EU) 2023/970 on pay transparency; transposition deadline: June 7, 2026. Legal position as of May 2026.

AGG-Compliant Job Postings

What to leave out—and how to phrase it correctly

The General Equal Treatment Act (AGG) protects applicants against discrimination based on race or ethnic origin, gender, religion or belief, disability, age, and sexual identity. Even seemingly minor wording can lead to claims for damages.

Gender

NOT PERMITTED

✗ “Female secretary wanted,” “Construction manager (m),” “Saleswoman”

CORRECT WORDING

✓ “Secretary (m/f/d)” or “Sales associate (m/f/d)”

Age

NOT PERMITTED

✗ “Young team,” “3–10 years of professional experience”

CORRECT WORDING

✓ “Some professional experience preferred”—without specifying a fixed number of years

Origin and language

NOT PERMITTED

✗ “Native German speaker,” “German citizenship”

CORRECT WORDING

✓ “Excellent German-language skills”—language, not origin

Disability

NOT PERMITTED

✗ “Fully physically fit”—if the job does not require it

CORRECT WORDING

✓ Describe the requirement specifically, such as “lifting loads of up to 25 kg”

Religion and belief

NOT PERMITTED

✗ Religion-based requirements, except in ideological establishments (Tendenzbetriebe)

CORRECT WORDING

✓ Focus on the work and qualifications, not personality

Sexual identity

NOT PERMITTED

✗ Heteronormative assumptions, such as “family man” or “wife”

CORRECT WORDING

✓ Use neutral wording or, where appropriate, explicitly inclusive wording, such as “LGBTIQ*-friendly team”

Source: General Equal Treatment Act (AGG), Sections 1, 7, 11, and 15. Legal position as of May 2026.

8 Recruiting Employees from Abroad

Recruiting employees from abroad undoubtedly brings additional requirements. It also creates enormous opportunities to fill vacancies with qualified people. As staffing shortages become more urgent in many industries, more companies are looking beyond national borders. Globalization and demographic change have permanently reshaped the labor market. To remain competitive in these conditions, companies must adapt their strategies.

Professionals who already speak German, such as expatriates or digital nomads, are especially attractive candidates. Digital nomads work independently of location, often moving from place to place. That flexibility can be highly valuable to employers, opening up opportunities to recruit experienced specialists who would not be available under traditional working arrangements.

The skilled labor shortage has long been a reality in Germany. As a deeply interconnected economy, Germany depends on qualified professionals who can meet the demands of modern businesses. More and more employers are therefore turning to international recruiting to fill these gaps effectively.

German-speaking talent is particularly attractive because language is often the biggest barrier. People who already speak German usually settle into day-to-day work faster and integrate more easily into teams and the company culture. That does not make international professionals without German-language skills any less valuable, however. They bring experience from other markets, often approach issues from different perspectives, and offer a fresh view of familiar processes. That frequently leads to new ideas and better solutions.

Many professionals who have moved abroad for personal or professional reasons eventually look for new opportunities. A compelling offer may persuade them to return. Others deliberately choose to remain abroad, making remote work arrangements especially relevant. Working from home and collaborating across locations will continue to grow in importance in the coming years. Companies that establish these arrangements early and manage them professionally gain a significant advantage.

Targeted outreach can help you reach digital nomads. It requires some initial effort, but it pays off. Digital nomads are found worldwide, from Asia to North America. Modern recruiting methods and a clear employer profile can bring your company to their attention. This approach is still unfamiliar to many businesses, but traditional application processes alone have long ceased to be enough in many markets. Employers offering digital nomads real opportunities often gain exceptionally independent, adaptable, high-performing employees.

This group is particularly well represented in IT, media, and marketing, where location-independent work is especially feasible. Working together, however, requires a shift in thinking. New arrangements need clear rules, openness, and effective coordination. Discuss expectations and needs in detail from the start to avoid misunderstandings. This illustrates why traditional recruiting alone is often no longer sufficient: new audiences require new approaches.

As this topic has grown in importance, numerous platforms specializing in freelancers and digital nomads have emerged in recent years. One principle always applies, however: if you recruit internationally, you need a clear understanding of the legal framework.

A Brief Overview of the Legal Framework

Companies increasingly work with professionals based abroad, with freelancers and digital nomads playing a growing role. The advantages are clear: international expertise, considerable flexibility, and sometimes financial benefits as well. To make the arrangement viable, its legal foundations must be established clearly from the outset.

1. Account for Employment Law Requirements

Every country has its own employment laws, often differing significantly from German standards. Familiarize yourself early with the rules in the country where the work will be performed. These include working hours, rest periods, vacation entitlements, minimum wages, and social benefits. When working with professionals abroad, you must consider both German requirements and the rules of the country concerned.

2. Resolve Tax Questions Properly

The tax framework for international working arrangements is complex. The rules of both countries matter, particularly provisions for avoiding double taxation. Without sound tax advice, costly mistakes can arise quickly. A specialist tax advisor is often advisable and may be essential.

3. Check Permits and Residence Authorizations

Not everyone is automatically entitled to work for a German company. Depending on a person's country of origin and residence status, visas, work permits, or other authorizations may be required. Leave no room for uncertainty. Failure to meet the legal requirements can have serious consequences for both the professional concerned and your company.

4. Protect Data and Intellectual Property

Whenever sensitive data or internal information is involved, clear rules are essential, particularly across borders. Confidentiality agreements should be standard practice. You must also assess whether international data transfers require additional safeguards to ensure data protection and GDPR compliance.

5. Draft Contracts with Foresight

International contracts need more than translation. They must expressly address matters such as working hours, compensation, liability, jurisdiction, and governing law. Depending on the arrangement, different legal systems may apply. This work is essential to protect your position if a dispute arises.

6. Plan Realistically for Administrative Risks

International working arrangements bring additional administrative responsibilities, including international payments, differing employment law requirements, and more complex payroll or fee processing. Misclassification of self-employed workers is a particularly sensitive issue. If a freelancer is later classified as an employee, the financial and legal consequences can be substantial.

Conclusion: Is Working with Freelancers and Digital Nomads Worthwhile?

There is no universal answer. The extra work and legal requirements may initially seem daunting.

The benefits, however, are clear. International professionals often bring skills that are difficult to find in Germany. They work flexibly, contribute fresh perspectives, and, depending on the arrangement, can be engaged cost-effectively. Access to a global talent pool is a real competitive advantage. For many companies, it far outweighs the additional administrative burden.

Businesses seeking innovative, long-term growth will find these arrangements difficult to overlook.

9 Building Early Relationships with Skilled Talent

In a labor market where qualified candidates are scarce in many areas, waiting for fully trained professionals is no longer enough. The crucial opportunity comes much earlier. Companies need to attract people while they are still in vocational training, at university, or exploring career options. Building those relationships early creates a talent pipeline of your own.

The advantage is clear. Young talent grows into your culture, learns your processes from the ground up, and often develops a stronger connection to your company than people you later have to recruit from elsewhere at considerable expense.

9.1 Apprenticeships

Germany's dual apprenticeship system remains a key way to secure a skilled workforce. It lets you develop young people's skills around your company's specific needs. Running a modern apprenticeship program also has a strong influence on your employer brand.

Successful apprenticeships require the right mindset. Apprentices are an investment in your company's future, not inexpensive assistants. Generation Z, in particular, expects more than decent apprenticeship pay. Development opportunities, honest feedback, reliable guidance, and a real chance of being hired after the apprenticeship all matter. Employers that credibly offer these things attract tomorrow's top performers.

9.2 Introducing Combined Education Programs

Programs that combine different educational pathways are often particularly effective. A good example is a dual study program, which combines academic knowledge with practical experience at a company. Students learn at university and apply that knowledge directly in the workplace.

Other hybrid options include degree programs that incorporate apprenticeships, or apprenticeships with additional qualifications in areas such as digitalization or management. High-achieving young people find these pathways especially attractive because they do not have to choose between theory and practice. Companies offering them position themselves as modern employers with real development opportunities.

9.3 Becoming a University's Practical Training Partner

An often underestimated way to build early connections with talent is a formal partnership with a university. Becoming a certified practical training partner puts your company directly on motivated students' radar.

Partnering on dual study programs brings current academic knowledge into your business. It also gives you several years to get to know potential employees in a real working environment. Their strengths, working styles, and fit become apparent much sooner, substantially reducing the risk of a poor hire. Such partnerships require dependable supervision and adherence to quality standards, but the benefits are considerable. You strengthen your regional position and gain early access to qualified emerging talent.

