How to Choose Your 
Applicant Tracking System
An **Applicant Tracking System (ATS)** is a software application specifically designed to automate the recruitment and hiring process. ATS solutions provide hiring managers with the tools they need to intelligently monitor and progress candidates throughout the hiring process.

Of the companies that best recruit and retain top talent, more than 80% either currently deploy, or plan to deploy, an ATS solution in the next year.

Is it time for your organization to invest in an Applicant Tracking System? Regardless of whether you have just begun the evaluation process, or you are well on your way to purchasing an ATS, this guide will equip you with the questions, tools, and resources you need in order to make an informed buying decision.

You will:

- Learn what an Applicant Tracking System can and cannot do.
- Discover key things to consider when evaluating an ATS.
- Understand the differences between ATS pricing models.
- ... and more.
Is Your Organization Ready for an ATS?

For some verticals and brands it can be difficult to determine the best time to invest in or upgrade to an Applicant Tracking System. Some indications that it might be time for your business to consider investing in an ATS are:

• **Your business is in growth-mode.** As companies increase manpower, hiring-teams feel the burden of extra pressure. ATS solutions bridge the communication gaps between departments and allow HR, recruitment, and management teams to collaborate and make the best hiring decisions.

• **You’ve exhausted your HR staff (or you don’t have enough HR staff).** In a saturated job market, a single job posting can net hundreds of resumes. For HR departments that are already stretched thin, this can make sifting through applicants, while still managing other responsibilities, very challenging. Applicant Tracking Systems automate the application process and help to streamline the interview and hiring processes.

• **You are having trouble tracking and reporting HR and legal compliance.** ATS systems help HR and management staff easily and efficiently monitor compliance, generate reports, and guarantee that all of the necessary documents are in the right place should an audit ever occur.

• **You have a high rate of employee turnover.** High turnover is a reality for many businesses. Not surprisingly, companies that have a high turnover rate are always hiring. This means that resumes are always coming in, and interviews are always being scheduled. Eventually, it can become hard for the HR department to stay ahead of the sheer volume of candidates that apply. ATS solutions automate this process and make it easy for hiring teams to attach applicants to job requisitions and monitor the hiring process.
## HR Features and Considerations

There are several dozen features that can be found in most ATS software applications.

Focus on the core functions that align with your HR and recruitment strategies, and avoid getting lost in a sea of features that you may only ever use once in a while or not at all.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The most basic Applicant Tracking Systems offer:</th>
<th>The more advanced Applicant Tracking Systems offer:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Resume database and candidate search</td>
<td>• Employee on-boarding (or integration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interview management</td>
<td>• Background verification and screening (or integration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Job application management</td>
<td>• Referral management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Workflow management</td>
<td>• HRIS Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• HR and legislation compliance management</td>
<td>• Social network tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Job board posting</td>
<td>• Offer letter generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Applicant profiles and filtering</td>
<td>• Automated interview scheduling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pre-screening</td>
<td>• Intelligent candidate matching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mobile accessibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reporting and analytics features</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most important features in an ATS are having candidate information easy to access and in one location, easy reporting, and the ability to administer the system without having to be a technical guru. Another consideration is the type/amount of customer support available to you after you are a customer.

---

**KRISTINA HARRISON**  
Internal Recruiter, Jackson Family Wines

**COLLEEN Geyer**  
Director of Talent and Community Outreach, Detroit Venture Partners

---

The first thing you want to ask yourself when looking to purchase an ATS is, “What features does the ATS need to have in order for our recruitment efforts to be successful?”
HR Features and Considerations

When reviewing potential ATS solutions, businesses should ask themselves the following:

- Is it easy to use?
- Is it social?
- Is the system scalable?
- Does it help keep you compliant?
- Are there metrics or analytics tools or recording features?

Modern businesses need an essential applicant tracking system, recruiting CRM, and social recruiting software solution that targets the right talent and builds strong teams.

The most important features of any ATS system are the ability to customize without a lot of effort, and the presence of search capabilities in addition to just tracking candidates.

