

The Ultimate Applicant Tracking System Buyer's Guide



occupop

About this guide

Welcome to the Ultimate Applicant Tracking System Buyer's Guide, a comprehensive evaluation of the process around choosing the right ATS System for your organisation.

Did you know?

75 percent of large companies use an ATS according to Capterra, the applicant tracking system reviews company.

It is no surprise that the applicant tracking system (ATS) is the trusted center of the modern recruiting tech stack. At that level of scale and with those hiring needs, having one central hub to manage all recruitment – and, just as important, stay data compliant – is essential. Not to mention the increasing level of remote hiring teams requiring cloud based recruitment management solutions. What's more, SMBs are now following suit.

Whether you're getting ready to purchase your first ATS for your business or thinking about switching systems, our goal is to take the pain out of the process. We've put together this comprehensive guide to help you discover key ATS-purchasing insights and tips and tricks to make this process easier. We hope you find this guide interesting and that it provides you with a process to follow and to make the right buying decision for your organisation.

We'd love to help you identify and prioritise your needs and find the right solution for your organisation. If you'd like any impartial advice on any aspect of the purchasing process, don't hesitate to get in touch.

The Occupop Team

About Occupop

Occupop is a beautifully simple recruitment software built for small and medium businesses. We help businesses be great at hiring through our simple philosophy – to make recruitment incredibly easy and accessible to everyone at work. So, businesses can hire the best people and build the best teams.

At Occupop, the automation and digitisation of the recruitment process for companies across the UK & Ireland has been our key area of focus for the past 6 years. Based in Dublin, Ireland but with a team all over the world, we have helped companies across many industries turn manual, laborious volume hiring processes into efficient, candidate friendly digital experiences.

In the past 12 months alone, we've helped companies across the UK and Ireland, not only through the challenges of operating during the pandemic, but ensuring they thrive in years to come.



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Market Outlook

The pandemic has profoundly changed the way we work, and in many cases for the better: such as the case with HR. For a long time, HR had digitisation on their to-do lists, but it was the pandemic that accelerated this intended project. It feels that almost overnight, employees started to work remotely from home, which led to distributed teams.

The challenges of virtual collaboration and the need to access data emerged. The longer the pandemic continued, the more companies faced difficulties keeping their complete workforce, as they were not able to continue bearing all the personnel costs. The consequence were lay-offs and a record number of job seekers.

Now over two years on, companies have overcome the initial shock and temporary inability to act, and they slowly have started to go back to a normalisation phase. However, the story doesn't end here: this is where the real challenges start. Professionals around the globe acquired a taste for working remotely and the pandemic has led to a change in values among many of them. Companies must therefore ask themselves how they respond to the changing needs of job seekers and what is important to successfully attract talent. Professionals started to rethink the work they do, the impact it has, and the value it brings.

As the economy starts to grow again, professionals will have more choices about the work they do, and at which company they want to work. Companies need to have a quick and transparent hiring process, an authentic and eye-catching employer branding as well as a valuable and gapless communication with candidates. All together with the sole goal of boosting candidate experience and winning the top professionals. Exceptional candidate experience is key to success, especially for SMEs to outperform large companies with unsaturated budget for employer branding initiatives.

Although the motto is "quality before quantity", companies must now act quickly and recruit new staff again. They need to fill X amount of positions in under X amount of time and are forced to further cut costs in HR, more precisely the recruitment budget, which involves costs for postings on job boards, rectifying wrong hiring decisions, a heavy reliance on recruitment agencies and reducing the cost of hire.

With a digital recruiting solution or Applicant Tracking System (ATS) that automates a lot of the manual work, it is possible to free up existing recruiters or HR from administrative tasks, leaving more time for the important things: Finding the best people.



What is an ATS?

