

AI in recruitment: Real impact in parsing and matching, but human element remains critical

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- AI already effective in narrowing down large talent pools
- Tech impactful in parsing, scraping job and candidate data
- But AI unable to understand cultural fits, and can be manipulated

Big data, artificial intelligence, and machine learning have been circulating throughout the job board and recruitment marketing space for years. Has this technology made life easier for recruiters and revolutionized job boards as predicted?

The answer — yes and no. AI has certainly been key in automating time-intensive data tasks, enabling smaller job boards to easily locate relevant vacancies online, and helping to narrow down huge candidate pools for specific positions. However, the technology remains unable to pinpoint nuanced but critical elements in the recruiting process — such as a candidate's cultural fit and soft skills — while resumes can be manipulated to fit an AI's matching criteria.

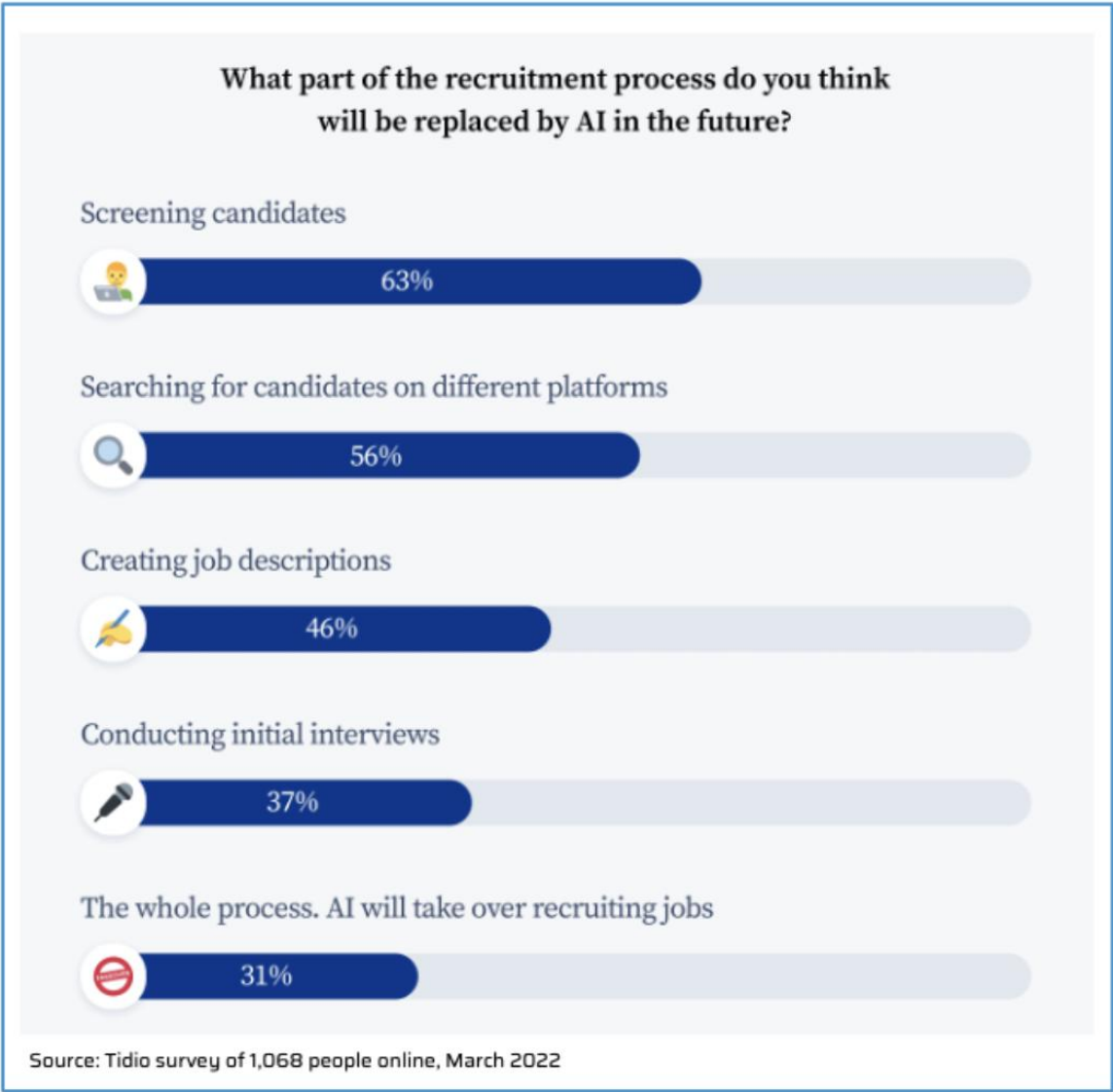
A faster way to find qualified candidates