GRACIA C. HUNTINGTON
Global Director of Talent Acquisition, Jive Software

DEBORAH BAIMAS
Evangelist and Relationship Champion, ShoreTel
Is It Easy to Use?

The type of ATS solution you decide to invest in quickly becomes irrelevant if you, your HR team, or your candidates can’t use it.

When researching new Applicant Tracking Systems, look for a solution that is not only intuitive, but also easy to import resumes into, and offers the search tools that you need to fill open job opportunities.

For your HR Team:

ATS systems should not only integrate easily with existing HRIS systems, they should also automate the job posting process and allow recruitment and HR staff to quickly and easily develop compelling career sites that promote the company brand and attract the right kind of candidate.

The best Applicant Tracking Systems allow HR and recruitment teams to:

- Use innovative dashboards and common-sense navigation.
- Create career sites that capture targeted talent and filter prospects.
- Easily enable and streamline an employee referral process.

You want something that is easy to use or you won’t get adoption. You want it to be easy to maintain and modify, or you won’t maintain it, it won’t work as well for you and will likely create user fatigue and abandonment due to frustration.

AMBER USHKA
Senior Director of Human Resources, Onvia
Is It Easy to Use?

For your hiring managers:
ATS systems should quickly and easily put applicant information at the hiring managers’ fingertips and provide seamless communication with candidates. Hiring managers will appreciate a system that allows them to:

• View all relevant data – including resumes – from inside the ATS without having to download documents or starting external programs.
• Easily open requisitions, send interview invitations, schedule interviews, filter results, engage with and review candidates.

For your candidates:
ATS systems should be easy for candidates to navigate and use and should operate smoothly on the devices that job seekers use most often. Jobvite’s Job Seeker Nation found that jobseekers are more mobile than ever:

Mobile is powering job seekers to look for jobs more openly:

• 41% in bed, 38% during their commute, 36% in a restaurant, 30% do it at work, and 18% search in the restroom.
• 42% of all job seekers spend an average of 10 minutes or more engaging in job searching activities on mobile devices each day.
Is It Social?

The most relevant ATS systems integrate with social networks and allow hiring managers to easily share job opportunities, source for talent, and even host interviews across some of the most popular social media channels.

Applicant Tracking Systems should be built with social media in mind from the start. This kind of connectivity has become a critical function in the modern recruitment sphere. When researching potential ATS solutions, ask yourself the following:

- Are social tools available to, and easily accessible by, all employees?
- Is this a ‘bolt-on’ solution or an acquisition?

The right system will provide all key employees access to innovative tools to allow them to attract passive candidates and strengthen the employee referral process.

Jobseekers, on the other hand, should enjoy a relatively simple application process that allows them to easily find and apply for jobs on the social media platforms that they use most often.

The benefits of social media recruiting strategies include:

- A better employee referral system
- A less expensive and faster recruitment
- A stronger brand image
- An easier way to reach passive candidates
- A more user-friendly candidate experience
Is It Scalable?

In the quest to invest in a system that matches current needs seamlessly, businesses often forget to keep their future needs in mind, and are displeased to find that they’ve outgrown their ATS much quicker than they had hoped.

Applicant Tracking Systems should grow with your organization. Scalability refers to the system’s ability to function regardless of how many end-users there are, how many candidates there are, along with your business requirements for the system.

Things to consider include:

1. **Corporate growth plans**—Do you plan to add to your HR team?
2. **Operations growth plans**—Do you foresee an increase in job openings or does your company have expansion plans into new regions, new verticals, etc.

Scalable ATS systems work just as well with 100 applicants as they do with 10,000 applicants. Ten thousand applicants might seem like a bit of a stretch, but it is better to make certain that your ATS system can support your big-picture objectives than to invest in a system that will let you down when you need it the most. Look at the history of the ATS vendor that you’re considering. Have they had success growing organizations and scaling with them?
Does it keep you compliant?

The only thing more stressful than spending a great deal of time finding and hiring someone is staying current with ever-changing regulations and legislation that ensure compliance.

Good Applicant Tracking Systems take the guess work out of legal compliance and make record-keeping and management a breeze.

