How Sweetwater Sound Rocks the Candidate Experience

Sweetwater

phenom

The Challenge

Sweetwater Sound, one of the world's largest online retailers of audio and musical equipment, has a pretty rock-and-roll backstory — complete with a VW bus as its first official headquarters. Now a 2,500+ employee organization serving millions of customers, Sweetwater still retains its entrepreneurial passion.

This leaning extended to the company's talent function, with homegrown HR technology like their applicant tracking system, developed in-house along with a self-hosted career site and application process. As Sweetwater grew, however, the organization realized its do-it-yourself approach was limiting recruiters' ability to quickly get high-quality talent through the door. "Every single task was a heavy manual lift for myself and the rest of our recruiting team with the FileMaker applicant tracking system we were utilizing," said Jordan Applegate, Senior Director of Recruiting for Sweetwater.

For Applegate, the challenge was to increase efficiency by finding a third-party solution while preserving hands-on control over the talent experience.

"We're control freaks, in the best sense of the term, when it comes to the candidate experience," he joked. "We wanted to see how much efficiency we could gain without giving up control over that."

"We reached a point where we knew we needed smart automations to keep up with our hiring demands and stay competitive in the market."

Jordan Applegate
Senior Director of Recruiting
Sweetwater Sound

The Solution

Applegate sought a solution with intelligent automation and tools that would drive more efficient recruiter functions — including application review and selection, interview scheduling, and candidate outreach — and data-driven decision-making. When they found Phenom, he recognized a solution that would solve the need for speed while also allowing the hands-on freedom to tailor a candidate experience that would remain true to Sweetwater's employer branding and values.

"The ability to retain control over the candidate experience really won us over," Applegate shared, highlighting the following capabilities:

Phenom Career Site, CMS and Hosted Apply. With Phenom Career Site and CMS, the Sweetwater recruiting department can create and publish their own career site content — without leaning on other teams, or being locked into vendor-specific templates. "We didn't want candidates to know they'd left us and went to a third-party tool," Applegate said. "With Phenom, we can keep our own branding and maintain a seamless experience for candidates." This holds true from the first candidate touchpoint and throughout the entire application process.

They also integrated Phenom with their Indeed job postings to automatically parse and process the hundreds of resumes received — something that used to take hours of manual effort. As a result, Sweetwater was finally able to meet their aggressive seasonal hiring targets for the first time. "Never before had we actually hit our aggressive goal of peak hiring until we implemented these automations. The Hosted Apply product has allowed us to streamline our hiring in a significant way."
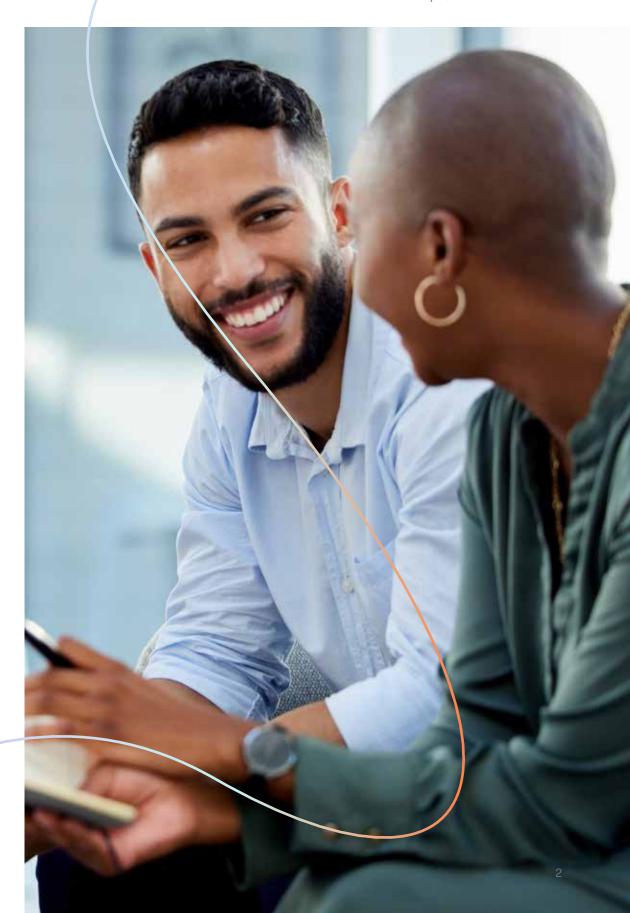
Phenom CRM and Campaigns. The CRM gives recruiters one system of record for candidate information, so they can track interactions in real time and create targeted campaigns that catch attention with personalized content. Using templates allows recruiters to "humanize" their communications with candidates, according to Applegate. Rejection notifications are a good example: instead of sending an industry-standard "thanks, but no thanks" email, recruiters can personalize the notification with helpful information, such as other job opportunities that might be a good fit.