Noelle Williams is the VP of recruiting for [Kavaliro](#), a professional services agency with an emphasis on IT and workforce services with offices across the U.S. She told the AIM Group that AI and machine learning have improved the sourcing portion of recruiting for recruiters, making it easier for them to find more qualified candidates quicker. However, that success is based on a recruiter's ability to make the right match between the employer and job-seeker.

As president of [Arnold Partners LLC](#), **David Arnold** specializes in the recruitment of CFOs and board members for technology companies throughout the U.S. When recruiting executives for technology clients, Arnold Partners uses AI software called [QLU](#), which acts as a recruitment assistant and automates research, sourcing, and other recruiting bottleneck activities.

When using QLU, Arnold inputs ideal candidate profiles into the software, which uses data from those profiles to search for similar profiles. He said that: "It uncovers candidates whom I don't know, but who have compelling skills and experiences that might be good for the client role."

The software also automatically conducts helpful and timesaving industry research. For example, if Arnold enters three company names, the software immediately returns dozens of other companies in the same industry to target.



Arnold can tag the profiles he likes and remove those he does not like. The more selections he makes, the “smarter” the results become. The software essentially “learns” the ideal profile during the search. To Arnold, this example demonstrates the recruitment industry becoming more of a tech-enabled service, a direction it’s been going toward for years.

"If you are not employing the power of technology in recruiting, both in-house and external recruiters are going to lose," Arnold told the AIM Group. "Previously, many external recruitment firms had proprietary, in-house databases that they guarded as their crown jewels. Then, came LinkedIn, and the notion of a proprietary database is now a joke. With millions of professional profiles on LinkedIn, the key is uncovering four or five of them that a client wants to meet and hire."

"The old-school notion of relationships with thousands of people still holds. Frankly, I turn to LinkedIn first for my clients — to the people I already know and trust. However, when we start to serve a unique industry or location, the direct relationships might not be as deep."

AI solutions solve mostly 'narrow' problems

Austria-based [Jobiqo](#) is a provider of job board software and AI-enabled search and match technology. It enables media brands and publishers worldwide to build next-generation job boards and career marketplaces.

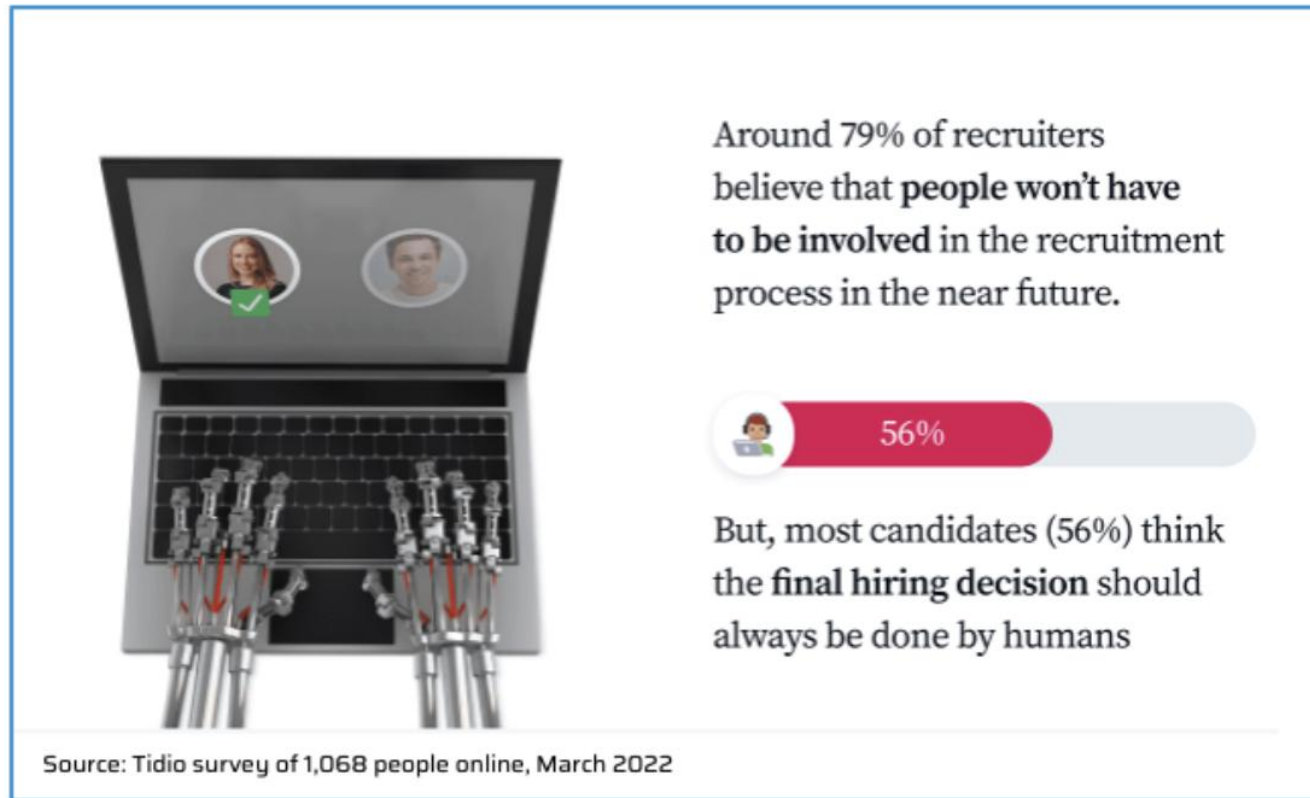
Company CEO **Martin Lenz** told the AIM Group that the ability to collect and process more relevant data, through machine learning and deep learning algorithms, is making a big impact on HR. However, only recently have machine power and data availability helped users make sense of it. Some of these AI solutions can solve mostly "narrow" problems.

