



MAIN STREET
— RECRUITMENT —

THE 9-STEP PLAYBOOK FOR 2026 HIRING

**A practical guide to help manufacturers attract
and keep the skilled workers they need.**

WHY RECRUITMENT MARKETING MATTERS IN 2026

The workforce shortage in construction and manufacturing is only accelerating. Retirements, competition for younger workers, and rising expectations for flexibility all mean that simply posting jobs won't be enough.

Recruitment marketing is different from a hiring plan.

A **hiring plan** is reactive: post a job when there's an opening.

A **recruitment marketing strategy** is proactive: build awareness of your company, nurture interest, and create a pipeline of candidates before you need them.

15.3%

of the workforce is projected to retire by 2030—a total of more than 25 million workers.



WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN THIS PLAYBOOK:

A 9-step framework to structure your recruitment marketing strategy.

Guidance on budget allocation for paid vs. organic efforts

Metrics that matter most for frontline roles.



STEP 1 | CLARIFY HIRING GOALS

Don't just react to open roles. Align recruiting goals with your company's growth plans. Do you need 10 new operators this year or a long-term pipeline for technical talent?

Set clear KPIs to measure success, such as:

- Hiring X roles within a specific timeframe
- Increasing application-to-interview conversion rate by X%
- Reducing time-to-fill for critical positions
- Improving offer acceptance rate

Defining your horizon and metrics upfront will help determine the right marketing mix.



STEP 2 | DEFINE CANDIDATE PERSONAS

Not all roles attract the same people. Frontline workers may prioritize pay and stability, while technical roles value training and career growth.

Build 2 to 3 profiles of your ideal candidates to guide messaging and ad targeting. Each profile should include basic demographics, key motivators, preferred job platforms, and what they value most in an employer, from work-life balance to advancement opportunities.



STEP 3 | MAP THE CANDIDATE JOURNEY AND CONVERSION RATES

Awareness → Consideration → Application → Onboarding

Where are candidates dropping off? A long application or confusing career page can cost you great hires. Audit the journey from a job seeker's perspective—and remember, it's not one-size-fits-all.

Consider how it may be different by position. Entry-level or hourly candidates may want a quick, mobile-friendly application process. Skilled trades or specialized roles might need more detail up front to feel confident applying. Tailor the journey to fit the expectations of each role.



STEP 4 | STREAMLINE APPLICATIONS

Review your own application process: How long does it take you to complete?

Complicated applications drive candidates away. Ask only the essentials up front (name, contact, availability) and collect details later. Mobile-first forms under 2 minutes improve completion rates.



STEP 5 | PICK THE RIGHT CHANNELS

Match your audience to the channel.

Looking for an easy way to reach a wide range of candidates?

Facebook might serve you best.

Need a more hyper-targeted approach?

Try programmatic ads.

Want to connect with entry-level talent?

TikTok or Instagram Reels can showcase your culture.

Paid: programmatic ads, social campaigns, job boards.

Organic: career site, SEO, employee referrals

Learn more about programmatic recruitment advertising:

<https://mainstreetrecruitment.com/insights/programmatic-recruitment-advertising/>



STEP 6 | BUDGET SMARTER

A useful rule of thumb: start with 60% paid / 40% organic. As your employer brand grows, you can rebalance toward organic.

Lean budget (<\$25k/year):

Focus on one or two paid channels (like programmatic job ads or social campaigns) to generate immediate applicants.

Working budget (\$25k–\$60k/year):

Mix paid ads with consistent branded content—short videos, employee stories, and career page updates.

Growth budget (\$60k/year):

Layer in long-term investments like SEO for job pages, employee advocacy campaigns, and nurturing candidate pipelines.

Tip: Track which channels bring you qualified applicants (not just clicks) and shift dollars accordingly.



STEP 7 | BUILD EMPLOYER BRAND CONTENT

Candidates want to see real stories, not polished commercials. Capture short videos of employees, photos of projects, and myth-busting moments about working in the trades using simple tools like an iPhone or Zoom. It's better not to wait for a full production budget. These quick, unscripted stories feel more authentic and genuine than anything rehearsed or HR-approved.



STEP 8 | MEASURE CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE ROI

Recruitment marketing isn't just about clicks—it's about quality. Track:

Application
completion rate

Cost per
qualified apply

Time-to-fill

Retention at
90 days

Learn more about the ROI of improving your candidate experience:
<https://mainstreetrecruitment.com/insights/candidate-experience-roi/>



STEP 9 | TEST + OPTIMIZE

Your first campaign won't be perfect. Run A/B tests on ad copy, landing pages, and targeting. Review quarterly to adjust your channel mix and messaging.



KEY METRICS THAT MATTER IN 2026

The labor shortage makes it tempting to focus only on “time-to-fill” or total applications, but those numbers don’t always tell the full story. To compete for skilled workers, manufacturers need to watch the metrics that reveal quality, speed, and candidate experience.

For frontline roles:

These positions are often the hardest to keep staffed. Efficiency and accessibility matter most:

Time-to-apply:

Target under 5 minutes from start to submission. Long forms are a deal-breaker.

Application completion rate:

How many people start and actually finish your application? A low % signals friction.

Cost-per-qualified-apply:

Not just cost-per-click. Track what you spend to bring in applicants who meet your minimum requirements.

For skilled technical roles:

Higher-skill positions require more nurturing, so measure quality of engagement:

Candidate engagement rate:

Email opens, ad clicks, video views—signals that your brand is resonating.

Interview-to-offer ratio:

A healthy pipeline delivers candidates who are more likely to move forward, not waste time. application? A low % signals friction.

Retention at 90 days:

Early turnover is expensive. Strong recruitment marketing sets realistic expectations that improve retention.

TAKE YOUR NEXT STEP

This 9-step playbook is a starting point. To apply it to your business, schedule a conversation with Main Street Recruitment. We’ll help you streamline applications, build smarter campaigns, and measure what matters.