9.4 Support During the Probationary Period and Early Turnover

One moment in recruiting is often overlooked: the first day on the job. You have advertised the role, conducted interviews, made a decision, and signed a contract. Then what? Someone is standing at reception or outside the workshop, having taken half a day of vacation to arrive on time, and no one really knows who is responsible. This is exactly where many companies begin losing their new hires.

Onboarding Timeline

How to prevent early turnover in the first 90 days: from one week before the start date through month three

**Before day 1:
- 7 days**

Preparation: one week in advance

Provide a workstation, computer, phone, and tools.
Set up access, inform the team, and appoint an onboarding buddy.
Prepare a small, personal welcome gift.

**First day: day
1**

The first day: a critical stage

Arrange a personal welcome from management or the supervisor.
Give a tour, introduce the team, and have lunch together.
Discuss the day's tasks without overwhelming the new hire.

**First week: 7
days**

Orientation and initial training

Hold a short daily check-in of 10–15 minutes with the onboarding buddy.
Introduce the most important processes and systems.
Assign a first work task with clear instructions.

**Meeting 1: 2
weeks**

Structured probationary period check-in

How has the start gone? What is working well?
Have there been times when you felt lost?
How have your first interactions with the team gone?

**Meeting 2: 6
weeks**

Structured probationary period check-in

Make an initial assessment of job skills: where are the gaps?
Which tasks are enjoyable, and which are difficult?
Offer training or job shadowing if appropriate.

**Meeting 3: 3
months**

Structured probationary period check-in

Would you still like to be working here in a year? Be honest.
What is your greatest concern as the probationary period comes to an end?
What would you change about onboarding?

Early turnover—an employee leaving within the first six months—costs more than most people realize. For skilled professionals, the cost can quickly reach five figures. This timeline sets out the minimum every business should implement.

Early turnover—when someone leaves within the first six months—costs more than most people think. The job posting, interviews, onboarding, missed client appointments, and an overburdened team can quickly add up to several thousand euros. For skilled professionals, the total can easily reach five figures. Worst of all, you have to start again from scratch.

The solution is not complicated. Prepare for the first day: have the workstation ready, set up access, and make sure someone personally welcomes the new hire. That may sound obvious, but it is rarely standard practice. Someone who spends an hour in the break room on their first day because the boss is stuck in a meeting may go home wondering whether they made the right decision.

Assign a dedicated onboarding buddy from the team for the first few weeks. Choose a peer, not someone higher in the hierarchy: someone who can answer questions without making the new employee feel awkward. Those questions are rarely about the work itself. They are about the coffee machine, vacation rules, or whether leaving early is acceptable when a child is sick. In the first few weeks, these details often matter more to the decision to stay than salary does.

Hold structured conversations. Instead of waiting for a major performance review at the end of the probationary period, schedule brief check-ins after two weeks, six weeks, and three months. Ask candidly: What is going well? What is troubling you? Is there anything you wish had been handled differently? Each conversation takes twenty minutes. Together, that is about an hour of your time—and, in the best case, it prevents a resignation.

Pay attention to warning signs. Someone who suddenly does only the bare minimum, withdraws from conversations, or calls in sick more often may already have mentally checked out. Address it before a written resignation lands on your desk. Sometimes you can still turn things around. Sometimes you cannot. Waiting, however, guarantees that you lose the opportunity.

One final point: learn from every departure. Anyone who leaves during the probationary period has a reason. A brief, candid exit conversation can tell you more than any HR statistic. Ask directly: What should I have done differently for you to stay? The answers may be uncomfortable or surprisingly simple. Either way, they are useful.

10 Artificial Intelligence in Recruiting

A few years ago, artificial intelligence in recruiting was still largely the preserve of corporations with large IT budgets. That has changed dramatically. Today, a ChatGPT subscription costing a few euros a month can help you draft a job posting in two minutes that once took an entire afternoon. You can draft replies to applicants, improve careers page content, and organize interview questions—all without a dedicated HR department.

For small and medium-sized businesses, this is a real opportunity. With a manageable investment of effort, you can present a more professional image, respond faster, and streamline routine work. There are also limits, legal requirements, and common pitfalls. This chapter explains where AI can help with recruiting today, what legal requirements you need to consider, and how to get started without taking on too much.

10.1 What AI in Recruiting Actually Means

This chapter focuses on two main uses of AI. The first involves generative language models such as ChatGPT, Claude, and Google Gemini. They help you write, summarize, translate, and develop ideas. Think of them as hardworking assistants: useful because they quickly produce a first draft you can build on, not because they know everything better than you do.

The second involves specialized recruiting tools that automatically sort applications, scan resumes, rank candidates, or suggest a shortlist. These tools intervene much more directly in the process. This is where the EU AI Act comes into play; we will examine it in more detail later.

For most SMEs, the second category is still uncommon. The first, however, is extremely useful and more than sufficient as a starting point.

10.2 Where AI Can Help Today

The greatest gains come from tasks that would otherwise involve spending considerable time finding the right words. Four areas stand out.

Write Better Job Postings Faster

A good job posting takes time. It needs to be appealing, honest, compliant with the AGG, and easy to find. AI can generate a first draft in minutes. Give it a description of the position, responsibilities, and company culture, and it will suggest wording. Then edit the result: adjust the tone, remove clichés, and check that every statement truly reflects your company. The result is often better than your own fifth draft, in a fraction of the time.

Create Careers Page and Social Media Content

AI can be a useful sounding board here as well. Ask it to suggest content about your values, employee benefits, team introductions, or short LinkedIn and Instagram posts. The key is never to use the output unchanged. Language models tend to produce generic wording that could describe almost any company. Your own voice emerges through editing.

Draft Applicant Communications

Application acknowledgments, invitations, rejections, and follow-up questions are messages you write repeatedly, and they need to be clear and respectful. Have AI draft strong templates, then adapt them to your style. You will save time while keeping your communication consistent.

Prepare for Interviews and Probationary Period Check-Ins

AI is good at creating structured sets of questions for a particular role or a probationary period check-in. You can also ask it to explain sample responses, helping you distinguish strong answers from weak ones. It cannot replace your understanding of people, but it can make your conversations more systematic.

AI Along the Candidate Journey

Where language models save SMEs significant time today—and where people make the decisions

Artificial intelligence does not replace a recruiter, but it can support almost every stage of the candidate journey. These six stages show where language models such as ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini can reliably help today, and where human involvement remains essential.

1

AWARENESS

Draft a job posting

Enter a description of the position and company culture to receive an AGG-compliant draft in minutes. Time savings: up to 70%. Then adjust the tone and remove clichés.

2

INTEREST

Careers page and social media

Generate drafts about your values, employee benefits, team introductions, or short LinkedIn posts. Bring your own style to the editing process; initial drafts often sound generic.

3

APPLICATION

Acknowledgments and communication

Draft standard messages acknowledging applications, inviting candidates, communicating rejections, or asking follow-up questions. Show consistent respect with minimal effort. A person adds the personal touch.

4

INTERVIEW

Questions and evaluation forms

Create structured questions for a specific role, with sample answers to help assess responses. The interview itself remains a human interaction.

5

DECISION

Where AI's role ends

Article 22 of the GDPR: applicants may not be subject to a decision made solely through automated processing. Sorting is permitted, but a person always decides whether to invite or reject an applicant.

6

ONBOARDING

Templates for the first 90 days

Welcome email, onboarding plan, and guidance for probationary period check-ins: AI provides the structure. Adapting the content to the team and the individual makes the difference.

Rule of thumb for SMEs: A language model used as a writing assistant is not a high-risk system under the EU AI Act. As soon as a tool sorts, filters, or ranks applications, however—even if a person makes the final decision—additional obligations apply from August 2026.

10.4 A Practical Example: A Job Posting in Ten Minutes

Here is an example to make this concrete. Suppose you need an experienced office administrator for a three-person office in a small or medium-sized skilled trades business. You open an AI tool and enter something like this:

“Draft a job posting for an office administrator at a skilled trades business with 25 employees. Responsibilities: preparing records for bookkeeping, processing orders, answering the phone, and handling correspondence. Style: down-to-earth and honest, with no marketing jargon. Follow AGG requirements and include (m/f/d). Length: approximately 350 words.”

The result is a solid draft. As you read it, you notice that three sentences sound too polished, one responsibility is missing, and “dynamic” does not describe your business. You spend ten minutes revising it. In fifteen minutes, you have completed what used to take three hours. This is where AI really helps in everyday work: it accelerates the task while leaving you in control.

The key is to provide enough context. The more precisely you describe your company, what you need, and the tone you want, the better the result. Vague instructions produce vague text.