Phenom's advanced automation capabilities have been a game changer. Sweetwater created automated workflows triggered by hiring stage changes to send assessments and schedule interviews instantly.

Phenom Talent Analytics. The ease of tracking and surfacing KPIs and metrics saves Applegate time and effort when it comes to monthly reporting. He also noted that metrics on CRM usage helps him improve the performance of his own team members. "We can look at usage from one recruiter to the next to personally coach and mentor on an individual basis."

"Phenom gives our recruiters the ability to focus on creating an amazing candidate experience. They're working more efficiently and more confidently."

Jordan Applegate

The Results

Since implementing Phenom, Sweetwater has noticed both quantifiable and qualitative gains as a result of an improved experience for both candidates and recruiters.

Stand-out results include:

- **More efficient high-volume hiring.** Phenom automations were instrumental to Sweetwater during the holiday peak, Applegate said, with a *single recruiter processing more than 500 applications per week*. "Using Phenom really set us up for success. We processed more applications and leads than ever before."

- **Faster interview scheduling.** "Moving through the interview process efficiently so we can make decisions on top talent quickly is a huge part of the success of our business," said Applegate. By using the recipe automation feature, the team has whittled phone interview scheduling from a multi-step process to one click. "In terms of time saved, "that's 5 minutes down to 5 seconds," Applegate estimated.

- **Stronger candidate engagement.** With more consistent branding thanks to the user-friendly CMS and Hosted Apply, Sweetwater *increased their completed application rate by 82%.* "The ease of dropping in polished content has improved our branding capabilities. We're showcasing culture-specific images and re-engaging more candidates than ever before," Applegate said.

"We've already seen a modernization that allows substantial time savings and eliminates system fragmentation."

Jordan Applegate

What Sweetwater Sound Is Achieving with Phenom

"Because Sweetwater is in a high-growth model across all business units, identifying and hiring top talent is key. Now we can do it quickly, accurately, and repeatedly — without sacrificing a great experience."

Jordan Applegate
Senior Director of Recruiting

Sweetwater.

↓ ## Decreased time to schedule an interview 98%

Automation has reduced time to schedule interviews from 5 minutes to 5 seconds.

↑ ## Increased completed applications 82%

Completed applications have increased dramatically since implementing Phenom Hosted Apply for a seamless, branded apply process.

↑ ## Increased recruiter efficiency

With the help of automation, a single recruiter processed 500+ applications per week during peak hiring season.

The Future

Sweetwater plans to dig deeper into reporting and metrics to show ongoing gains in recruiter efficiency. They're looking forward to continuing the relationship they're building with Phenom, which Applegate notes has been responsive in collaborating on an approach that's personalized to his team's specific talent needs.

"Our relationship with the Phenom team has been very beneficial," he said. "They're always open to finding a way to deliver on the specific metrics we need."

One thing Sweetwater is most excited about is managing job requisitions and offers within Phenom. "Sweetwater is turning on offer management which leverages hiring statuses in Phenom to automate offers, allowing us to take candidates all the way through the process from first click on our career site through signed offer and start date in one experience."

