

Industry Leader Q&A: RPO

OI's Frank Casale Talks RPO with WilsonHCG Founder/CEO John Wilson

Frank Casale: Today we're here visiting with John Wilson, Founder and CEO of WilsonHCG. John, the first question I have is when you look at the RPO space now versus five or six years ago, what do you see as some of the critical differences?



Frank: OK, and with some of the cycles that we've all lived through and continue to live through, are you sensing that the scalability up, as well as down, is now critical as well – just that overall flexibility?

John: Yes, absolutely. And it's not just in the scale; it's equally in the flexibility of how the partnership works. Traditional RPO relationships are about hiring 1,000 people one year then having the scalability to increase or decrease that depending on need. But, instead of structuring contracts by a specific number of hires, we understand there might be five or six milestones that a company wants to achieve in the first year or two of our relationship. So, if hiring volumes drop, we're going to focus more on building out employment brands, interview guides, hiring manager trainings and talent communities.



John Wilson: Five years ago, RPO was about big companies outsourcing their recruitment function to save cost. They said, "We have a mess on our hands, but you can have our mess for less." That was really what RPO was.

Now, we see RPO being redefined to focus on talent and go-to-market strategy. Organizations are focusing on employment brands, talent communities and other initiatives and tools that result in better talent.

For example, we have one client that expected extremely high volume for a specific product that ended up not rolling out. It was delayed a year. So, during that time, we created a talent map for the company and identified every single potential employee for that company a year down the road.

Frank: OK. Let's shift to technology. Technology is playing more and more of a role in many processes in most companies these days as well as yours and mine, right? So what can you talk to as far as the role of technology now within RPO?

John: There are two schools of thought when it comes to technology. One is pushing your proprietary technology on all of your clients. The other is to conduct an analysis for each client to determine which technology solutions are best for each organization. We have multiple partnerships for video interviewing, ATS solutions, talent communities and every other recruitment technology. So, we suggest a different set of technology solutions to each client depending on its needs. Where I see technology being a necessity is in our regulatory environment. We need to utilize the technical resources to help us maintain compliance in areas like EEO and OFCCP.

Frank: OK. How about social media? It's tough to read about RPO either in industry trades or in anybody's brochure and not see social media as a go-to, right? What's real, what's hype, what is it really doing for the recruiter?

John: From our perspective, using social media in recruitment for our clients is more about employment branding. Twitter is never going to provide an enormous number of candidates. But Twitter can be a useful tool for getting the word out about a company. Glassdoor is not going to get us many candidates, but Glassdoor is the first place candidates go when they want information about our clients. LinkedIn, on the other hand, provides us a lot of candidates. So, it's about knowing what each social platform represents.

Frank: So, essentially, your point about Glassdoor is that it may not help make a deal, but it could kill a deal, right?

John: Absolutely. Having a presence on Glassdoor is the most basic element for building an employment brand. And it's important to not only have the presence but to be monitoring and managing it.

Frank: So, if you bumped into an old college buddy who's looking to hire an RPO firm, and he asked you to be really agnostic for a moment, what would you suggest he look for under the heading of vendor selection best practices? What should people be looking for right now?

“Focus on the RPO’s ability to deliver talent and its ability to adapt and evolve.”

John: I would tell him to focus on the RPO's ability to deliver quality talent and its ability to adapt and evolve. The reason many of the old RPOs were successful is because the employment market dictated them to be successful. They posted a job and people applied. That's not the case anymore. So, that focus on recruitment quality is number one in determining an RPO's success within an organization. And RPOs should be able to be flexible in terms of scale and changing with the market.

Frank: So, more and more we're hearing that the client companies are looking for a cultural compatibility, and I continue to be intrigued by that. One of the things I struggle with is, how do you define a culture? But you're the leader of this company that you founded, so how would you define the culture here?

John: Hard-working, collaborative, innovative and nimble. When we look internally, those are the attributes we want to see from our people. Our whole company was built on employees' ideas and constant innovation of how to do things better. And I think that we need to maintain and praise that.

Frank: John, last question: as you look into your crystal ball going forward four or five years, what do you see happening in this space?

John: When you talk to analysts, some say it's a \$1.2 billion space today and it will be a \$2.8 billion market sector in the next two years. But, I think you're going to see RPO become more of the standard in the way businesses operate, especially in the mid-sized market and above. Compliance continues to be an obstacle for many companies; they can't handle it internally.

The second point I'll make is that talent is everything. An organization needs to leverage professionals to build an employment brand and build talent communities. The ever-changing technology in recruitment requires professionals who are immersed in the industry. No one knew what video interviewing was three years ago. Now people talk about it like it's a standard practice. Reference checking used to be done over the phone but now it's different. No one was thinking talent communities three years ago or cared about their employment brand; they cared about their company's brand, but they didn't know there was a difference between an employment brand and a company brand. So, with that being said, what are the next three to five years going to look like? We're going to look back at this conversation and realize something that is so important then wasn't even being talked about now.

Frank: Before we conclude, I'm thinking for those out there, the people that you and your team are typically talking to day in and day out, is there anything that's not necessarily intuitive to them, or maybe something they're not thinking of that you would suggest they think of?

John: Yes, it's company culture. I think the chief HR officers out there look at RPO just like they look at outsourcing payroll or some other commodity. Recruitment couldn't be further from a commodity. There has to be a cultural match between the client and the RPO. We encourage every one of our prospects to get on a plane and come here; we'll come see you, but we want them to meet as many of our people as possible. Not the salesperson, not me, but our frontline recruiters – the people who will actually work with them on a daily basis.

***For more information on
Outsourcing Institute offerings & events,
contact us at inquiries@outsourcing.com***