



The gap sits after the apply button

Employers score 62% on attracting candidates and 21% on qualifying them.
85% have no automated qualification process.

Summary

In 2026, platform vendor Phenom audited 219 employers across eight industries on the automation of their hiring process. On attracting, engaging, and converting candidates, employers average 62% of the attainable maximum. On qualification after the apply click, the same employers average 21%, a gap of 41 percentage points. 94% do not schedule an interview at the point of application. 99% do not use video interviews inline. Less than 1% have a fully orchestrated qualification process. For frontline roles, 85% sit in the lowest automation tier. For knowledge worker roles the figure is 93%. No industry scores above 30%. The data comes from a platform vendor measuring against its own product categories, and that caveat applies to every use of the figures.

Where the process stalls

In 2026, platform vendor Phenom audited the candidate experience at 219 employers across eight industries, from career sites through to the application process. The result is a gap that overshadows everything else in the report.

On attracting, engaging, and converting candidates, employers average 62% of the attainable maximum. Career sites are branded, search works, chatbots are active. 37% score in the top tier.

On what happens next, qualification after the apply click, the same employers average 21%. The difference is 41 percentage points.

What the numbers show

The figures behind that average make it concrete. Of the 219 employers audited, 94% do not schedule an interview at the moment of application. 99% do not deploy one-way video interviews within the application flow. 99% have no voice screening agent. Less than 1% have a fully orchestrated qualification process in which screening, assessment, and scheduling happen in a single session.

21% average hiring automation score



Phenom, State of Hiring Automation 2026, frontline roles, n=219.

No industry scores above 30%. Retail leads at 28%, higher education trails at 12%. The five top performers are Circle K at 84%, Elara Caring at 73%, Southwest Airlines at 50%, Michaels at 50%, and Bass Pro Shops at 49%.

Why the gap exists

Employers have invested heavily in the top of the funnel over the past several years: career sites, chatbots, mobile-friendly applications, and personalised job recommendations. That investment has paid off. The candidate reaches the apply button.

What happens after that lives in a different system, often a separate tracking system, a standalone scheduling tool, and a manual review process. Phenom calls this the difference between inline qualification, where everything happens in one session, and fragmented workflows, where each step starts days later. In the second scenario the candidate has moved on.

The split between frontline and knowledge workers

For frontline roles, 85% of employers sit in the lowest automation tier. For knowledge worker roles the figure is 93%. Frontline scores higher on 13 of the 15 measured automation capabilities. Yet 61% of employers apply exactly the same automation to both role types.

The survey of more than a hundred organisations by Aptitude Research shows that 47% focus primarily on knowledge worker roles, 20% on frontline, and 32% on both. The role type that gets the most attention is the one with the lowest automation maturity.

What cuts against this

Three caveats belong with these figures.

First, the report measures what Phenom measures. The seven automation categories, chatbot, assessment, screening, video interview, scheduling, voice agent, and credential verification, are the product categories of the researcher. An employer that uses a different tool for the same step scores zero even though the work gets done. The report measures the presence of inline automation, not the absence of qualification.

Second, the audit examined publicly accessible career sites, between December 2025 and February 2026. It says nothing about what happens behind the apply button in an applicant tracking system or an internal system.

Third, the sample omits two large sectors. The public sector and professional services are not represented. The eight audited industries cover a broad but incomplete picture.

What this means in practice

- Attracting candidates works reasonably well at most employers. Retaining those candidates after the application does not. 94% do not schedule an interview at the moment of application. That is the point where an agency compresses the timeline.
- Automation differs by industry. Retail leads at 28%, higher education trails at 12%. A consultant working those sectors can quote the benchmark figure in an intake.
- The gap is widest for knowledge workers. 93% of employers hiring knowledge workers sit in the lowest tier, against 85% for frontline. Specialist agencies most often encounter an employer that qualifies by hand.

- 61% of employers make no distinction in automation between frontline and knowledge worker roles. An agency that differentiates its process by audience operates in a market where the employer almost never does.

Method and sources

The figures come from two sources that together form the report. Phenom audited 219 employers on the publicly visible candidate experience, from career sites through to the application. The assessment uses a point system with a maximum of 365: 220 points for attraction, engagement, and conversion, and 145 points for post-apply qualification automation. Aptitude Research surveyed more than a hundred organisations on automation priorities, adoption barriers, and investment areas. The audit examined publicly accessible sources collected between December 2025 and February 2026.

The report uses the Job Zone classification system for role classification: zones 1 and 2 are frontline (little to some preparation), zones 3 and 4 are knowledge workers (medium to considerable preparation).

The eight audited industries are retail, hospitality, transportation and logistics, manufacturing, healthcare, financial services, information technology, and higher education. The public sector and professional services are not represented.

Phenom is the vendor of the platform that would score well on the measured categories. That conflict of interest makes the absolute scores less useful than the relative patterns: the gap between attraction and qualification, and how industries rank against one another. The report is published at stateofha.phenom.com under the copyright of Phenom People, Inc.

Automation, Hiring, Qualification, Technology

Sources

- Phenom, State of Hiring Automation: 2026 Benchmark Report
- Aptitude Research, Hiring Automation Survey 2026