ATS stands for Applicant Tracking System, which is a type of hiring software designed to automate many of the laborious and repetitive recruitment tasks, such as:

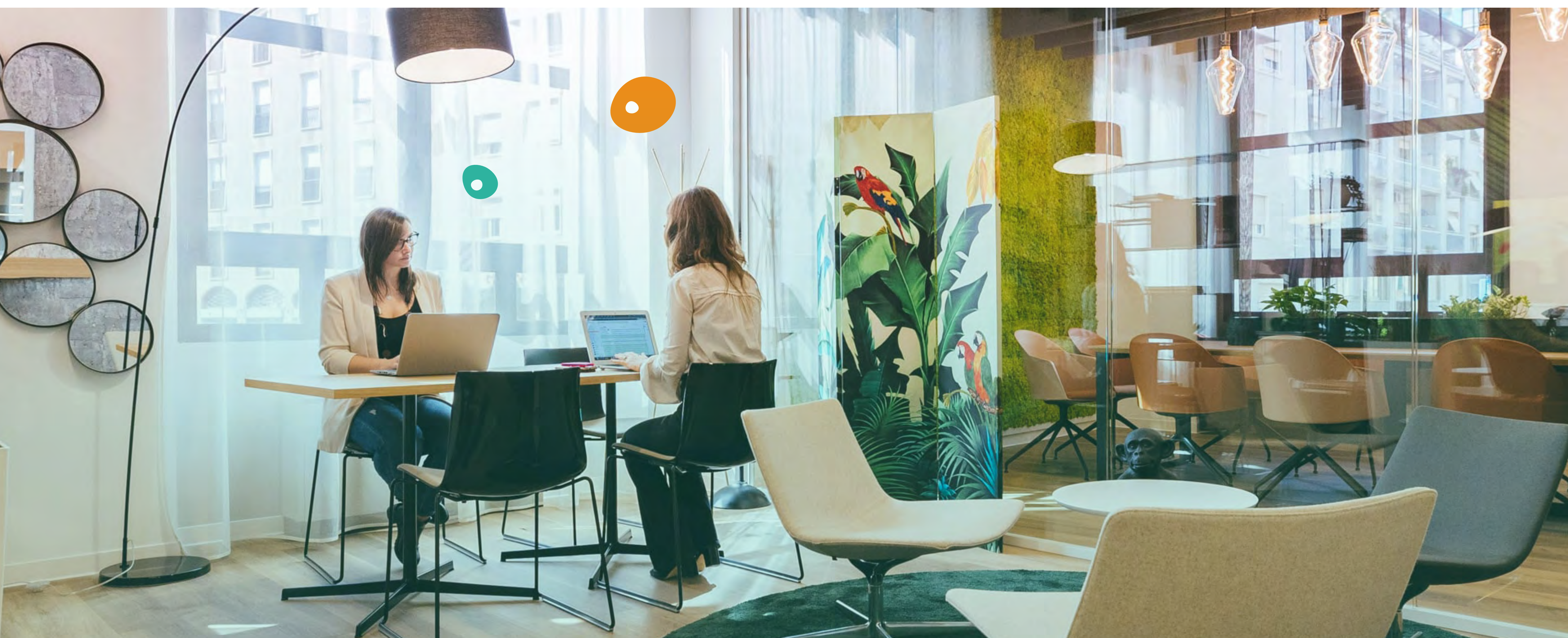
- Posting jobs on multiple jobs boards and social media accounts
- Manually sifting through CVs to generate a shortlist
- Email acknowledgement and rejection of candidates
- Manually scheduling interviewees with multiple attendees
- Entering CV information into a HR database

Things have come a long way since the first generation of ATS which could only be used in the office, by one person at a time and required an expensive, rigid, long-term licence, which made them really only suitable for large firms. The modern ATS now makes good business sense for all firms, irrespective of size: they are cloud and mobile accessible, come with flexible subscription plans, are cost effective and allow businesses to recruit staff from anywhere in a seamless fashion.

In fact, modern, best-of-breed ATS's come with exciting features that will automate and streamline your hiring process such as:

- One click advertising to multiple job boards to save time.
- Easy-fill application forms to boost candidate experience.
- Applicant screening questions
- AI-powered CV screening and filtering
- Automated interview scheduling using self-service technology.
- Hiring manager review functionality, allowing virtual sharing of CVs with instantaneous 'thumbs up/thumbs down' review.
- Interview scorecards for rapid assessment of talent
- Automated communication with candidates using custom email templates
- Boolean searchable candidate database
- Real-time analytics & reporting
- Automated GDPR Compliance

Prioritise these features when shortlisting and selecting your ATS and you will eliminate menial tasks, reduce cost-per-hire and speed up recruitment significantly.



