

TrueJob Inc. | Case Study

Ann Arbor SPARK: Promoting Job Growth and Driving Industries



Background

Ann Arbor SPARK is Ann Arbor’s engine for economic development, and is dedicated to the economic prosperity of the greater Ann Arbor region. It uses its skills and knowledge to attract, develop, strengthen, and invest in driving industries to help the region thrive. Most of all, it is committed to job growth.



Phil Santer

Phil Santer is the Senior Vice President and Chief of Staff for the CEO. He is part of the Business Development Team at Spark and has been with the organization for just over five years. He has been doing economic development in Michigan for over a decade. Prior to joining SPARK, he worked for the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.

SPARK supports a broad range of companies, from small entrepreneurial companies to more mature organizations. Across these companies, SPARK focuses on providing the support they need to grow, which includes attracting knowledge workers. Asked about the role of SPARK, Phil said, “This is all about attracting companies and, more importantly jobs, jobs, jobs.”

SPARK’s website had a legacy job board that was built internally years ago. The job board became very popular, and today draws 47% of SPARK’s website traffic, but it was no longer up-to-date enough to meet the needs of the three major constituents that an economic development organization supports. Those constituents are the EDO itself, the companies in the region, and area job seekers. When trying to help local companies recruit and retain knowledge workers, having an easy to use, up to date job board is critical.

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The Challenge

Asked about SPARK’s needs for a new system, Phil said, “We wanted to find something that met the needs of all three constituents. First, we needed a job board that would appeal to knowledge workers—something modern and easy to use. We also needed to have analytics to show our funders and our corporate customers that we are adding value to the community.

“To attract the right workers, we needed the job board to allow us to curate which jobs appeared so we could focus on the right companies and the right jobs. We didn’t want a generic job board that allowed any company to post any job. We also needed a job board with options to prominently feature the SPARK brand, and on the backend, we needed the user experience for our staff to be simple, but powerful.

“Second, our local companies, from very early stage companies to much more mature companies, wanted to have a range of functionality that served their broad needs. For instance, while a more mature company may already have an Applicant Tracking System, the early stage ones did not. So, we needed something that kept these diverse needs in mind.

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“And third, the job applicants wanted superior job filtering capabilities to help them hone in on precisely what they were looking for. We even wanted something that would understand their needs and recommend jobs to them. Think Pandora for job search.

“Overall, we knew finding all of this functionality was not going to be easy.”

A major part of SPARK’s decision to move to a new system was the lack of functionality and the usability of the legacy site. Phil said, “True Job offered the functionality and technical assets that we envisioned for an updated job portal.” He continued, “It was a big decision to go from a legacy system that we had owned to be able to partner with a third-party, a vendor to be able to outsource this work.”

Choosing a Solution

During their search for a new system, SPARK became aware of TrueJob, which happened to be a local company in Ann Arbor. TrueJob offered precisely the functionality that SPARK was looking for to meet the needs of the three constituents. It focused its product on organizations like EDOs, had a modern look and feel, and a higher quality user experience overall.

Phil said, “We developed a cross-functional team to evaluate alternatives and make a selection. The team included representatives from business development, marketing and even the CEO’s office. We wanted to make sure that we had proper buy-in across the organization. The person who would administer the site for us was intimately familiar with our culture and understood our overall strategy so we wanted that person to be able to easily administer the system without extensive software skills or training.”

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While TrueJob was a local company, the selection was made on the capabilities of the company rather than its geography. “It became clear to us that TrueJob was the right product for our needs,” Phil said. “They provided precisely what an EDO needs, even to the point of offering documentation and training videos for us and our corporate customers to ensure success across the diverse needs of these customers. We even had focus groups, where local organizations came in and helped tell us what they thought they needed and that helped us with the selection.”

Implementation and Results

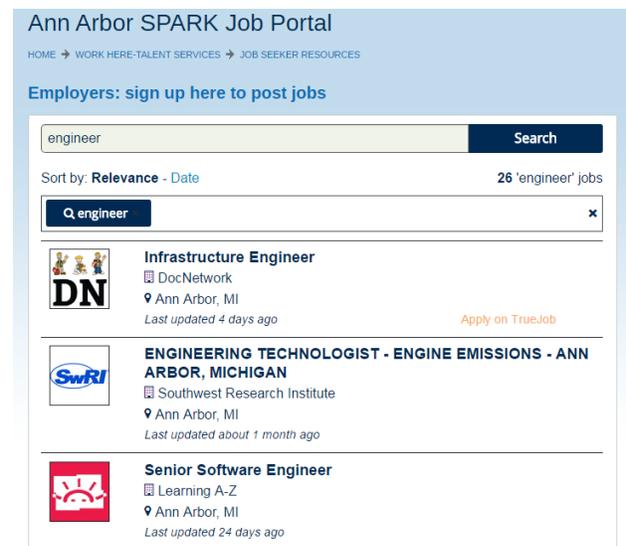
The implementation of TrueJob went smoothly and was handled expeditiously. The transition from the legacy job site to the new one was seamless. “TrueJob worked directly with our team, handled our transition, trained our people and quickly answered any questions we had. It was about as easy as it could be,” Phil said.

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SPARK also had an impressive promotional plan for the new job site. The new job board was announced at SPARK’s annual meeting, which had extensive press coverage. SPARK also made sure that all its corporate customers were aware of the site and had access to the proper training materials to help them use it most effectively.

The benefits and results have been impressive. Most notably, SPARK has already seen greater participation from employers on its job site, and they now have better analytics to show how they are helping the local community. With increased interest in the site, local companies have seen more applicants applying for jobs, and job seekers are utilizing the advanced filtering and search capabilities to help them find the right job quicker and easier.

The quantitative results are also impressive. Even early on, SPARK has seen a 42% increase in application clicks, a 68% increase in conversions (the percentage of visitors that choose to apply to a job they are viewing). SPARK is also now able to see the precise number of applications submitted through the site (this number was unknown in the legacy system).



A screenshot of the new SPARK job board

Summary

Asked about the importance of SPARK's job board, Phil said, "Many EDOs don't even offer a job board, but they should. A principle goal of an EDO is to help their local companies find the right talent and help people who are looking for opportunities find those companies. A good job board is a critical part of the talent management aspect of EDOs.

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"Economic Development is about helping to create jobs. When EDOs look to either add a job site or replace their existing job site, they should not try to internally duplicate what is already available. EDOs are there to provide economic development, not build their own technology."

Any EDO that is considering a job board needs to consider 8 critical criteria that will determine the success of their job site. These are:

1. A high-quality user experience for both their corporate and job seeker customers
2. The ability to curate the selection of jobs that appear on the job site
3. Analytics that definitively show what they have accomplished with the job site
4. Better filtering and matching for applicants and companies to make the process of job search easier and more effective
5. Automatic scraping of public job sites to increase the pool of available jobs and simplify the signup process for employers
6. Documentation and training videos to help internal staff and customers take advantage of the site and maximize participation
7. Capabilities for smaller companies that may need extra support like a built-in Applicant Tracking System
8. Branding for the EDO

If EDOs keep the needs of their three main constituents in mind, they will be successful.