10.5 Where AI Reaches Its Limits

Useful as AI is for writing, it has clear limitations. Language models sometimes invent facts. They can fabricate sources, supply incorrect figures, or make legal statements sound as if they have been verified. Never rely on AI for legally sensitive statements without checking them. This applies to references to collective bargaining agreements as well as statements about salary ranges, tax allowances, and statutory deadlines.

AI also has a limited understanding of your company. It does not know what your workplace is really like, how people feel, or which values you actually practice. Ask it to describe your culture as an employer, and you will get something that could fit countless other companies. Authenticity comes from you, not a language model.

10.6 Legal Requirements to Keep in Mind

Two key legal frameworks interact when you use AI in recruiting: the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the EU AI Act. They complement rather than replace each other.

Article 22 of the GDPR: No Fully Automated Rejections

Applicants have the right not to be subject to a decision based solely on automated processing when that decision significantly affects them. Rejecting an application has such an effect. In practice, AI may sort or evaluate applications, but a person must make the final decision. That person must have real decision-making authority, rather than simply rubber-stamping the AI's result.

The EU AI Act: Recruiting Is a High-Risk Area

The EU AI Act entered into force on August 1, 2024. Its core obligations for recruiting systems apply from August 2, 2026. Under Annex III, point 4, AI systems used to select applicants or evaluate candidates are automatically classified as high-risk systems, regardless of whether the tool comes from Germany, the United States, or Asia.

If you use such a system—an applicant tracking system with automatic matching, for example, or an AI-powered resume filter—you have specific obligations as its deployer. The most important are:

- Document which AI system you use and for what purpose.
- Ensure human oversight that goes beyond formal approval.
- Inform applicants transparently about the use of AI.
- Implement appropriate technical and organizational measures to protect personal data.
- For systematic use, a data protection impact assessment under the GDPR is recommended.

There is no general exemption for small companies. Any business using an AI recruiting tool is a deployer under the law, even a company with 25 employees. Limited concessions apply to conformity assessments, but the basic obligations remain.

What This Means in Practice

If you use ChatGPT or similar tools to write content, you are not in this high-risk category: you are using AI as a writing assistant. Once a system analyzes, filters, or ranks applications, however, Annex III applies—even if a person makes the final decision.

10.7 Take Discrimination Risks Seriously

A second legal issue deserves particular attention: the General Equal Treatment Act. AI systems can discriminate even if no one deliberately programmed them to do so. A system trained on historical application data in which certain groups were underrepresented learns those patterns as well. As a result, women, older applicants, or applicants with non-German names may receive statistically lower ratings without that outcome having been explicitly programmed.

For employers, this creates a double risk. You are liable for discrimination in the application process even when it originates in a third-party tool. If you use an AI system, ask the provider directly: Has it been tested for bias? Are there records? Can you understand the criteria it uses to evaluate applicants?

If you cannot obtain clear answers, the system is unsuitable for a high-risk recruiting application.

10.8 A Practical Starting Point for SMEs

If you want to start using AI in recruiting today, follow this approach. It is manageable enough to avoid overwhelming you, yet substantial enough to make a noticeable difference.

Step 1: Start with straightforward tasks. Use a language model such as ChatGPT, Claude, or Gemini for job postings, careers page content, applicant emails, and interview guides.

Step 2: Establish clear internal rules. Specify which data may be entered into which systems. As a general rule, applicant data does not belong in publicly available AI tools, if only because of the GDPR.

Step 3: Be transparent. If you use AI in the application process, say so. A notice in your careers page privacy policy and, where appropriate, in the application acknowledgment is usually enough. Applicants have a right to know. Generally, they do not object as long as a person makes the final decision.

Step 4: Only then consider specialized tools. Applicant tracking systems with built-in AI can be useful once your application volume justifies them. If you receive only a handful of applications each month, the effort is not worthwhile. Human screening is faster and more effective at that scale.

Step 5: Keep people in the process. However capable the technology becomes, a person should make the final decision to invite or reject a candidate. Hiring is a matter of trust. You cannot delegate trust.

10.9 Common Mistakes—and How to Avoid Them

Companies using AI in recruiting encounter a few recurring pitfalls. The following are the ones we see most often in our consulting work. All are easy to avoid.

Using text without reviewing it. An AI-generated job posting is a first draft, not a finished document. Read it aloud. Does it sound like you? If not, revise it, or your company will sound like every other employer.

Entering applicant data into publicly available AI tools. Pasting an application into ChatGPT and asking for a summary raises data protection concerns. To use AI to process applications, you need a tool with contractual data protection safeguards and a data processing agreement.

Forgetting to inform applicants. If you use AI, you must disclose it. One sentence in your privacy policy is enough, but it must be there.

Treating AI as a replacement rather than a tool. Delegating hiring decisions to software not only violates Article 22 of the GDPR; it also removes the essentials of recruiting: intuition, experience, and your personal impression of a candidate. These cannot be automated.

Failing to document its use. If you do not document something, you cannot substantiate it in a dispute. A simple internal document listing the tools, their purposes, and the people responsible is sufficient in most cases.

10.10 Introduce AI in 30 Days: A Roadmap

A concrete timetable helps you take a structured approach. The following four-week plan is designed so that even a business owner without an HR department can complete it alongside day-to-day responsibilities.

Week 1: Take stock. Identify where you currently lose the most time: writing job postings, responding to applicant emails, or preparing interviews. List the three most time-consuming tasks. These are your candidates for AI support.

Week 2: Choose and test a tool. Select a language model. ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini all offer free versions suitable for getting started. Try writing two job postings: one as you normally would yourself, and one with AI assistance. Compare the effort and the results.

Week 3: Set the rules. Put in writing which data may be entered into which tools and which may not. Start with a clear rule of thumb: no applicants' personal data in publicly available tools. Explain the rules to everyone involved in recruiting.

Week 4: Be transparent and review the results. Add a brief notice about AI use to your privacy policy. After four weeks, assess what worked and what did not. Expand what has proved useful and stop doing anything that does not add real value.

10.11 Summary

AI is already changing recruiting in significant ways. For SMEs, the greatest opportunities lie in using it to handle routine writing and structuring tasks: job postings, other content, applicant communications, and interview preparation. You can start immediately, with manageable effort and without legal risks.

If you go further and use specialized recruiting AI, you must be prepared for the EU AI Act's high-risk obligations from August 2026. AI does not make good recruiters unnecessary. It makes them more productive.

11 Practical Examples

11.1 The Four-Day Workweek

The world of work is changing profoundly. The four-day workweek, considered a niche arrangement or an experiment just a few years ago, is increasingly becoming a serious tool in the competition for talent. It involves more than shorter hours: it reflects a fundamentally different understanding of productivity, work organization, and what makes an employer attractive.

Many successful models follow the 100-80-100 principle: 100 percent of the output in 80 percent of the time, at 100 percent of the pay.

Studies accompanying pilot projects show that psychological strain often decreases while job satisfaction rises. Companies also report significantly fewer sick days. An additional period of time off each week often gives people more opportunity to recover and helps prevent overwork. Employees may return to work with greater focus and more energy as a result.

An instructive example among Germany's small and medium-sized businesses is the tax advisory firm run by Andreas Schollmeier, a business administration graduate and tax advisor in Moers. Since July 2022, everyone at the firm has worked a four-day week. Weekly working hours were reduced from 40 to 36, with no reduction in pay. Schollmeier has written about the transition in his book, "Gamechanger 4-Tage-Woche," and discussed it in numerous interviews. His firm has received the "Top Arbeitgeber (DIQP)" employer award several times with a rating of "very good," based on an independent employee survey conducted in 2021.

The decision to introduce a four-day workweek was both personal and strategic. Schollmeier started with four employees in 2019, and the team grew considerably within a few years. External pressures, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and numerous legislative changes, had increased the workload. There was also a clear business rationale: in a market where qualified tax professionals are extremely scarce, an unusually attractive working arrangement can provide a decisive competitive advantage.

A thorough shift to digital processes was essential. In an interview with Haufe Taxulting on August 10, 2022, Schollmeier explained that improved processes and digital tools had freed up considerable amounts of time. His central point was that productivity matters more than time spent at work.

The effect on recruiting was clearly measurable. In that interview, Schollmeier said, “We received more applications in one week than in the previous three years.” Since then, he reported, he had been able to choose among several excellent applicants (source: Haufe Taxulting, interview by Sarah Beha, August 10, 2022). In Daniel Kubitz’s “Steuermannschaft” podcast in July 2024, Schollmeier also reported high application numbers and low turnover since introducing the arrangement. By 2024, his team had grown from 15 to 18 employees (source: DIE WIRTSCHAFT KÖLN, May 2024).