Key Questions

We realise that buying an ATS is a complex purchasing journey and through the next few chapters we will take you through an ideal ATS purchasing process, step by step. In this section we will cover the most pertinent questions that arise such as:

1. Is an ATS for me?
2. How to assess your requirements in an ATS
3. Creating a shortlist for a suitable ATS
4. The ATS buyer's journey
5. Which ATS pricing model is best for you?
6. Additional considerations

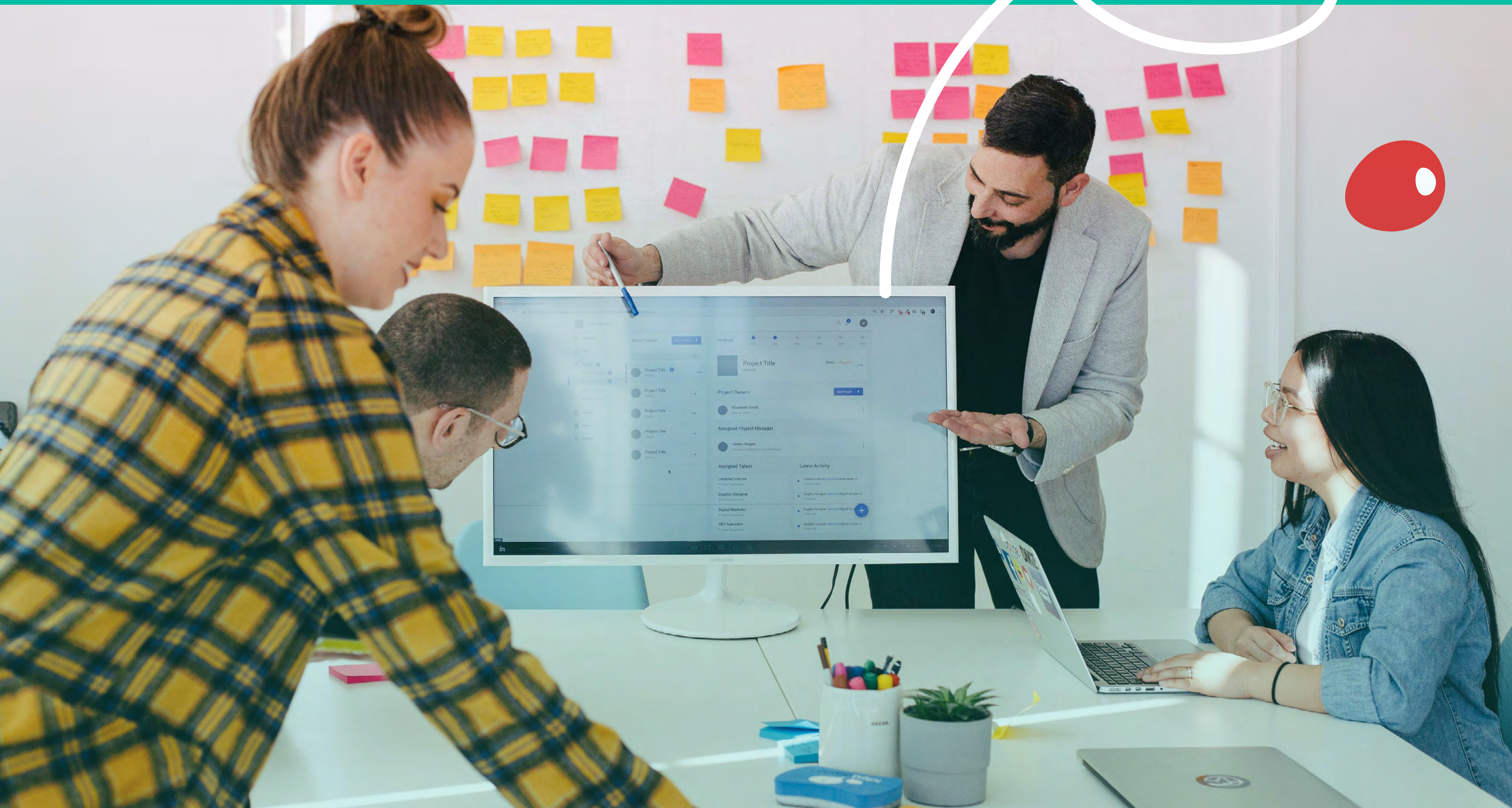
This guide will dive into these questions, sharing insights, tips and resources. Our goal is to take the pain out of the ATS-purchasing process and show you that you're not alone.