"We are unable to expect a general AI solution that fully and automatically connects the right candidate with the right job at the right employer." He feels some people in the market are too excited about the short-term and mid-term impact of big data and AI in the recruitment process," Lenz told us.

"Recruitment is much more complex than e-commerce and more fragmented, depending on the market or country you are working in. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. If you make technology decisions or want to affect change, talk to vendors or partners who promote solving key outcomes of recruitment, such as quality applicants and cost-efficient reach. Those who solely promote AI or big data may distract you from providing a great service to your customers."

Lenz sees a general, natural trend where job boards focus more on transactions and less on engagement. Job boards play an increased role in the pay-per-advertising field, and a growing reach that converts to applications is the key strength of a job board.

"Matching is complex, even with solutions in place. You need to be able to find a narrow user segment to grow enough users and data points to make sense of the matching," Lenz said. He gives the example of a CV database that enables employers to find the best candidates for a job, ranked by a matching score.



The database requires a high volume of candidates to create reasonable results for engagement, which is hard for recruiters to do on their own when they reach out to candidates. If engagement between users on the platform is key to the business model, improved matching capabilities can be a gamechanger to business success.

AI key in programmatic, skills searches

Big data, AI, and machine learning are all making an impact in different ways across the recruitment marketing landscape.

"If you use this technology properly, you can get a lot of good data as it relates to the industry," **Caleb Fullhart**, a senior VP at [Cielo Talent](#), a global talent acquisition company that provides talent acquisition strategies and recruitment process outsourcing solutions, told the AIM Group. "It can help when you know the best time to push out a campaign, or with target marketing of a particular profile."

One way big data is making an impact is through programmatic advertising that enables employers to automate buying and placing job advertisements within their defined budget.

"Just as with consumer advertising, recruiters can make sure their job advertisements get in front of the right people by using software tracking market data, learning from conversion rates, and tracking results," said Fullhart. "Obviously, this saves time for the recruiting team but also ensures that budget dollars are spent wisely."

The last few years have seen an explosion in the development of skills management software. These are built on the foundation of an ontology that defines aspects of a skill, builds a common language, and clarifies the relationship between other skills. It enables employers to quickly and accurately match external candidates and employees to career opportunities, allowing for better decisions, a huge upside for companies financially.

Olivier Breton is the founder and CEO of [NiceBoard.co](#), a job board that focuses on providing easy-to-use software for building niche and community-focused job boards. His company does not focus on big data, but rather on offering job boards for smaller, niche communities.