One statement by Schollmeier sums up the experience: “If you want a four-day workweek, you can make it work, even in a larger company” (Haufe Taxulting, August 10, 2022). These results come from a single tax advisory firm and may not be readily transferable to other industries or businesses of different sizes. However, many pilot projects across different industries have now confirmed the broader pattern of shorter working hours helping employers recruit.

The four-day workweek is much more than a short-lived trend. It offers a serious response to a working world in which knowledge, concentration, and personal responsibility are becoming increasingly important. Its positive effects on health, motivation, and satisfaction last when the arrangement rests on trust, clarity, and mutual dependability. Employees who experience this kind of appreciation often identify much more strongly with their employer and communicate that positive impression to others.

Business owners considering this step can draw an important lesson: the arrangement is feasible in far more industries than many initially assume. Whether in the skilled trades, care, or consulting, willingness to question existing structures matters more than the industry itself. Tasks need to be allocated more intelligently, management practices need to evolve, and unnecessary processes need to be consistently reduced.

Introducing a four-day workweek is therefore both an organizational change and a clear signal. It shows potential applicants that the company is willing to try new approaches and put people first in practice. In a competitive labor market, bold, credible decisions like this often make the difference between stagnation and growth. Acting today significantly improves your chances of attracting tomorrow's skilled workers.

11.2 Skilled Trades: When the Workshop Becomes a Stage

Imagine a plumbing business in Lower Saxony that has struggled with staff shortages for years. The owner, about 55, faces the same problem as many others in the trade: applications have all but dried up, and the few that arrive are rarely a good fit. At a training session run by the Chamber of Skilled Crafts, he hears from a colleague who has been experimenting with TikTok. His initial reaction is skepticism.

Six months later, the business has established a simple routine. Once a week, its youngest journeyman, aged 21, uses his phone to film a task from his working day. There is no script, editing, or professional camera. One video shows him connecting a heating unit; another shows the team having lunch together. None lasts more than a minute.

Little happened in the first few weeks. Then a video showing a repair to an old boiler went viral, attracting about 80,000 views in four days. Three weeks later, the business had received six serious applications, five from the immediate area. It was able to hire two apprentices.

The example offers three lessons. First, authenticity matters more than polish. Perfect promotional videos will not earn you credibility on TikTok; showing everyday working life will. Second, let younger employees take the lead. They understand the platform and its visual language. Third, give the format time. Not every video will be a hit, but if you keep at it, people will find you.

11.3 Care: A Neighborhood Approach

In 2023, a home care provider in a midsize city in the Ruhr region faced a serious problem. Three care workers had left in succession, and the vacancies had remained unfilled for months. The managing director decided to rethink the approach from the ground up.

Instead of advertising again on the major job boards and competing with hospitals and other care providers, she took a different route. Once a quarter, she held an open afternoon with coffee at her office. Notices in local supermarkets, pharmacies, and bakeries invited people from the neighborhood who were interested in returning to care work or moving into the field from another career. No application or resume was required: people could simply drop in.

Four people attended each of the first two events. The third attracted eleven. Within eight months, the provider filled four positions with people it would never have found on a conventional job board. Three were women who wanted to return to work after raising a family and had previously been put off by the effort of submitting a formal application.

The decisive factor was how easy it was to take the first step. No one had to apply. Initially, it was simply a conversation over coffee and cake, with no commitment. Those who expressed interest were then contacted individually and invited to spend time observing the team at work.

In care, personal connections, local roots, and an easy way to get started often work better than job postings alone. Major job boards are less often the right channel here. Talking to people in your own neighborhood often achieves more than posting another advertisement on Indeed.

11.4 Manufacturing: The Company Shuttle as a Calling Card

A midsize metalworking company in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania with 80 employees faced a familiar location problem. Its plant was in an industrial park eight kilometers outside the nearest larger city, with no public transportation connection. Anyone who wanted a production job had to own a car. That excluded a significant group of potential applicants: people entering the workforce, career changers, and young people without a driver's license.

Instead of accepting the situation, management invested in a solution. In spring 2024, the company introduced its own employee shuttle. A small, 15-seat bus runs two routes from the city to the plant in the morning and back in the afternoon. Employees pay nothing. The investment was approximately €35,000 for the bus, plus the monthly cost of a part-time driver.

The recruiting results were immediately measurable. Applications for production roles tripled within six months. Two young men from Syria who lived in the city and did not own vehicles were hired for jobs with on-the-job training. A mother of two planning to return to work applied only because the question of how she would get to work each morning had been resolved.

The lesson is that the biggest recruiting obstacles sometimes lie in practical, everyday problems, rather than pay or employer image. Taking your ideal candidates' circumstances seriously and offering concrete solutions creates a competitive advantage that others cannot quickly copy. The bus does more than transport people. It sends a clear message: we consider our employees' needs, even when we are not required to.

12 Eight Steps to More Applications

12.1 Taking Stock

Before investing in new campaigns, advertisements, or greater reach, you need to know where your business currently stands in the market. Recruiting without understanding your starting point often means spending money without making a meaningful difference. An honest assessment is the foundation for everything that follows.

Two perspectives matter:

Looking Inside the Business

Do not rely on assumptions about how people feel at work. Measure it. Regular employee surveys are essential. You can build a strong employer brand only if you understand why people enjoy working for you and what makes their work difficult. The key question is whether your employees would actively recommend you as an employer. If the answer is not a clear yes, work on your culture before stepping up your external communications.

Looking Outside the Business

Who competes with you for employees, and how do they present themselves? How does your target audience see you? Take a critical look at your existing recruiting channels:

- **Visibility:** Are your job postings reaching people where your ideal candidates actually spend time, for example on specialist job boards or social media?

- **Barriers:** How complicated is the application process? Do candidates have to labor through forms, or can they apply with a click?
- **Competition:** What do your direct competitors offer? If you advertise “flat hierarchies” while the business next door attracts people with a “four-day workweek” or “genuine support for families,” you need to rethink your approach.

The aim of this first step is to identify the gaps between your perception of the business and reality. Identify your real strengths, such as formal recognition as a family-friendly employer, and build your future strategy on them. A thorough assessment is essential to choosing the right actions next.

12.2 The Employee Survey

With the foundation in place, it is time to get to the heart of the matter. An internal survey is more than an unwelcome obligation: it is your most valuable market research tool. Unless you understand your own people, you will never find the right applicants in the wider market.

This step is crucial because employees are the only people who know what your company feels like from the ground up. Listening closely and responding to their needs lays a solid foundation for success.

What really matters in a survey:

- **Anonymity:** People will not answer honestly if they fear consequences. Use an independent service provider to ensure complete anonymity. This is the only way to hear the unfiltered truth, even when it is uncomfortable.
- **Ask the right questions:** Use questionnaires grounded in research. Common approaches include Gallup's Q12, the DIQP standards, and established sets of questions from HR research. The right questionnaire depends on the size of your company and what you want to learn from the results. Add questions tailored to your business as needed.

Roadmap: Eight Steps to More Applications

From Your Current Position to Significantly More Applications from Qualified Candidates

01 Take stock

Look inside and outside the business: measure team morale, analyze competitors, and assess your visibility.

02 Survey employees

Use an anonymous survey grounded in research. Act on the results: a survey with no follow-up frustrates the team.

03 Review competitors and channels

What selling points do competitors use? Where is your target audience active? Allocate your budget deliberately.

04 Simplify the process

Make the first step easy: a name, phone number, and resume are enough. Skip the cover letter. Design for mobile first.

05 Respond quickly and personally

Make a fast response a competitive advantage. Call promptly after an application arrives. Provide a named contact.

06 Build visibility

Use your careers page, relevant job boards, and social media strategically. Let employees speak for themselves.

07 Create a referral program

Your employees know people in their networks. Clear incentives reduce the risk of poor hiring decisions and bring in candidates who are a better fit.

08 Build trust through recognition

A reputable employer certification provides an independent signal of trust. Under EmpCo, use only certifications with a transparent methodology from September 2026 onward.

Sequence: This order is a recommendation, not a rigid rule. However, steps 1 and 2 are prerequisites for the others. Without a thorough assessment, your communications will remain generic.

- **Social proof:** Pay attention to areas such as support for families. If your workforce gives this aspect positive ratings more often than average, you have found your strongest selling point in the labor market. Formal recognition as a family-friendly employer simply confirms what is already part of everyday working life.

You want to understand what sustains your business from within. These insights provide the basis for future job postings and social media content. If employees truly value flexible working arrangements or quick decisions, you do not need to manufacture an image. You can communicate credible strengths.

