

# Creating a Sourcing, Branding, and Innovation Engine

How a 26-year-old firm uses LinkedIn to stay ahead of the staffing industry curve



In the last decade, the recruiting landscape has undergone some dramatic changes – the biggest being heightened competition for talent since the demand for top professionals [is much higher](#) than supply.

To outpace this competition, recruiting firms need strong brand visibility and systems to reach passive candidates at scale. Without the right tools, it's very easy for staffing agencies – especially smaller organizations – to become outdated or fall through the cracks, even though the job market is currently thriving.

That's why Mee Derby & Company, a 9-person executive staffing agency in Washington, D.C., looks for new ways to stay innovative and outpace industry challenges. We recently chatted with Mee Derby's founder and CEO, Robin Mee, to learn how her team has ventured into new markets, generated thought leadership, and grown by 30% in just one year. Here are some of the biggest lessons that she shared.

## Innovation takes careful, rigorous planning

**LinkedIn:** What does innovation mean for your organization and team?

**Robin:** In good economic times, we have lots more competition. It falls away during the several recessions that have happened over the 26 years that Mee Derby's been in business. So we keep our competitive edge by staying on top of technology and staying ahead of other staffing companies in our industry. We try to embrace technology in an assertive way.

Our company is made up of a core group of people who have piloted Mee Derby's innovative mindset success over the last 26 years. We've got incredible tenure with one of my team members has been here for 22 years. Another just celebrated 15 years next week with the firm. I've got several people who are pushing ten years. We've also established an extremely loyal client base.

**LinkedIn:** How do you put innovation into action?

**Robin:** Our experience with LinkedIn is the perfect case study for answering this question. For a long time, I found myself wondering whether we could find a solution that delivers qualified candidates to my team's inboxes each day. We ventured into LinkedIn's community and spent more and more time exploring the platform through free subscriptions and eventually paid subscriptions. We innovated through rigorous, methodological planning. In 2013, we decided to invest in a professional license for every recruiter on our team. It was a big financial commitment, but we realized that we needed this infrastructure to continue to stay ahead of the curve and grow.

**LinkedIn:** Can you share an example of what you mean?

**Robin:** We had an opportunity in the healthcare staffing space. Even though this was an area that was relatively new for us, we decided to go for it – we knew that LinkedIn would give us the community, tools, and infrastructure that we would need to support our entry into this space through its capabilities for high-volume sourcing. It was a nine-week project, and actually over that period of time we were able to source 85 interested and qualified healthcare staffing professionals around the country. We couldn't have done it without LinkedIn Talent Solutions.

## Innovative plans need meticulous measurement

**LinkedIn:** The decision for a small company to make a new investment is always scary. How did you navigate this process?

**Robin:** We started with a 6 month pilot and closely monitored the results over that time. It was only after we built a process for measuring and tracking successes and areas for growth that we committed to a one-year contract – to really institutionalize Talent Solutions into Mee Derby's recruiting strategy. We already knew that this product would be a natural next step for us, as 50% of our placements over the previous 4 years have come from a LinkedIn contact or relationship – and during that time, we did not have Recruiter licenses. We knew that LinkedIn Talent Solutions would provide new opportunities for growth, but we knew that we needed to take carefully planned, calculated steps to make the most out of it.

**LinkedIn:** How have you measured results with Talent Solutions?

**Robin:** We started by looking at increases in revenue. At the end of the 6 month trial, we had increased revenue dollars enough to not only pay for – but make a profit from Talent Solutions. We were able to translate all benefits generated into increased revenue that I don't believe we would have seen if we hadn't made that investment. Piloting was key to figuring out the process that was right for us.

Before we used Talent Solutions, 50% of our placements came from LinkedIn. In 2014, once we started using Talent Solutions, that number was closer to 65%. Our revenue between 2013 and 2014 jumped by 30%. The staffing industry as a whole has been growing at a healthy rate – but not 30% healthy.

## Brand building supports ROI

**LinkedIn:** In what other way has Talent Solutions helped your firm generate an ROI?

**Robin:** I think that staffing companies in general spend a whole lot more time and resources in building a sales presence than building a marketing presence. And it's hard for staffing firms to wrap their brain around marketing – but we have made marketing a core part of our efforts. We sponsor conferences, participate in trade associations, and maintain a great website. Talent Solutions has allowed us to develop an additional, cost-effective, and consistent marketing channel by providing us with an outlet to share content and build a social media community.

**LinkedIn:** How are you tracking the results of your brand-building?

**Robin:** Admittedly, this is hard to do, but we're actively monitoring the growth in our follower base – something that we would not have been able to do without LinkedIn. A lot of people are interested in what we do because we specialize in placing executives in the staffing industry. This follower base helps us stay connected and continuously engaged with hard-to-reach passive candidates.

We have always positioned our organization as thought leaders in the staffing industry. And we used email blasts to communicate with our clients and candidates. Creating followers on LinkedIn moves that marketing to a social platform, which over time will grow larger than our Mee Derby database. One of the biggest signs that our presence is growing is that we often receive messages, out of the blue, from people who we haven't met before.

**LinkedIn:** Are there any final thoughts that you'd like to add?

**Robin:** It takes a little while to institutionalize marketing. And then you have to feed the beast. You have to continuously provide new and original content as well, sharing and re-posting things that are relevant to your organization. It's a lot of work, but again, the feedback I'm getting is fantastic.