Is an ATS for me?

Modern ATS's have the ability to streamline any hiring process, (driving down cost-per-hire and time to hire), through the clever automation of labour-intensive hiring tasks using sophisticated software algorithms and AI. Therefore if you engage in high-volume recruitment and get large numbers of applicants then you stand to save significant time and money from using an ATS.

But, an ATS also includes other value-adding features such as **interview scheduling**, **customised email responses to candidates**, **the ability to access from anywhere** and **hiring manager review**, this will improve the end-to-end quality of any recruitment process, irrespective of volume. So, if you are looking to enhance both the candidate experience and hiring process then an ATS is still a good option for you.



Assessing your hiring process -

Discover what you need from an ATS

Whether you are a first-time ATS buyer or ATS switcher, to ensure good traction and address potential change-apathy with internal stakeholders during your ATS buying journey, you'll want to clearly quantify the potential gains of your new purchase.

To do this, start by exploring each stage of the hiring process. **Identify any repetitive or time-consuming tasks that you or your team perform.** Quantify the time spent on each task to visualise the full extent of the issues or where there are opportunities to improve the process significantly.

Below are some common pain points that you may recognise in your hiring process, followed by a time-sheet estimate. (The time estimates are based on a job that typically gets around 50 applicants). This example list of pain points are more applicable to an ATS first-timer, but some will also apply to switchers.

- Manually posting jobs on multiple job boards for each vacancy that you have, requiring staff to individually login into and navigate different vacancy publishing systems. **15 minutes per job post.**
- Manually marketing your vacancies on individual social media accounts. **15 minutes per job post.**
- Scouring through crowded inboxes, manually downloading CV's, and manual curation of electronic file storage systems. **2 hours per job post.**
- Manually forwarding, (and re-forwarding) CV's to other in-house recruiters or hiring managers for feedback, which can also lead to duplication of effort. **1 hour per job post.**
- Sifting through large volumes of CV's to assess skills and qualifications and to create a longlist/shortlist for further review or interview. This is a common cause of bottlenecks. **8 hours per job post.**
- Manually entering key applicant data, such as name, contact details, qualifications, demographic info etc. into some kind of tracking system in Excel or Word. **4 hours per job post.**
- Having to send volume email acknowledgements/rejections to applicants. **4 hours per job post.**
- Manually coordinating availability and arranging interviews with candidates and one or more interviewers across 2 or even 3 stage interviews. This can be a common cause of delays in the hiring process. **2 hours per job post.**
- Manually entering onboarding information into the company HR system for successful hires. **1 hour per job post.**

Total Time Spent:

22.30 Hours

per job post

Return on Investment: What will your business gain from a new ATS?

Make sure that the financial return on investment is clear to all stakeholders to maintain traction and enthusiasm. **The above example promises £18,000 gross savings per year from automation based on an in-house recruiter being paid at £12.50 per hour and the company hiring 60 people a year, spending an average of 24 hours on a post.** Elimination of such tasks above will also increase job satisfaction and engagement within your hiring team.

You'll need to make sure these pain points are addressed by whichever ATS you choose, to ensure these labour savings are achieved and to realise this return on investment of course.