When researching ATS solutions it is important to verify that they comply with all relevant government regulations, such as:

- Other codes of [Federal Regulations](https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/)
Are there metrics or analytics tools, or recording features?

Every successful hiring and recruitment strategy depends on an ability to achieve tangible results. When researching potential ATS systems, it is necessary to determine what your organization views as results worth measuring and the weight of each metric.

**Would your HR and recruitment team benefit from:**

- Skills-matching to connect candidates with open job requisitions?
- Valuable Time-to-Fill metrics?
- Candidate mapping that shows what source most of your applicants come from?
- Employee referral tracking

These are the types of features that can greatly enhance the hiring process and pinpoint areas for improvement.

**An ATS should allow users to:**

- Track applicants from source to hire.
- Generate reports that determine where the best referrals are coming from.
- Monitor social media and job posting success to determine where to best focus advertising budgets.
- Identify bottlenecks in the hiring process.
- Access dashboards to generate real-time candidate source metrics.
IT Features & Considerations

Modern HR and recruiting departments must embrace technology in order to keep pace with the ever-evolving hiring market. Applicant Tracking Systems should be easily accessible, secure, and stable for both hiring teams and job seekers.

Other things to consider when researching an ATS include:

- Partnerships and system integrations
- Access to technical and customer support
- Accessibility from outside the physical office location
- Compatibility with existing portals, such as the employee referral portal
- Security and ownership of data
- Updates and new versions

Partnerships and system integration

Whether this involves HRIS assessment, work status verification, or criminal record verification, finding an ATS solution that has, or is capable of having, the most-needed partnerships is a necessary part of ensuring a seamless hiring process. Important factors to take into consideration include:

- What types of partnerships or system integrations are necessary during the recruitment or hiring process?
- Will the Applicant Tracking System integrate with other services (like billing or payroll) without issue?
- Can you automate external job posting and candidate sourcing?

Access to technical and customer support

Regardless of how user-friendly an Applicant Tracking System may be, they are still complex programs that potentially have features or tools that are beyond your skill level. Eventually, the goal is to designate a member of your staff as a ‘Power User,’ someone who not only understands the tricks and features of the system but can also teach other users what they've learned.

Even with a ‘Power User,’ you will want to know that support will be there for you if and when you need it.
Questions to ask when researching ATS systems include:

- What hours is technical or customer support available?
- Are there ways to get my questions answered inside the product (help features?)
- How do I contact customer support?
- Is there a fee for service?
- Do you have a dedicated Account Manager at the ATS company?
- Is ongoing training available?
- Are there user forums available?

Accessibility from outside the physical office location

The workforce, much like job seekers, has become increasingly mobile. This rings especially true for telecommuters and hiring managers who regularly travel between multiple office locations. The ability to access the Applicant Tracking System from outside the physical office location is a value-added service worth further investigation.

When exploring potential ATS systems consider the following:

- Do key members of your HR, recruitment, or management team regularly travel or work from outside of the office?
- If so, how will they access the ATS? Via cell phone? Laptop? Tablet?
- Does the ATS allow for secure mobile access?
Security and ownership of data

HR teams come into contact with a lot of personal data, financial data, and other information that—if used for malicious gain or fraud—could result in serious legal repercussions and potentially cripple a business.

The best ATS systems leverage the latest security protocols and guarantee to:

- Never share, sell, rent or lease, or disclose any information collected from applicants or users.
- Provide hosted services across SSL servers.
- Delete all information stored on the system and backup servers, should you ever decide to stop using their system.
- Successfully pass penetration (pen) testing to verify that the software is compliant with security standards.

Updates and new versions

For some businesses, purchasing an ATS solution that is 100% unique and customized specifically to your workflow is tempting. However, more often than not this causes problems in the long run. A system should be built to work smoothly in most applications, and augmented with some unique specifications for your company—not the other way around. This makes support and updates much easier in the future. As you’re shopping, ask about:

- Is there a release schedule for updates?
- What are some upgraded features that can be added on later?
- How do updates get installed, and how long does it usually take?

The most important thing to consider would be customization in making the ATS work with your current system. You want to aid the recruitment system, not start from square one—rebuilding the process from the ground up. The ability to customize it will help not just your recruiters acclimate quicker to the new ATS, but it will help as you on-board them into your system and help with the overall candidate experience.

