

Written Statement of Dan Solomon
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Before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal
Workforce, and the District of Columbia
Committee on Government Affairs
United States Senate

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this written statement.

My name is Dan Solomon. I am CEO of Virilion, which is an interactive marketing services agency with offices in Austin, Boston, Los Angeles and Washington, DC. We help our clients use digital technologies to gain awareness and build relationships among their key audiences.

We have worked with federal agencies, including the Small Business Administration, FEMA, and the Coast Guard. Specifically, we helped the Coast Guard recruit civilian employees.

I appreciate this opportunity to present my views regarding how federal agencies can improve their recruitment and hiring process to be more friendly to those between the ages of 25 and 35 year olds through new media techniques.

At the outset, let me state my deep admiration for those who serve the public through their federal service. Personally, I have been honored to hold civilian positions in all three branches of government. I learned a great deal from those professional experiences and hope that my efforts were beneficial to those I served.

Also let me express my appreciation for those who have primary responsibility for recruiting younger people for federal service. Younger people are a difficult group to reach and engage.

I will not take the Committee's time to recount the substantial research that shows the shift in media consumption patterns, especially among those 25 to 35 years old, away from television to online. And online, these people have a vast array of outlets and activities presented to them ... causing the audience to be highly fragmented.

And it is this rapidly changing and increasingly rich media landscape that makes the recruiters' job even more difficult.

That said this new media environment gives government agencies a greater opportunity to reach people who are in the process of looking for new career opportunities and to reach people without geographic limitations.

Bottom-line: people are looking for jobs online and the government needs to be there to attract the best. I will be the first one to say that the government cannot rely solely on digital efforts to achieve its recruiting objectives. But online efforts can both reach people directly and help improve the effectiveness of the government recruiters offline efforts.

Government recruiters should be encouraged to deploy the appropriate new media techniques at each stage of a job search or career change: (1) when a person might be exploring federal service, (2) when they are considering different options, and (3) when they are actually making the employment decision.

The internet is now the most frequented place to look for a job. According to a survey conducted by the Conference Board and TNS, nearly three-quarters of workers who looked for a job between January and September 2007 did so online.

But it is no easy task for government recruiters to decide where to go online to attract job seekers' and career changers' attention.

Search engines, such as Google and Yahoo!, are the on-ramp online for most people. If one types in "federal jobs" into a search engine – USAJobs – the government's official job site comes up prominently. But the challenge for recruiters is how to reach those who are not specifically searching for a federal job.

There are over 50,000 job boards online, according to Peter Weddle, a publisher of a guide to job boards. These include sites that are affiliated with newspapers, independent career sites, geographic specific sites, and niche sites run by professional associations and industry groups. Where to post and how to make use of these sites is a challenge for government recruiters.

Social networking sites, such as LinkedIn and those sponsored by alumni groups, are increasingly popular for job hunting. According to a survey done by SelectMinds and reported in eMarketer, nearly three quarters of GenYers said they viewed these networks as very important, compared with 66% of workers age 30-39 and 61% of workers age 40+. The challenge for the government recruiter is to appropriately participate in these communities to attract the attention of talented people.

As I mentioned earlier, the federal recruiter needs to also use online techniques to support their more traditional offline efforts. And offline efforts are important.

A 2007 study by Experience, Inc. asked college students to list their most effective-job hunting resources (multiple answers): in-person networking 40 percent, university career centers, 37%, internships 37% and online job boards 27%.

According to the previously mentioned Conference Board and TNS survey, more than one-half of job seekers said they networked through friends and colleagues.

In this regard, federal recruiters need to be recruiters ... actively following-up on possible leads they have generated through their own networking efforts by e-mail. Overtime, these techniques in the federal recruiters' arsenal will include the use of mobile devices.

The federal recruiters also need to use new media techniques to reach the people who might influence the career decisions of the 25 and 35 year olds offline -- particularly their parents and their friends. This will take some creativity. But needs to be a focus.

Once an agency has someone's attention, the agencies' web sites provide a cost-effective way to get people excited and interested through compelling content. They have lots of competition, including the dreams held out by American Idol and the rest of popular culture. I point to the games and simulations created by the Army as the most significant example. The recruiting web sites of federal agencies need to be more engaging and descriptive of the career opportunities ... not just a stagnant site with government information.

During the hiring process itself, agencies need to incorporate online techniques. The expectation of the 25 to 35 year olds is that they can make choices and manage those choices online. Again according to the Conference Board and TNS survey, 57% percent reported using the Internet to submit resumes and applications. To be successful in its recruiting efforts, government agencies must move meet those expectations.

One thing is certain, the career of a federal recruiter is certainly changing. And I encourage this committee to look not just at what agencies can do to improve their communication efforts but also to help the recruiters improve their skills and expertise. For the government to attract talented people, federal recruiters need to embrace the online world and convey an excitement about public service.