Issues with your current ATS

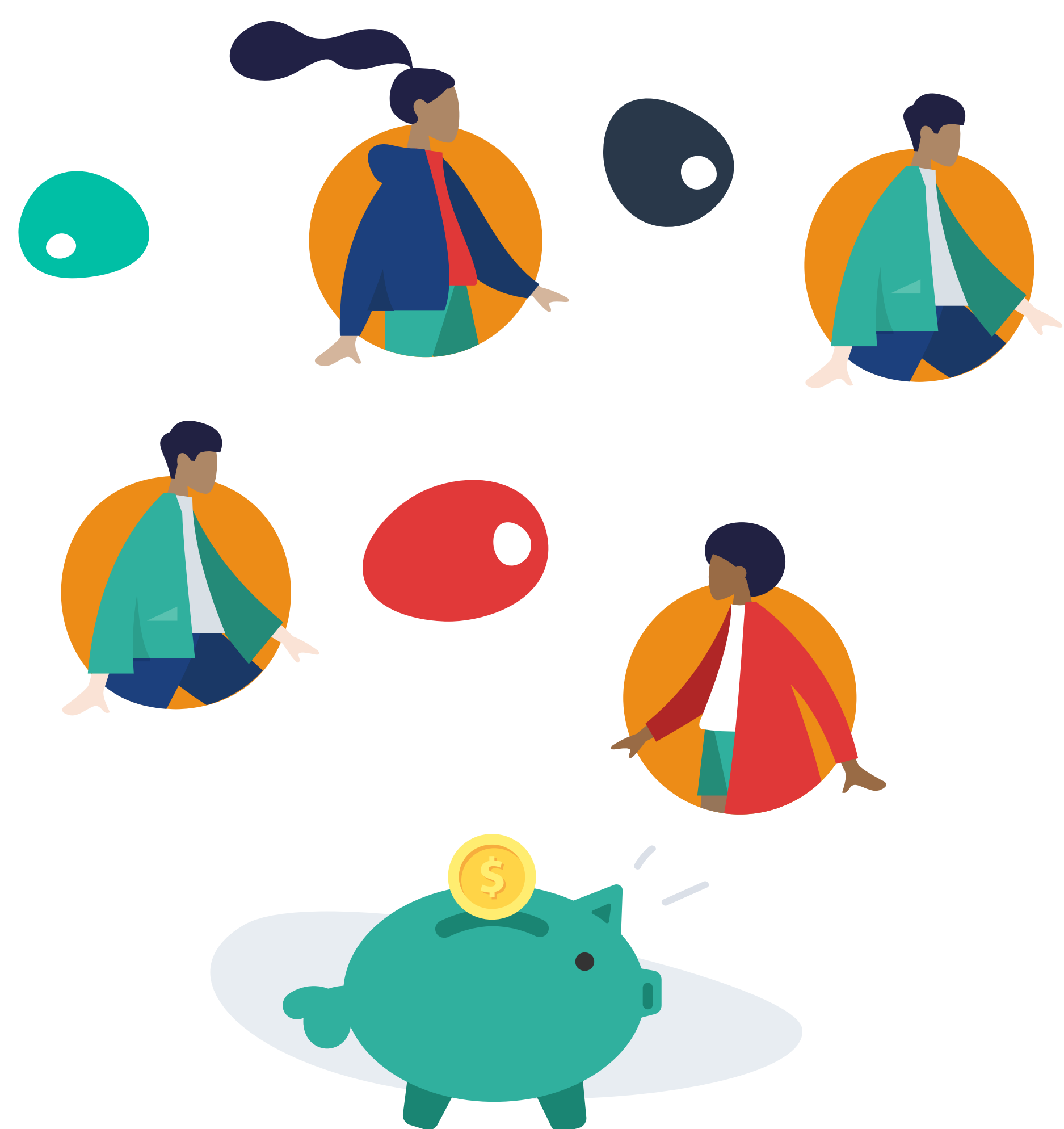
Dissatisfied with your existing ATS? Establish your pain points to clarify next steps. If you already have an ATS you may recognise some of the following pain points/limitations, which could be a sign you need to switch or at least review the situation with your vendor.

- 1** It's become shelfware, e.g. sitting on the metaphorical shelf and not being used. In-house recruiters may be using their own processes outside of the ATS system to get hiring tasks done.
- 2** It's feeling like an outdated legacy system, lacking some of the punchy, flexible features you read about with modern, cloud-based subscription software, such as being accessible from any location with an internet connection. It could be awkward to use versus other tools, potentially frustrating and deterring applicants and internal users.