One point is essential: a survey that leads to no action is worthless. When problems emerge, you must address them. Few things frustrate a team more than discovering that nothing changes after a survey. Your external communications become credible only when you act internally.

12.4 More Applications from the Right Candidates

To fill vacancies successfully, focus on the tasks that matter most in establishing a convincing position as an employer.

Analyze Your Competitors and Their Offers

Examine how your direct competitors in the region present themselves. What selling points do they use? What working arrangements do they offer? Which benefits do they highlight? If other employers are already drawing attention with flexible hours, a four-day workweek, or clear benefits for families, advertising the basics will no longer be enough. You need to understand how others compete for the same talent to define your own position more clearly.

Reach Your Audience Where They Are Active

Do not spend money on channels your target audience does not use. Recruiting apprentices calls for different platforms than recruiting experienced specialists. Young people and experienced professionals need to be reached differently. TikTok or Instagram may be crucial for some audiences; LinkedIn or specialist platforms may be more relevant to others. Analyze where people show an interest in changing jobs and where competitors are leaving opportunities untapped.

Make Speed a Competitive Advantage

The market moves quickly. Good candidates will not wait weeks for a response. People who receive several offers in a short period often decide based on speed, clarity, and their personal impression. A slow process can cost you candidates before the first interview. Accelerating the application process is therefore a priority. Streamline your procedures and look for ways to make personal contact sooner.

Simplify the Application Process

Ask yourself honestly how easy you make it for interested candidates to contact you. If they first have to write a detailed cover letter and upload numerous documents, you will lose many of them at the outset.

A much shorter application can be a simple solution. In many cases, a name, phone number, and perhaps a profile link are enough for the first step. You can discuss everything else in the initial conversation. The easier it is to get started, the more likely you are to hear from good candidates who would otherwise be deterred by complicated procedures.

Some businesses now go further, using specialist call centers to make initial contact as easy as possible. For many applicants, a brief phone call instead of a cumbersome online form conveys appreciation from the outset. This is rarely cost-effective for smaller businesses, but the principle applies everywhere: make it easy for people to start a conversation with you.

Build Trust by Showing the People Behind the Business

Simply posting “We’re hiring!” is rarely enough today. Show what defines your company in everyday working life. Use what you learned from your employee survey and let employees speak for themselves. Short interviews or glimpses of real situations have much more impact than abstract advertising promises.

If your company is particularly strong in areas such as support for families or flexibility, make those strengths visible through examples people can understand and verify.

Create a Referral Program

Your employees know your business. They know who might have the right skills and fit well with the team. This makes referral programs an effective tool. Encouraging and fairly rewarding good referrals from your own workforce often reduces hiring mistakes and brings in candidates who are a better fit.

Use Social Media Effectively

Go beyond job postings and use formats that show people and everyday working life. Short video interviews with employees work particularly well. When someone explains credibly how the company makes it possible to balance work and personal life, the impact is far greater than that of a written advertisement.

Communicate your company's strengths through stories as well as statements. Concrete situations from everyday life are much more memorable than abstract terms.

Focus on your target audience, while allowing for some reach beyond it. Targeted social media campaigns may be the right choice if they suit that audience.

Take Phone Calls Seriously

Personal contact makes a real difference in a digital world full of automated processes. A brief, friendly conversation soon after someone applies often leaves a much stronger impression than an automated acknowledgment. Prompt communication signals respect and professionalism.

Post Jobs Where Your Target Audience Actually Looks

An advertisement in the local paper or a notice on your own website used to be enough in many cases. Today, it usually is not. Reaching qualified professionals requires a broader approach. Use major online job boards, specialist platforms, and relevant social media. Companies that ignore these channels can quickly look out of date, especially to younger audiences. Find out where your ideal candidates spend time and get information, then post your openings there.

Increase Your Company's Visibility

Digital reach matters, but a physical presence remains just as valuable. To become a familiar employer, be visible offline too. Regional job and apprenticeship fairs are good opportunities. Partnerships with schools and universities help you connect with young talent early. An open house can also make people more comfortable approaching you and give them a chance to speak directly with your team.

Build a Positive Local Reputation

Alongside direct recruiting, work on being known in your community as an approachable, engaged employer. Sponsoring a local club, taking part in regional events, or organizing community activities with your team helps people remember your company positively. That existing impression may make the difference when you advertise a vacancy later.

Create Appealing Workplaces

Pay used to be the central consideration for many employees. It still matters, of course, but it is rarely the only focus. People increasingly value the conditions an employer creates.

Design workplaces where people enjoy spending time and working. Ergonomic equipment, comfortable common areas, free drinks, and thoughtfully planned quiet spaces are meaningful details. What matters is the message they convey. Your team and potential applicants should see that your company takes health, well-being, and appreciation seriously.

Treat Applicants with Respect

The way you treat interested candidates is often underestimated. Show appreciation from the first contact. Start with a job posting that is open, welcoming, and respectful. During the interview, take an interest in the person as well as their resume and qualifications. A conversation with prospective colleagues or a short tour of the workplace shows that your interest is sincere.

Communicate Openly About Application Status

Some companies still take far too long during the application process. Weeks of silence put people off, and strong candidates quickly look elsewhere. Respond promptly to initial contact, acknowledge receipt of application materials, and follow up soon after interviews. Clear communication that keeps applicants informed makes you a professional, dependable employer in their eyes.

Write Respectful Rejection Messages

When you can choose among several excellent candidates, how you handle rejections also reflects your quality as an employer. Be polite, respectful, and encouraging. Recognize how far the person progressed and make it clear that you took their application seriously. If they wish, you can also offer to keep their materials on file for future openings. Over time, this builds a valuable talent pool you can draw on later.

Modernize Your Website

Professionals usually look at your website before applying. Young talent responds particularly strongly to a modern, well-maintained website that uses a range of media. Make the most of that opportunity: provide honest insights and make it easy to contact you. Present yourself as a modern employer and build trust before an application arrives.

Make Your Company Values Visible

Although pay often dominated in the past, many applicants now pay much closer attention to whether a company's values match their own. Your online presence should offer real insight into your attitudes and culture, beyond surface-level information. Keep the "About Us" section up to date and show your commitment to the wider community.

Highlight Positive Feedback

To find out what employees appreciate about your company, ask them directly. Their authentic feedback can be used effectively on your website or social media. Short video testimonials from team members are particularly credible. They create a personal connection and have far more impact than anonymous advertising messages. Thank employees for their support as well. This strengthens their connection to the company and encourages them to contribute again.

Make Active Use of Review Platforms

Employer review sites are a routine part of many applicants' research. The more positive and credible your presence there, the more it helps your recruiting. Actual employee satisfaction must always be the foundation. Once that is in place, actively encourage employees to share their experiences publicly. You can then include positive reviews in your own communications as credible endorsements.

Obtain a Reputable Employer Certification

Recognized employer certifications take this a step further. Established examples in the German market include kununu Top Company and DIQP awards such as "Top Arbeitgeber" (Top Employer), "Familienfreundlicher Arbeitgeber" (Family-Friendly Employer), and "Top Ausbildungsbetrieb" (Top Apprenticeship Employer). Reputable certifications share a common basis: a sound employee survey. They show that above-average satisfaction has been verified. The analysis also gives you valuable insight into where you can improve. Use the award consistently in your communications, on your website, in job postings, in media relations, and on social media.

13 Appendix: Practical Resources

The following pages contain practical resources you can use in your business right away: three sample job postings for common recruiting needs in SMEs, an onboarding checklist for the first few weeks, and a guide to structured probationary period reviews. These resources are starting points, rather than finished products. Adapt them to your industry, your voice, and the realities of your business before using them.

13.1 Resource 1: Job Posting for the Skilled Trades

The following posting is suitable for recruiting a qualified journey person in a skilled trades business. It is deliberately short: long job postings in the skilled trades are rarely read to the end.

Automotive Mechatronics Technician (m/f/d) Wanted: Let Us Make Your Working Day Better

Would you like to do good work with a team that really knows you? We are looking for someone to join us in [Town/City]. We are a family business with twelve employees, half of whom have been with us for more than ten years.

What we offer:

- A fixed salary of €3,200 to €3,800, depending on experience
- The option of a four-day workweek after you have settled into the role
- A €50 fuel voucher each month
- A modern workshop with up-to-date diagnostic equipment
- Real opportunities to stay on after completing an apprenticeship

What we are looking for:

- A completed apprenticeship as an automotive mechatronics technician (m/f/d) or an equivalent qualification
- Enjoyment of working on cars and sharing ideas with the team
- A Class B driver's license

Sound like you? Give us a call or send your resume by WhatsApp to [Number]. We will get back to you within two business days. That is a promise.