"The value our job boards provide comes from that smaller, targeted, expert audience," said Breton. "We tend to think small data will always beat the noise of big data when it comes to hiring and that 10 qualified candidates are always better than 1,000 general applications."

Ben Stewart, founder of [Tech Sales Jobs](#), said that, at this point, his startup is focused on automation over big data. His site uses [JBoard.io](#) to automatically pull full job posts, pictures, and descriptions from any job site on the internet.

"It has been significant because it automatically fills the supply side of our website, which is open jobs," said Stewart. "It automates the posting of jobs, which we can then supplement with manually promoted posts."

This automation helps fledgling job boards get started before any revenue kicks in. As a result, the Tech Sales Jobs site distributes jobs even further and automatically to the likes of LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. Stewart and his team also use Buffer, IFTTT, and Zapier to automate other processes and combines those tools accomplish 95% of what they need. The site launched in August and had over 32,000 job views in just its second month of operation.

"Because of all this automation, we can quickly expand our reach and get more users much faster than without it," said Stewart. "Due to this large influx of users, we can then charge for promoted posting spots and help companies reach more people, show them the company's openings, and get brand recognition they might not have."

Robots can't pinpoint cultural fits, yet

Atlanta-based [Gas South](#) is the largest natural gas provider in Southeastern U.S. The company hasn't gone the AI route because it has a variety of specialized roles where significant judgment is required to screen candidates. Instead, the company has implemented various tools to screen more efficiently and effectively. Other than ask questions in online applications, it still employs humans to conduct the screening process.

Secret Holland, VP of HR and community affairs for Gas South, said the company uses [Bryq](#) for assessments on finding a fit for the role and [Vidcruiter](#) for initial interviews and screening. "But, we continue with a personalized approach because finding people that align with our culture and specific team or department is important to us," Holland told the AIM Group.

Holland believes big data and AI are effective for the right company or specific roles "If a recruiter is screening dozens of candidates for a similar role, like customer care agents, perhaps there's a better fit in that environment. For specialized roles, I don't see a good fit," she said.

Many candidates seem to curve their resumes, using certain phrases for specific jobs as they've been taught to do. Holland said this practice could result in AI crowding the pipeline with candidates that aren't qualified because they've learned how to master the art of adjusting resumes to match what's needed to move through the process.

Using AI could cause the hiring manager to miss candidates who possess transferable skills rather than direct experience. Holland said she sees a trend in recruiting that focuses on skills needed versus exact experience for the same role. "AI can only assess skills and experience, but the ability to assess cultural fit and soft skills are missed when using AI," she said.

AI helps reduce time-to-fill rates and eliminates some volume of manual resume review for the recruiting team. However, Holland said she does not see big data and HR matching producing industry-changing results in the near term, especially for the effort it takes to set up each role in the system before posting a position.

"Recruiting requires judgment — and lots of it," said Holland. "Judgment allows for candidates to move across roles that might be a better fit. Humans detect transferable skills better, where the specific rules needed when using AI can limit screening. Companies need to consider automation to help screen hundreds of candidates for a role down to 50-60. But, the actual screening process will always have a human element. I would not want a machine to decide who I hire for my team."

Tech overload can scare away candidates

"Job boards like Indeed and LinkedIn are investing in AI and machine learning so their sites get smarter by trying to find the best candidates to fit each job. The site learns from itself, but it will not replace the human element. AI and machine learning cannot account for the personal and outside factors that affect candidates throughout an interview or hiring process," Kavaliro's Williams said.

Williams and her team have received feedback from candidates that the technological advancements of some job boards are overwhelming. Candidates become uninterested in using them and shut down their job board accounts.

On the recruiting side, Williams has found that technological improvements allow junior recruiters who are still learning and training to find qualified candidates more quickly. At the same time, some advancements take longer for entry-level recruiters to learn.

“Job boards have implemented automatic matching techniques that try to make recruiting easier. However, the process isn’t perfect,” said Williams. “Recruiting will always have a human element that an AI or big data tool will not be able to replicate. Numerous factors of recruiting are more soft skills compared to solely matching technology, candidates, and the job.”

In other words, “data is impactful if the person who is looking at it knows what to do with it,” said Fullhart of Cielo Talent. AI is saving recruitment marketplaces and recruiters manpower hours by helping whittle down huge talent pools — but it’s unlikely to reach a level of being able to pinpoint the ideal candidate, at least not in the near term.