

The Hidden Job Market

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Can't seem to find a job? Maybe you're just not looking in the right places.

Because of the overwhelming number of job seekers ready to pounce on new openings, employers often bypass the big online job boards and even placement agencies, and try to fill job openings directly.

Over 80% of today's jobs aren't advertised, according to Howard Poplinger, owner of human-resource company Epic Development and Evaluation.

Companies are relying more heavily on their current employee networks, or on local or specialized job pools, to avoid the flood of unqualified candidates that comes with high unemployment.

"Businesses go to employees first and ask if they know anybody," Poplinger said. That way, managers don't have to go through the time-consuming process of placing an ad and sorting through applicants, he explained.

With nearly 14 million people unemployed, there are more than five job seekers per opening, according to the Labor Department's most recent data.

"Employers are definitely leaning on their employee population to get referrals for people that their employees trust," said Kathy Robinson, the founder of TurningPoint, a career consulting firm in greater Boston. "Otherwise they have to screen thousands of applicants."

According to Robinson, open positions may eventually make it onto big job sites, but only after employers reach out to their employees or a select group of recruiters first.

"The first couple of weeks is the quiet period, which is mostly word of mouth," she explained.

For example, one company recently reached out to Robinson, looking for qualified candidates to fill an opening for a human resources associate, which was neither posted on the company's Web site nor listed on any job boards.

When employers do advertise, they are much more selective in where they post by utilizing smaller, free sites that are unique to a skill set or a specific market, according to Tig Gilliam, CEO of Adecco Group North America, a unit of the world's largest employment staffing firm.

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Small or mid-sized business owners, in particular, generally have more luck finding a qualified resource through a site specific to engineers in Pittsburgh, for example, rather than a major job board that caters to all types of job seekers nationwide.

"Big job boards are of limited help for them because so many of the users aren't in the area they are recruiting," he said.

Uncovering hidden jobs

Gilliam recommends that job seekers expand their search tools and reduce their dependency on the major job sites that have become so popular over the last decade.

Remember the help wanted ads in your local paper? Gilliam suggests adding them to your search repertoire, in addition to smaller online job boards that specialize in a certain skill set, community or region.

A Google search can usually bring up any job boards specific to your home town. More targeted industry listings can be found on the Web sites for professional associations and societies, such as the Software Contractors' Guild or the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.

Even the local listings on Craigslist can be an asset for some job seekers.

Vanchinathan Chandrasekaran found his new job on a Florida Craigslist site.

When Chandrasekaran, 25, was looking for a job he said the response rate from Craigslist far exceeded that from the more popular job search sites.

"Though the companies were small, I was happy that someone was looking into my resume." he said.

Soon, Chandrasekaran found a position as a software developer with a firm in Boca Raton through a Craigslist ad and started his new job in January.

According to career experts, there are also ways to tap into a company's network to find out about openings, even if the positions are never advertised publicly.

Robinson suggests that job seekers, "Dig deeper when thinking of connections" at choice companies.

Joining local networking groups for your profession or LinkedIn may uncover a connection to an employee at the company, such as sharing the same alma mater, which could be the foot in the door you need, she said.

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Joining a company's community online, through sites like Facebook and Twitter may also provide access to openings before the general public.

Without an "In" at the employer of choice, job seekers can still gain an advantage by contacting the company directly, even if there are no open positions posted.

When it comes to finding out about jobs that are unadvertised, it often boils down to "Knocking on Doors," Poplinger said.

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