[Owner's Name], [Phone], [Address], [Website]

13.2 Resource 2: Job Posting for an Administrative Assistant

This posting suits an administrative position in a professional firm, medical practice, or service business. Its tone is slightly more formal than the skilled trades posting, while remaining personal.

Administrative Assistant (m/f/d) for Our Tax Advisory Firm

We are a tax advisory firm with eight employees serving small and medium-sized business clients in [Region]. We are looking for an administrative assistant to join our team and grow with us.

Your responsibilities:

- Provide administrative support to our tax professionals
- Communicate with clients by phone and email
- Manage appointments and correspondence and handle basic bookkeeping
- Help develop our digital filing system

Your qualifications:

- Completed vocational training in business administration; career changers are also welcome
- Proficiency in Microsoft Office; knowledge of DATEV is a plus
- Enjoyment of organized work and working with people

What we offer:

- A fixed salary of €2,800 to €3,400, depending on qualifications and experience
- 30 vacation days and flexible working hours between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.
- Up to two days a week working from home after the initial training period
- Thorough onboarding with a designated onboarding buddy on the team
- Annual professional development, fully paid for by us

We welcome a brief application by email to [Email] or an initial phone call at [Number]. A complete resume is enough; no detailed cover letter is required.

13.3 Resource 3: IT Job Posting

IT candidates are particularly alert to empty language, so this posting stays factual and specific.

IT Systems Integration Specialist (m/f/d)

We manage the IT infrastructure of approximately 60 small and medium-sized business clients in the greater [Region] area. Our team of six is growing, and we are looking for another team member.

What you will work with:

- Microsoft 365, Azure AD, and Microsoft Server 2019/2022
- Firewall configuration with Sophos and Fortinet
- Veeam backup systems and monitoring
- On-site visits to clients within a 60-kilometer radius, approximately two days a week

What we offer:

- A starting salary of €48,000 to €58,000 gross per year, depending on experience
- A company car from day one, including personal use
- 30 vacation days, four of which can be converted to special leave on request
- A meaningful professional development commitment: one certification of your choice each year, fully funded
- Work from home on days without client appointments

What we are looking for:

- Completed vocational training in IT or comparable professional experience
- Proficiency with Windows servers and common networking technologies
- A Class B driver's license and willingness to support clients on site

Keep your application simple: a resume is enough. Send it to [Email] or contact us on LinkedIn. We are also happy to hold initial interviews by video call.

13.4 Resource 4: Onboarding Checklist for the First Few Weeks

This checklist helps you introduce new employees to the business systematically. Print it, post it on a bulletin board, and check off each completed item. It may look simple, but in many businesses it has made the difference between early turnover and long-term retention.

Before the First Day: One Week in Advance

- ☐ Prepare the workspace: desk, chair, computer, phone, and tools.
- ☐ Set up access: email address, IT accounts, keys, and locker.
- ☐ Inform the team about the new hire, ideally in a group email with a photo and short profile.
- ☐ Assign a team member as an onboarding buddy and discuss the role.
- ☐ Prepare a welcome gift. It need not be expensive, but it should be personal.
- ☐ Outline the first week's schedule.

The First Day

- ☐ Arrange a personal welcome from management or the employee's direct supervisor.
- ☐ Tour the workplace and introduce team members.
- ☐ Show the employee their workspace and test access together.
- ☐ Have lunch or take a break with the team.
- ☐ Discuss the day's tasks without overwhelming the new employee.
- ☐ Provide the onboarding buddy's phone number for questions.

The First Week

- ☐ Hold a brief daily check-in with the supervisor or onboarding buddy, lasting 10 to 15 minutes.
- ☐ Introduce key processes and systems.
- ☐ Assign a first work task with clear instructions and expectations.
- ☐ Introduce key clients or contacts in other functions, where relevant.
- ☐ Resolve contractual and administrative matters with HR, including social insurance, income tax withholding, and vacation.

After Two Weeks

- ☐ Hold the first structured meeting with the supervisor. How has the start gone? What is working well, and what feels confusing or uncomfortable?
- ☐ Resolve outstanding questions about the work and how the business operates.
- ☐ Adjust onboarding if the pace is too fast or too slow.

After Six Weeks

- ☐ Hold the second meeting and make an initial assessment of work performance. Where is the employee confident, and where are there still gaps?
- ☐ Offer targeted training or job shadowing if needed.
- ☐ Ask the team how the new colleague is fitting in.

After Three Months

- ☐ Hold the third meeting, with a clear focus on the remaining months of the probationary period.
- ☐ Set specific development goals for the coming months.
- ☐ Exchange feedback: what is working, and what else would each side like to see?

13.5 Resource 5: Guide to Structured Probationary Period Reviews

Probationary period reviews often happen too late and lack structure. This guide offers a simple framework that takes 20 to 30 minutes per meeting. Use it three times: after two weeks, after six weeks, and after three months.

Preparation

- Choose a quiet place, preferably away from the employee's workstation.
- Set aside 30 minutes and close the door.
- Take notes in a notebook instead of on a laptop. It feels more personal.
- If possible, let the employee know two or three days ahead that you would like a brief conversation.

Opening: 2 Minutes

"I'm glad we have made time to talk. I'd like to check how you are settling in, what is going well, and where we can make adjustments. This is not a performance review in the usual sense. I want to hear your perspective."

Questions After Two Weeks: About 15 Minutes

- How was your first week? What went particularly well?
- Were there moments when you felt unsure what to do or where to turn?
- How have you connected with the team? Who have you worked with so far?
- Are the tasks what you expected?
- What would you have liked us to do differently during onboarding?
- Do you have everything you need for your work?

Questions After Six Weeks

- How has your impression of the business changed since your first day?
- Which task do you enjoy most? Which do you find more difficult?
- How are things going with your onboarding buddy?
- What would you like to learn that you have not learned yet?
- Is anything worrying you or making you feel uncertain?
- How would you describe the atmosphere in the team? What have you noticed?

Questions After Three Months

- Would you like to be working here a year from now? Please answer honestly.
- What would concern you most as the probationary period comes to an end?
- What opportunities do you see for your development here?
- What would you change about our onboarding process?
- Where do you see yourself in two to three years?
- What do you need from me or the team to keep moving forward?

Closing: 3 Minutes

Summarize the three most important points from the conversation. State specifically what you will do and what you expect from the employee. Write down one or two concrete agreements for the coming weeks. Thank the employee for speaking openly.

13.6 Resource 6: Employee Job Satisfaction Survey

An employee survey is one of the most effective ways to assess morale reliably. The following resource has proved useful in practice and covers the most important topics. Employees need to trust that their responses will remain anonymous. Without that foundation, the answers will be distorted. Smaller businesses should consider having an external organization analyze the results, such as a consulting firm, an association, or a provider specializing in employer certifications.

Introduction for Employees

Dear Employees,

We are conducting an anonymous employee survey on behalf of your employer. Please take five to ten minutes to answer the following questions.

When answering open-ended questions, please do not include information that could identify you or anyone else. Information about data security and data protection under Articles 13 and 14 of the GDPR is provided with the questionnaire.

A note on language: For readability, the German original sometimes uses masculine forms. All references are intended to include people of every gender and identity.

Thank you for taking part.

Instructions

- Select exactly one response for each statement.
- There are no right or wrong answers. We want your personal assessment.

- All responses will be analyzed anonymously.

Rating scale for all statements: 1 = Strongly agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Somewhat agree; 4 = Somewhat disagree; 5 = Disagree; 6 = Strongly disagree.

Section 1: The Company

Overall, I am satisfied with my employer.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

I would recommend our company based on its products or services.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

I am proud to work for our company.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Our company uses feedback to identify improvements.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Our company offers enough benefits that are meaningful to employees.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Section 2: Workplace and Working Conditions

I am satisfied with my career and advancement opportunities at our company.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Our company enables me to balance work and family life well.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Our company offers flexible working hours, at least when needed.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

I am paid fairly at our company.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Our company recognizes good performance and achievements.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

I feel informed about developments and our company's strategic direction.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

I feel encouraged to contribute ideas and suggestions for improvement.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Our company reviews employees' suggestions for improvement and implements them where possible.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

I am satisfied with the working conditions at our company.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Feedback is welcomed and shared at every level of our company.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Is there anything about your employer or workplace that bothers you?

☐ No, nothing bothers me. ☐ Yes, I would like to see the following change:

If yes, what would you like to add?