- 3** Increase in company size. System users have increased significantly which has altered your requirements meaning your current system may no longer be a good fit.
- 4** New hiring strategy. Perhaps you are now hiring internationally or making more use of contingent workers or need to hire from different sources and the current ATS no longer fits requirements.
- 5** Limited functionality. ATS lacks mission-critical features and does not have the capacity to support an integration.
- 6** More cost effective/suitable pricing model.

If you are facing these issues with your current ATS, you may need to take it up with the vendor. If they can't provide a satisfactory solution, it may be time to switch.

Even if they do offer solutions, (many of which may have attached timescales and additional costs), **with an ever expanding marketplace it's the right time to check the marketplace to see if alternative vendors can offer a more cost-effective package, with enhanced functionality, instantaneously.**



Creating a shortlist for a suitable ATS

Now you know what you need, look for an ATS that fits your criteria. It's now time to assess the marketplace for ATS software. A good way to do this is to create a simple needs and functionality checklist.

This is a simple 2 column document. The first column contains needs, (derived from your hiring pain points) and the second column contains actual functionality offered in the ATS. You can then visit aggregator sites like [Capterra](#) and [G2](#), which contain summarised

information and reviews about ATS's, allowing you to establish what extent each ATS software meets your needs and create a shortlist to go to market with.

Here's an example needs and functionality checklist that an ATS Switcher or First-Timer can use to establish if a vendor's product suits their needs.

Needs and Functionality Checklist

Pain Points and Needs (Examples)	Functionality Offered
Slow time-to-hire vs the competition	Includes automation functionality and several time-saving features.
Labour-intensive hiring process. Current system does not support high volume recruitment. Need to eliminate/reduce manual tasks. Cost per hire is well above industry norms. We've noticed that our charge per job is very high in our current ATS and so is charge per job posted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One click advertising to multiple jobs board to save time.• Applicant screening questions to quickly eliminate non-viable candidates.• AI-powered CV screening and filtering.• Automated interview scheduling using self-service technology.• Interview scorecards for rapid assessment of talent.• Automated communication with candidates using custom email templates.• Boolean searchable candidate database.
We recruit in several countries and our current system is really only used at the head office.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Entirely cloud-based so can be used anywhere.• Supports multiple languages and currencies.

Candidates complain about poor communication during the hiring process and having a poor experience of the company.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automated and personalised communication with applicants using custom email templates throughout the applicant journey. • Some chatbot functionality. • Easy-fill application forms to boost candidate experience.
The collaboration process between in-house recruiters and hiring managers is poor and frustrating and especially difficult when staff work in different offices, at home or in other remote locations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cloud-based workflow and communication process so remote teams can work together effectively. • Hiring manager review functionality, allowing virtual sharing of CV's with instantaneous 'thumbs up/thumbs down' review.
Poor visibility into Diversity and Inclusion effectiveness and practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System can automatically blank out sensitive demographic information related to protected characteristics. • System has fully automated D&I reporting with the ability to customise.
Data security	Automated GDPR compliance and ISO certified.
User uptake of previous tech systems is not good. Lack of support from current suppliers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full onboarding support offered • Email and live chat support offered • Extensive video tutorials
Lack of integration with current systems means we have to manually transfer data back and forth between accounts and human resources.	<p><i>System integrations:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media accounts • Careers page • Major jobs board • Electronic signature software • Payroll ADP • HR software • Background assessments • Pre-hire assessments
Current system feels outdated and is awkward to use and some processes are by-passed. It's in danger of becoming shelfware.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AI-powered CV screening and filtering • Cloud integration • Social media collaboration features • Real-time analytics & reporting • Flexible pricing and upgrading

The ATS Buyers Journey

Once you have done the groundwork on establishing your pain points and needs, along with initial screening of systems, it's worth developing an implementation schedule and sharing this with stakeholders to help focus minds on the goal.

If you find a system that meets your needs, has the functionality, support and is at the price point you are looking for, there may be no need to go through this process with more than 1 vendor. Though it is worth testing out a system before implementation to ensure the fit is right, both in terms of support and system itself. Therefore, **ensure any system to review offers a free, no-obligation trial.**



Timelines

3 days - Review vendor websites and demos to develop a longlist of 4 to 8 providers.

