



Questionmark Case Study

San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit Screens Potential Hires

Background

The San Francisco Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BART) rail system serves four counties in the San Francisco Bay Area. With 43 BART stations on 104 miles of track, BART provides rides to 104 million passengers each year.

Pre-Screening Candidates

For decades, BART has required job candidates to take tests before they can be hired. Before the advent of computer-aided testing, questions for candidate pre-screening were handwritten on 3x7 cards and stored in a vault called Big Bertha.

Even once BART began to automate, the process of testing potential hires was cumbersome. With about 60 people a month to test, there was no time to update test questions. Union rules required two people to be in the room for any test, and a test facility for 70 people had to be maintained. It took three to four days to grade tests, and even when the agency began to use Scantron sheets, it still took an additional day.

New Testing Schemes

BART now uses Questionmark Perception to screen potential hires. The majority of testing is for six jobs in electronics. When candidates apply to be technicians who maintain automatic fare collectors, train control systems, computers, transit vehicles, communications (such as radio or computer networking equipment) or big transformers, they must first show that they have enough knowledge of electronics. The tests ask multiple-choice questions about such electrical concepts as Ohm's Law, circuits, currents, voltage, and other knowledge.

Perception has made the whole testing operation much more efficient and quick. Candidates can begin their tests as soon as they arrive, without having to wait for a whole group to get settled. And it's no longer necessary to carry 60 pounds of test booklets to different buildings -- or to sharpen pencils!

The HR department receives test results right away. Also, when candidates log into the system, they confirm their address and thereby are able to get their own results immediately.

Because these candidates are often very tech-savvy, BART uses Questionmark Secure to make sure that they aren't instant-messaging with someone or using Google to get answers. The software locks the desktop so that none of these applications can be used during the test.

Employee Testing

BART's learning management system (LMS) is Pathlore, and a new assessment has now rolled out through the LMS. Because the BART right-of-way goes through the Port of Oakland, maintenance people have to go to the Port as well. But the Port is a secure area, and its security procedures for entering and leaving have changed. So the new training and assessment cover accessing the Port and ensure that people know before they arrive at the gate that they will be subject to search and that Port personnel take security very seriously.

Perception works smoothly with Pathlore. The system greets each student by name, sends them e-mails with status reports, and delivers courses. It also serves up an assessment at the end and displays the student's score.

Future Uses

Perception may someday be utilized in training Station Agents, Train Operators and other BART employees. With people being able to take tests in their own facilities rather than having to visit a training center, there are plenty of potential roles for Perception assessments.

More information

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