Think back to when you started your current position. Compared with then, your overall job satisfaction has:

☐ Increased significantly ☐ Increased somewhat ☐ Stayed the same
☐ Decreased somewhat ☐ Decreased significantly ☐ Don't know

Section 3: Your Work

I have the autonomy I need in my day-to-day work.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

I would describe my work as varied and interesting.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Employee performance is reviewed regularly.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

I consider performance reviews fair.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

I can make my own decisions about how I do my work.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

I understand our organization's internal processes well.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Work objectives are realistic and achievable.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Overall, I am satisfied with my work.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Information is shared effectively within the team.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Section 4: Learning and Sharing Experience

I have the knowledge I need for my day-to-day work.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Our company encourages employees' ongoing professional development.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

I have enough time to keep my work-related knowledge up to date.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

I receive enough support when my work presents new demands.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Section 5: Teamwork and Working Atmosphere

Our company has a positive working atmosphere.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

When mistakes happen, our company looks for solutions rather than assigning blame.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Our company values each person's competence, regardless of age, gender, or background.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Initiative and personal responsibility are important at our company.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

We can speak openly about problems and difficult issues at our company.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Section 6: Supervisors and Leadership

Information is shared effectively between employees and managers.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

My direct supervisor explains what they do and follows through on what they say.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

My direct supervisor is open to ideas and suggestions.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

My direct supervisor encourages and motivates me to take responsibility for my work.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

My direct supervisor sets clear, realistic goals and establishes priorities.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

My direct supervisor recognizes good work.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

My direct supervisor accepts criticism of their own actions.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Section 7: Overall Satisfaction

I would recommend our company as an employer.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

I am happy working at our company.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

I am happy to contribute to our company's success.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

If I were making the decision again today, I would apply to our company again.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

I would like to continue working at our company in the future.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Have you recommended your employer to others, or would you recommend your employer?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Section 8: Support for Families

Supporting families is important to our company.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Our company enables parents and employees with caregiving responsibilities to balance work and family life.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Overall, I am satisfied with the range of options currently available to help me balance work and family life.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

I can balance work and family life well at our company.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

My direct supervisor supports me in balancing work and family life.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

I would recommend our company as a family-friendly employer.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Section 9: Your Suggestions for Improvement

Do you have any suggestions for improvement that you would like to share with your employer?

Thank you for taking part. Your feedback helps us continue improving our company.

13.7 Resource 7: Tax-Advantaged Benefits

A good benefits package can make the difference in competing for talent, especially in small and medium-sized businesses, where there is often less room to increase pay than at large corporations. A major advantage is that many benefits are exempt from tax and social insurance contributions. Every euro the employer spends reaches the employee. With a conventional pay increase, 35 to 45 percent is usually lost to taxes and social insurance contributions.

The list below presents the main options using the current amounts for 2026. It is not a substitute for tax advice. Before introducing any measure, consult your tax advisor or payroll provider to ensure that the details and documentation requirements are handled correctly.

Benefits in Kind and Small Gifts

Under Section 8(2), sentence 11, of the German Income Tax Act (EStG), benefits in kind of up to €50 per employee per month are exempt from tax and social insurance contributions. This amounts to €600 per person over a year. The benefit must be provided in kind, rather than in cash, and must be granted in addition to salary.

In practice, fuel cards, locally redeemable shopping vouchers, and dedicated benefit cards work particularly well. This is an exemption threshold, not a tax-free allowance: exceeding it by even one cent makes the entire amount taxable.

Small gifts for personal occasions are also tax-free up to €60 per occasion. Birthdays, weddings, the birth of a child, company anniversaries, and passing an exam are opportunities to give something personal in addition to the monthly benefit in kind. There is no annual limit on the number of such gifts.

Mobility: Commuting and More

Employer-provided transit passes, including the Deutschlandticket, are fully exempt from tax and social insurance contributions under Section 3, no. 15, EStG when provided in addition to salary. The €50 threshold for benefits in kind does not apply. However, the benefit reduces the employee's commuting expense deduction. The Deutschlandticket currently costs €63 a month and is an attractive benefit for many employees.

A company bicycle that employees may use privately is one of the most popular benefits. Its taxable benefit value is just 0.25 percent of the list price per month under Section 6(1), no. 4, sentence 6, EStG. For a €3,000 bicycle, that is €7.50 a month. If financed through salary conversion, it offers employees substantial savings in tax and social insurance contributions. This also works for e-bikes and cargo bikes.

An employer subsidy for commuting between home and work can be taxed at a flat rate of 15 percent under Section 40(2), sentence 2, EStG. The subsidy is capped at the commuting expense deduction the employee could otherwise claim. Employees receive a net financial gain, while employers pay significantly less than they would for an equivalent salary increase.

Health and Recreation

Employer-funded health promotion is exempt from tax and social insurance contributions up to €600 per employee per year under Section 3, no. 34, EStG. Eligible activities include certified preventive health courses under Sections 20 and 20b of Book V of the German Social Code (SGB V), such as back care, stress management, nutrition counseling, exercise programs, and addiction prevention. A standard gym membership generally does not qualify unless the gym offers certified courses.

A recreation allowance is an additional payment to help employees fund time off. The employer can apply a flat tax of 25 percent to annual payments of up to €156 for the employee, €104 for their spouse, and €52 per child. For a family of four, this totals €364 a year. The employee must take at least one week of vacation, and no more than three months may separate the payment and the vacation.

In special cases, such as a medically prescribed course of recuperative treatment after a lengthy illness, a recreation allowance of up to €600 may be entirely tax-free. Be sure to involve your tax advisor in such cases.

Family and Children

Subsidies for child care for children not yet subject to compulsory schooling are exempt from tax and social insurance contributions without an upper limit under Section 3, no. 33, EStG. Eligible expenses include fees for preschools, infant and toddler day care centers, in-home child care providers, and comparable providers. The employee must submit the original invoice to the employer, and the subsidized amount may not be claimed as a special expense on the employee's own tax return.

For children under 14, employers may provide a tax-free payment of up to €600 a year for short-term child care, for example when a child is ill or unexpected work commitments arise, under Section 3, no. 34a, EStG. This sends a meaningful message of support to parents under pressure.

Meals and Refreshments

A meal subsidy of up to €7.67 per working day is possible. This consists of the official benefit-in-kind value for lunch, €4.57 in 2026, plus a tax-free supplement of €3.10. It can be provided through meal vouchers, digital services, or a direct cafeteria subsidy. It is an attractive option for field staff and employees without access to a cafeteria.

Water, coffee, and tea at work are generally not considered taxable benefits. You can therefore provide them without a tax burden. A well-stocked water dispenser and decent coffee cost little and contribute to a pleasant working environment.

Retirement Benefits

Under Section 3, no. 63, EStG, contributions to an occupational pension plan (bAV) are tax-free up to 8 percent of the earnings ceiling for statutory pension insurance contributions. In 2026, this is €676 a month or €8,112 a year. Contributions up to 4 percent of the ceiling, or €338 a month and €4,056 a year, are exempt from social insurance contributions.

Since 2022, employers have been required to add a contribution of at least 15 percent of the amount converted from salary, provided the conversion saves them social insurance contributions. In practice, this is almost always the case. Many SME owners voluntarily contribute 20 or 25 percent, sending a clear signal of commitment to their employees.

The Second Act to Strengthen Occupational Pensions of January 21, 2026, expanded the incentive for low-income earners under Section 100 EStG. Occupational pensions are now even more worthwhile for employees on low incomes.

Work Organization and Flexibility

An internet allowance of up to €50 a month can be provided subject to a flat tax of 25 percent, without the employee submitting individual receipts. A larger reimbursement is possible if the actual work-related share of internet costs is higher, but supporting documentation is then required.

Allowing employees to use a company laptop, smartphone, or tablet privately is fully exempt from tax and social insurance contributions under Section 3, no. 45, EStG. Neither the value of the device nor the extent of private use matters. The device must remain the employer's property.

Employee computer programs work through salary conversion. The employee receives a laptop or tablet for private use, the employer retains ownership, and the lease payment is deducted from gross salary. Salary conversion creates the savings in tax and social insurance contributions.

Flexible schedules, flextime, arrangements that give employees responsibility for managing their hours, and four-day workweeks do not directly receive favorable tax treatment. Nevertheless, they are an important factor in many applicants' decisions. For a practical example of the four-day workweek, see Section 11.1.

Learning and Professional Development

Professional education and training that primarily serve the employer's business interests are fully exempt from tax and social insurance contributions under Section 3, no. 19, EStG. This applies to seminars, language courses, software training, industry events, conferences, and comparable activities. Employers may also cover tuition if the degree program is relevant to the employee's occupation.