"Using Phenom really set us up for success. We processed more applications and leads than ever before."
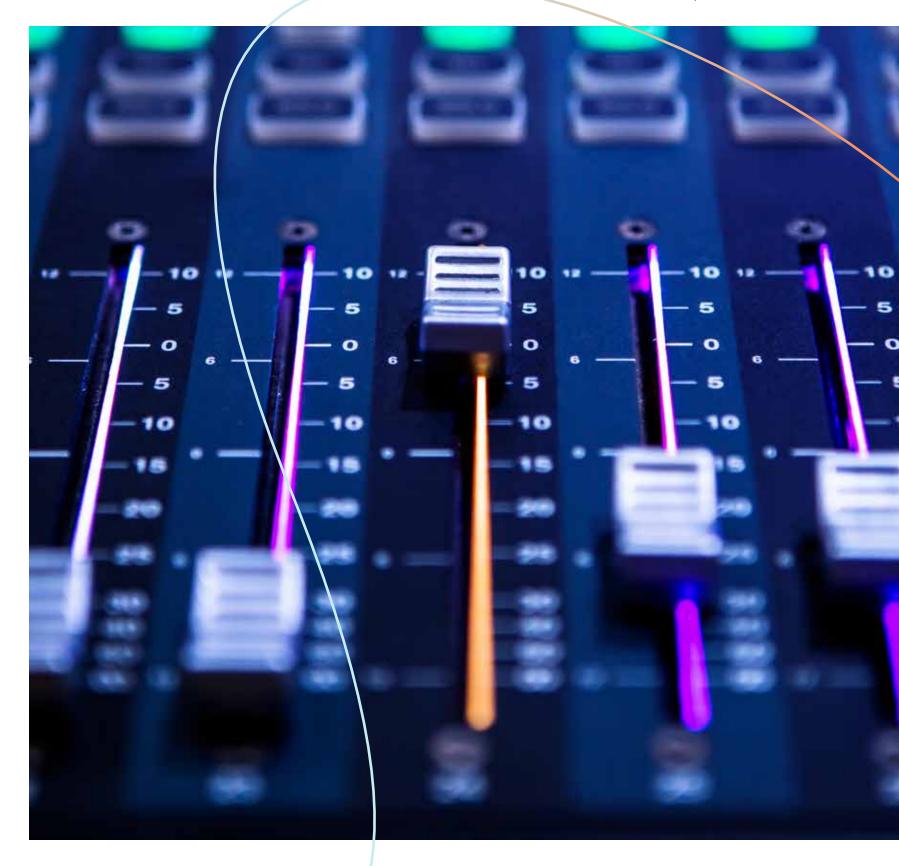
Jordan Applegate

Sweetwater

Sweetwater Sound began in 1979 as a mobile recording studio. Noticing that musicians lacked access to quality instruments, gear, and expert support, Sweetwater's founder created a company to fill that gap, providing the comprehensive selection and service customers were missing. The company has evolved into the largest U.S. retailer of musical instruments and pro audio equipment. Now serving millions of customers, the Sweetwater employee team shares the common vision of delivering the best-in-class selection, service, and support to make music dreams come true.

Industry	Retail
Career site	sweetwater.com/careers
Headquarters	Fort Wayne, Indiana
Employees	2,300+
ATS	Phenom CRM

See the **Phenom Intelligent Talent Experience** platform in action

Book a demo

Candidate Experience

Best-fit candidates find and choose you faster. Attract job seekers and broaden talent pools with personalized job recommendations and an intelligent career site.

Recruiter Experience

Recruiters become wildly productive. Discover and engage top talent with AI, put tedious tasks on autopilot, and maximize your team's ability to streamline workflows.

HR Experience

HR leaders align employee development with company goals through an intelligent workforce planning solution that allows them to identify skill and competency gaps, manage career frameworks, and identify DE&I opportunities.

Employee Experience

Employees develop their skills and evolve their careers. Upskill, evolve, and retain your workforce with intelligence and personalized opportunities.

Manager Experience

Managers build stronger-performing teams with real-time analytics, insights, and collaboration tools.

HRIS Experience

HRIS teams seamlessly integrate with your HR tech stack — including ATS, HCM, and LMS tools — to create a holistic infrastructure.

Helping a billion people find the right job.

Phenom has a purpose of helping a billion people find the right job. Through AI-powered talent experiences, employers are using Phenom to hire employees faster, develop them to their full potential, and retain them longer. The Phenom Intelligent Talent Experience platform seamlessly connects candidates, employees, recruiters, hiring managers, HR, and HRIS — empowering over 500 diverse and global enterprises with innovative products including Phenom Career Site, Chatbot, CMS, CRM, AI Scheduling, Video Assessments, Campaigns, University Recruiting, Talent Marketplace, Career Pathing, Gigs, Mentoring, and Referrals.

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