2 - 4 weeks - Take the best fitting system forward for trial and ask in-house recruiters to list out pros and cons throughout.

3 days - Review feedback and ask vendor any arising deep-dive questions.

1 week - Consultation with internal decision makers and selection of vendor.

1-3 days - Soft launch following onboarding and support.

Which ATS Pricing Model is Best for You?

Nearly all ATS pricing models are now subscription-based, which means you pay a monthly/annual fee for access to their cloud-based service and technical support.

These subscription services usually offer 3 to 4 pricing tiers, providing increasing levels of functionality/capability for a higher subscription fee.

These pricing/functionality tiers are typically segmented according to the following criteria:

- **Per job posting**, e.g. Tier 1 = Up to 8 jobs a month, Tier 2 up to 15 jobs a month, etc.
- **Per employee**, e.g. Tier 1 = Up to 10 employees, Tier 2 Up to 50 employees etc.
- **Per in-house recruiter**, e.g. Tier 1 = Up to 1 in-house recruiter, Tier 2 Up to 5 in-house recruiters.

Core Features and Add-ons

It's also likely that functionality will be limited in Tier 1 and increasingly sophisticated features and capabilities will be added as you move through the tiers. Irrespective of the pricing model, you should expect to have a fully functioning ATS at Tier 1, including the following core features as a minimum:

- Job Posting Engine
- Applicant Tracking
- Custom Workflows
- Integrated Careers Page
- Social Sharing
- Job Assigning
- Interview Scheduling
- AI CV Scoring & Matching
- Unlimited CV Database
- Boolean Searching
- Reporting
- Automated Data Retention
- Security & GDPR Compliance
- Email Support

When choosing your pricing model, check carefully that the core pricing model has these core features. **As your company grows and evolves and needs change, (or if you already have sophisticated needs), you should be able to progress through the pricing tiers to add additional functionality.** Common features you'll find in higher tiers might be instant online chat support, interviews scorecards, HR system integration, hiring manager access etc...

In reality, the modern subscription pricing model is deliberately flexible to suit the modern business world. As a general guide a bigger company with more predictable and sustainable workflows may choose an annual plan in exchange for a discount, whereas smaller, more nimble companies with less predictable work and cash-flows may benefit from a monthly plan allowing upgrade/downgrade/switch flexibility.



Additional Considerations

Here's 4 additional things to consider when making your selections.

- 1** Always review the vendor's current clients. If the system is being used by competitors or businesses similar in size, scope and operational model, there's a good chance it will suit your business too.
- 2** User case studies can provide detailed insight into how the software is actually being used today in real businesses and should inform your short-listing. If the vendor doesn't have a user case study on the website, ask if they can send you one to review. Some vendors may actually let you speak to an existing client/user about the software. Favour user case studies which are relatively up to date, e.g. less than a year old, as it's a fast-changing market.
- 3** Consider how long the vendor has been in operation. Older companies potentially have a more tried and tested business model, but could also have a lot of legacy systems and be less nimble. Try and find a balance between longevity and clear commitment to product development and innovation.
- 4** You ideally want to engage with a provider whose product will evolve with the marketplace and your needs. Ask for a product development roadmap as this will help you to see the product's intended evolution programme



About Occupop

We'd love to keep this discussion going. Undoubtedly, the ATS is at the core of the hiring team's tech stack. If that part isn't working effectively for your team, getting the right technology in place is of utmost importance.

There is considerable choice and shifting priorities in the ATS arena, especially as new vendors come online, like Occupop, with simpler, streamlined solutions that prioritise candidate experience and ease of use.

At Occupop, the automation and digitisation of the recruitment process for companies across the UK & Ireland has been our key area of focus for the past 6 years. Based in Dublin, Ireland but with a team all over the world, we have helped companies across many industries turn manual, laborious volume hiring processes into efficient, candidate friendly digital experiences.

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Learn more about Occupop

About to start an ATS evaluation? Connect with our team today to learn how Occupop can help you accelerate your recruiting and hiring efforts and scale your business smarter and faster.

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