Textbooks, professional journals, and digital learning materials for work-related purposes are also exempt from tax and social insurance contributions. A well-stocked professional library at work provides practical value and demonstrates a commitment to learning.

Employee Discounts and Recognition

Under Section 8(3) EStG, employees may receive discounts on their employer's goods and services with a benefit value of up to €1,080 a year, free of tax and social insurance contributions. The goods or services must be part of the employer's regular offering, such as plumbing fixtures from a plumbing business or advisory services from a tax firm.

Employee events and company celebrations are exempt from tax and social insurance contributions up to €110 per employee per event under Section 19(1), no. 1a, EStG. Two events a year are allowed, for a total of up to €220 per person annually. All costs count, including food, drinks, venue rental, music, and an invited accompanying guest.

Private use of a company car is not tax-free, but electric and hybrid vehicles are assigned a lower taxable benefit value. For fully electric vehicles with a gross list price of up to €100,000, the monthly taxable benefit is only 0.25 percent of the list price, compared with 1 percent for vehicles with internal combustion engines. Since July 2025, many midsize and premium models have therefore qualified for this favorable treatment. For sales and field staff, a company car is often the most effective retention benefit.

Important Points When Combining Benefits

Many of these options can be combined. Making full use of them can provide each employee with several thousand euros a year in additional benefits free of tax and social insurance contributions. Always observe three rules.

First, almost all benefits must be provided in addition to the salary already owed. Salary conversion is expressly permitted only for occupational pensions and company bicycles. In all other cases, converting salary would jeopardize the tax exemption.

Second, document everything carefully. Every benefit in kind, small gift, and other benefit must appear in the payroll records and have supporting documentation. In an employer withholding tax audit, you must be able to demonstrate that the requirements were met.

Third, seek advice. The individual rules are complex, and small mistakes can turn a tax-free benefit into a costly liability for back payments. Your tax advisor or payroll provider knows your circumstances and can explain which options suit your business and make financial sense.

13.8 Resource 8: Appealing Employee Benefits

The options in Resource 7 primarily offer tax advantages. A second group of benefits receives no special treatment under conventional tax rules but often makes the decisive difference in attracting talent. They address needs that money alone cannot meet: control over one's time, personal development, balancing work with different stages of life, and mental health. These creative offerings can be especially effective in setting small and medium-sized businesses apart when there is limited room to increase salaries. The following list presents twelve examples that have proved effective in practice.

Workations

A workation combines work and vacation. Employees work for a limited period from a location of their choice, often abroad. The employer grants permission; working hours stay the same, but the location becomes flexible. Typical policies allow two to four weeks a year. For stays abroad, tax and social insurance implications must be assessed individually, especially for periods of 30 days or more. Within the EU, this is usually straightforward; outside the EU, an A1 certificate is required. Clear workation policies can make an employer more attractive, especially to younger knowledge workers.

Sabbaticals and Long-Term Working Time Accounts

A sabbatical is an extended paid or unpaid leave, often lasting three to twelve months. Employees can use it to reassess their direction, travel, pursue a project, or simply recharge. There are two ways to fund it. Under the traditional sabbatical model, employees forgo part of their salary for an agreed period and draw on the accumulated funds during their leave. Alternatively, a long-term working time account lets employees accumulate vacation days, overtime, or portions of salary and later use the balance for time off, caregiving leave, or early retirement. These accounts are clearly regulated under German employment law and provide full social insurance coverage during leave. They are a strong retention tool, especially for experienced professionals in midlife.

Mental Health Days and Employee Assistance Programs

Extra time off specifically for mental health, often called “recharge days” or “mental health days,” is a growing trend. Typically, employees receive two to four additional days a year that require neither an explanation nor a medical certificate. The message is that mental health matters as much as physical health. Employee assistance programs (EAPs) are also worth considering. External providers such as nio and other specialist platforms offer anonymous, confidential psychological counseling, as well as help with legal, financial, and family issues. Support is provided by phone, chat, or video, and the employer pays a flat fee per employee. Employees receive professional help while remaining anonymous, and the business benefits from healthier, more effective teams.

Special Leave for Major Life Events

Special leave can go well beyond statutory requirements. Examples include two or three additional days for an employee's wedding, ten days for fathers following the birth of a child instead of the statutory entitlement, five days of bereavement leave after the death of a close relative, and a day off for moving or a child's first day of school. Progressive employers also recognize grief following the loss of a pet and offer a day off. These days cost the business relatively little but show a level of understanding that employees remember for a long time.

Volunteer Days and Support for Community Involvement

Paid time off for volunteering, often called volunteer days, is becoming increasingly important. Employers commonly offer one to three days a year for charitable activities such as helping at a food bank, supporting a children's home, or taking part in an environmental initiative. Some also provide resources, such as company vehicles for relief work or small donation budgets to complement employees' efforts. This demonstrates a clear commitment to social responsibility. It is also a valuable part of the employer brand, especially among younger generations who care about purpose and impact.

Personal Learning and Development Budgets

Beyond conventional professional development, more employers are giving employees a discretionary learning budget of €500 to €2,000 a year. Employees choose how to use it: language courses, platforms such as LinkedIn Learning or Coursera, conferences, coaching, certifications, or reading materials. The advantage over centrally prescribed training is ownership. Employees invest in what interests them and are much more motivated as a result. Costs remain manageable across the workforce, while the effect on retention can be substantial.

Employee Financial Participation

Traditional arrangements such as profit participation rights, virtual equity, and employee capital participation were long largely confined to major corporations. Practical options now exist for small and medium-sized businesses too. Employees can share financially in the company's success through profit sharing, virtual equity paid out when the business is sold, or an actual stake in its share capital. This has two effects. Employees identify more strongly with the business because they benefit directly from its success, and the arrangement signals trust and a long-term commitment. Expert tax and legal advice is essential.

Concierge Services and Everyday Support

Concierge services have been established in larger German companies for several years and are now gaining a foothold among SMEs. An external provider organizes everyday tasks for employees: scheduling medical appointments, accepting packages, buying gifts, booking tradespeople, planning vacations, and dealing with public authorities. Employees regain valuable hours they would otherwise spend managing their personal lives. At around €30 to €60 per person per month, this service offers noticeable relief, especially for working families.

Dogs in the Office

What sounds like a lifestyle perk has become a meaningful benefit in many industries. Dog owners who can bring their pets to the office have been shown to feel more relaxed, comfortable, and less stressed. Clear rules are essential: standards for the dog's behavior, the team's agreement, consideration of allergies, and a designated area or quiet retreat for the dog. Communicating the policy openly and making it part of the culture can help position the business as an attractive employer for a particular target audience.

A Day Off on Your Birthday

An extra day off for an employee's birthday is a small but effective gift. The message is that, on their special day, the person comes before work. If the birthday falls on a Sunday, the employee can choose a day off in the following weeks. The business gives up one working day per employee per year but creates a memorable expression of appreciation.

Expanded Insurance Benefits

Employer-sponsored supplemental health insurance, occupational disability insurance, and group accident insurance can be expensive or difficult for employees to obtain individually. Employers can arrange significantly better terms while keeping monthly costs manageable. Supplemental health insurance, for example, costs €15 to €40 per person per month and may cover treatment by a chief physician, a private hospital room, contributions toward dental prostheses, or treatment by a Heilpraktiker, a German alternative health practitioner. Employer-funded savings contributions remain a valued traditional benefit because they help employees build assets at a manageable cost.

Flexible Benefits with a Menu of Options

A flexible benefits model offers a practical solution for a workforce with varied needs. Instead of imposing the same benefits on everyone, the company gives each employee a fixed budget to spend according to personal preferences. Parents might choose a child care subsidy and employer-sponsored health insurance; younger employees might prefer a learning budget and an Urban Sports Club membership; older employees might select supplemental health insurance and additional vacation days. These arrangements are usually managed through external platforms and involve a manageable administrative workload. Employees feel their needs are taken seriously because they decide what fits their stage of life.

One final consideration applies to all these options: creative benefits work best when they reflect a sincere commitment and fit the company culture. Allowing dogs in a workplace with strict cleanliness rules can feel contrived. Offering sabbaticals in a business that chronically overworks its staff can feel insulting. Choose benefits that suit your business, your workforce, and your actual circumstances. Three or four benefits implemented consistently are more effective than twelve halfhearted promises.

Bibliography and Sources

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ABOUTTHEAUTHOR

PhDr. Oliver Scharfenberg has been an entrepreneur for more than 20 years and specializes in marketing and employer branding. He helps SMEs position themselves as attractive employers.

