

How Verisk uses skills-based hiring to unlock hidden potential

What do you do when all resumes look similar and you have thousands to review? It can leave a recruiter trying to judge how strong of a data scientist the candidate is based on how well they can format a piece of paper. A significant challenge when aiming to get to know the person behind the resume.

These are real problems Felicia Fleitman, Director, Early Careers & Diversity Pipelines at Verisk, faced when reviewing candidates for their Data Science Excellence Program.

As a company that embraces D&I as a business imperative, Verisk is putting skills over resumes by doing things differently.

How do your early career programs work? What type of people apply?

We use HackerRank for our Software Dev and Data Science internships, and entry-level roles. Our entry-level Data Scientists join our Data Science Excellence Program, a rotational development program that exposes participants to the breadth of products that Verisk offers our customers.

We typically recruit Masters level students for the program, though we also consider PHD and undergrads with highly technical backgrounds that are interested in pursuing a career in data science.

Joining the Data Science Excellence Program ("DSEP") is an incredible learning opportunity. When you come on board, you rotate across two different business units over 3 years. Additionally, there is an entire team that supports your learning and development journey. Our analytics community is highly engaged in DSEP and constantly provides training and networking opportunities to the participants.

How does HackerRank fit into the program?

We get several thousand applications for our data science excellence program and our data science summer internships. Last year, we had over 5,000 applications for just about 20 spots. Prior to using HackerRank, we would get the resumes and, to be honest with you, most of the resumes look very similar.

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The resumes would have an undergrad in something technical and then a master's level degree in business analytics, statistics, engineering or something along those lines.

We always have really great talent applying, but it's not feasible to send 5,000 people through a live interview. Even after you take out the folks that don't meet a minimum qualification, you're still talking about several thousand applications. As a company obsessed with optimization, efficiency, and equity, we're continuously looking for ways to remove luck and randomness and replace them with a focus on the skills Verisk needs, a culture fit, and the professional growth applicants seek.

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Now, we can look at their resume and say, "This candidate meets the minimum qualifications, so let's send the HackerRank assessment, so we can better understand how this candidate solves problems."

Prior to HackerRank, the technical interview used to be in person during the third round. It's one of the ways we've made our talent screening process more efficient and skills focused. Now, the technical screen is the very first round. We look at their resume and if they meet the qualifications, they immediately get a HackerRank assessment. It's a great tool that supports our goal to assess candidates based on their skills; not how they present on paper.

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What was the experience of rolling out HackerRank like for you? How did you roll it out?

It was really positive. Our data scientists were already familiar with HackerRank, so I didn't have to convince them. They were aware of technical assessments, so it was a fairly easy sell. It helps that our Chief Analytics Officer at the time was a huge fan of HackerRank as well.

We assembled a team of three data scientists to work together to determine the assessment. The only guidance I gave them was that it cannot be longer than 90 minutes, because it competes with the students' classwork, and that it should be open from a language perspective. Just because a student hasn't learned a specific language in school doesn't mean it's not something that they can pick up. HackerRank offers 40+ languages, so it was easy to meet that requirement.

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The team interviewed several other Verisk data scientists to discover the mindset that they should introduce into the assessment to make it reflect the kind of work we do. We gave the assessment to a couple of junior data scientists to test, and they gave us their feedback. We continue to iterate the assessment every year to keep it as up-to-date with our work.

Have you made any changes to the process to further engage potential candidates?

As a company focused on achieving our diversity & inclusion goals, equity and inclusion in the recruiting process is paramount. As we kicked off the fall recruiting season, for the Masters level folks, we found that they had just entered their data science masters level courses and had only been learning the concepts for a week or two. We thought a lot about it, and now we're moving our recruitment to the spring, so that students have a full semester of coursework under their belt.

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At the same time, we crafted our process so that if you are passionate about data science, you can still pass. Even if you haven't taken a course specifically in, for example, physical models, but it's something that you are constantly exploring, googling, and learning more about you, should be given a shot. The assessment should be good for anybody who has a real passion for data science, even if they haven't taken a formal class on it.

What's next for the program? What big goals do you have this year?

The push for us internally is diversity, specifically gender and racial diversity. We're very proud to say that half our incoming class is female. Putting skills over resumes helped with this goal.

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When you only look at a resume, things like formatting make a big difference. It may seem like they spent more time on it, but in reality, they may have just had a good career service person.

Something like this is important, because first-generation college students are 70% less likely to visit career services. If you are a first-generation college student who isn't getting a resume formatted and therefore it doesn't look like everyone else's, by the time that it comes down to my desk, it doesn't accurately reflect who they are and what they can do.

We're committed to removing inequity from the hiring process, so we aggressively make those investments that drive real change and create opportunities.

To learn more about careers at Verisk visit their [careers site](#). [Request a demo](#) to see in action how HackerRank can help you put skills over pedigree.