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Businesses chasing foreign workers under new 457 visa win LinkedIn backflip

By political reporter Jackson Gothe-Snape

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Foreign workers can be brought into Australia on the new 457-style visa as long as employers tried to hire Aussies first ... on LinkedIn.

The Government this month tweaked its rules around the new 457, now dubbed the "Temporary Skill Shortage" visa, reversing an earlier decision to reject ads on the social network as part of labour market testing.

This testing — where employers are required to demonstrate they advertised locally for jobs — is designed to ensure Australians are given priority before overseas workers are hired.

At the end of 2017, 75,610 overseas workers were in Australia on a 457 temporary work visa.

The new rules mean an employer can satisfy testing by advertising in two places — for example on the Government job portal Jobactive and LinkedIn.

A three-week LinkedIn campaign costs approximately \$500, while advertising on Jobactive is free.

'Backflip' in latest change

Labor immigration spokesman Shayne Neumann said this was another "backflip" from the Government and proof it "botched" changes to Australia's skilled migration program.

He said Labor would introduce an independent skills assessment body if Labor won Government that would determine "genuine" skills need.

The Government announced major changes to the 457 program last year, but since then has made several tweaks following a backlash from migrants and businesses.

The changes have led to a reduction in 457 visas. 25,000 grants to foreign workers were made in the year to March compared with 46,000 in 2016-17.

A spokeswoman for Alan Tudge, the minister responsible for the program, declined to provide comment on the LinkedIn tweak, but emphasised that the rules were designed to strike an appropriate balance between prioritising Australian workers and recognising industry recruitment practices.

Social media advertisements had been accepted in the past but the old requirements were less prescriptive.

In March, rules were introduced that specifically required evidence of two advertisements with national reach booked within the previous 12 months.

The changes barred Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram as well as general classifieds sites like Gumtree.

As of June, LinkedIn ads are acceptable again and the window of the ads was reduced to six months.

LinkedIn different to Gumtree



PHOTO: LinkedIn is a social networking website with a focus on professionals. (Reuters: Robert Galbraith)

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Key points:

- 457 visa changes overturn ban on LinkedIn to test local market for jobs
- Facebook, Instagram, Gumtree not acceptable
- Businesses can bring in foreign workers if ads don't attract sufficient talent

Wayne Parcell, immigration partner at professional services firm EY, said he welcomed this development.

"It was probably not clear enough to policy makers that beyond your own profile contact network on LinkedIn, there are also the LinkedIn job boards for which many employers, including ASX-listed companies, pay a fee, and the service has a national reach like other recruitment websites," he said.

He noted the latest changes also allow industry-specific recruitment websites to be used, but LinkedIn ads that are designed to reach only certain contacts — for example posts visible only within someone's network — are not acceptable.

Kevin Lane, president of the Migration Institute of Australia, said the March changes tightened up labour market testing but went too far on LinkedIn.

He argued LinkedIn was often used for senior executive positions, much more so than something like Gumtree.

"The paid LinkedIn is maybe seen to be a higher quality — it's only used by people who are really serious about getting someone," he said.

Programmers, chefs, cooks and accountants are among the most common occupations in the temporary foreign worker visa program.

Topics: government-and-politics, immigration, social-media, australia

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