SCOTT MITCHELL
Director of Production and Recruitment Coordinator,
American Wedding Group
Choosing an ATS System

It won’t take long before you realize that while there are hundreds of Applicant Tracking Systems on the market, there are not hundreds of Applicant Tracking Systems capable of doing what you need them to do.

The number of choices can be overwhelming, so when you’re ready to make a choice just take it one step at a time:

1. Pick the top 3-5 ATS systems that offer the features you require.
2. Sign up for demo accounts and put the ATS capabilities to the test.
3. Get final feedback from HR, team members, IT staff.
4. Review your list of must-have features.
5. Compare quotes.
1. Pick the top 3-5 ATS systems that offer the features you require

You started shopping with a list of features you absolutely need from your ATS, now score some of your favorite systems according to that list.

If social media integration is a key feature, for example, score each of the systems you are considering on a scale of one to five for how seamlessly they work with the most valuable social channels. Breaking down each of your required features to a simple score, and then adding up a final score for each ATS will give you a clearer picture of which system might work best for your organization.

2. Sign up for demo accounts and put the ATS capabilities to the test

Simply knowing what features you require isn’t enough. You have to actually test out the ATS to be sure that those features will work as you need them to.

The software companies will offer live or on-demand demos for you to watch. This is the time to:

- Ask detailed questions about the features and functions of the system.
- Determine what kind of support the ATS provider might be capable of providing.
- See your top-rated features in action.
- Learn more about value-added features that the ATS has that you may not have thought about.
3. Get feedback from HR, team managers, and IT

During the demonstration process, prior to selecting an Applicant Tracking System, it is necessary to determine how the ATS will benefit its everyday users. If the demo is live, get as many stakeholders to RSVP as possible. If it is on-demand, try to schedule a time when you can go through it together.

4. Revisit your list of must-have features

If you've managed to find a solution that meets all of your requirements, and easily integrates with all of the systems that you need it to—great!

If not, this is the time to re-evaluate those needs and determine what you (and your hiring team) can and cannot do without.

5. Compare quotes

There is no one-size-fits all option when it comes to the costs associated with Applicant Tracking Systems, because the definition of “ATS” varies widely—from just a simple back-office tool to automate your hiring workflow, to advanced systems with a CRM database, recruitment marketing tools, social job distribution, etc.

The cost of an ATS is determined by a number of different factors, including your specific requirements and the features you most demand. In order to make an informed decision, it is necessary to know how providers of ATS solutions price their services.

1. Pay-per-Employee is the most common. This means that businesses will pay a fee that is based on the size of their organization and the number of employees that will use the system.

2. Pay-per-Recruiter is also common. This type of system requires that businesses pay a monthly flat fee based on the number of hiring managers or recruiters that have access to the system. One-time setup fees may also apply.

3. Pay-per-Opening/Applicant is not as common. This pricing structure means that businesses will pay a fee that is based on the total number of open job requisitions or how many applicants they have in the system.
Get To Work with the Right ATS

Whether your business is growing, HR is over-worked, you need help with compliance issues, or your industry is known for high turnover, an Applicant Tracking System can be a lifesaver.

If you’re not sure where to start, do a web search and look for an ATS that reviewers say is easy to use, that is built to integrate with social media, and that are designed to scale seamlessly as your organization grows. As you start to get a feel for what is out there, and talk to some other stakeholders, you will be able to hone in on the perfect system for your team.
About Jobvite

Jobvite is the only recruiting platform that delivers real-time recruiting intelligence with innovative technology for the evolving social web. Leading, fast-growing companies today use Jobvite’s social recruiting, sourcing, and talent acquisition solutions to target the right talent and build the best teams.

Jobvite is a complete, Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) platform, which can optimize the speed, cost-effectiveness, and ease of recruiting for any company. To learn more, take a tour of our product.

CONNECT WITH US

www.facebook.com/jobvite
www.twitter.com/jobvite
www.linkedin.com/company/jobvite

Call us at 844-JOBVITE