

Job Search Advice for Today's Economy

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Abstract

The current job market is one graduating seniors and those who were employed but have lost their jobs have not faced in many years. It is a global situation in a global economy where what happens in one country affects all others. So, what advice can be given to current students and former students on how to get a job in this world situation? With ready access to the Internet from home computers as well as computers available in public places, such as libraries, the Internet is a key source for obtaining information and advice. This project has developed a set of guides from an Internet search. These guides include such items as (1) setting weekly goals for contacts, (2) networking through social networking sites, (3) using nontraditional methods, such as blogs, (4) finding ways to locate jobs not publicly listed, and more. The conclusions section gives a complete list.

Introduction

Turn on the television or radio to listen to a news program in 2009 and rarely will you find a broadcast without the mention in one form or another of the dismal job market. Go to the web and view a news site and at least one of the articles will probably talk about jobs being lost somewhere. CNNMoney.com posted on its site on January 16, "Brutal job losses continue in 2009" (Smith, 2009, p. 1). This article goes on to state, "Circuit City Inc. is the biggest culprit of 2009. The bankrupt retailer said on Friday that it is shutting down because of dried-up consumer spending and liquidating its 567 U.S. stores, dooming some 30,000 jobs" (p. 1).

The U.S. Department of Labor in an economic news release, "Employment Situation Summary," (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2009a) reported on January 9:

Nonfarm payroll employment declined sharply in December, and the unemployment rate rose from 6.8 to 7.2 percent, the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor reported today. Payroll employment fell by 524,000 over the month and by 1.9 million over the last 4 months of 2008. In December, job losses were large and widespread across most major industry sectors. (p. 1)

The same site on July 17 in "Regional and State Employment and Unemployment Summary" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009b) reported, "Regional and state unemployment rates were generally higher in June [2009]. . . The national unemployment rate, at 9.5 percent, was little changed between May and June, but was up 3.9 percentage points from a year earlier" (p. 1).

"September Job Losses Underscore Depth of Crisis" (Langfitt, 2009, p. 1) reads the headline of a National Public Radio (NPR) web posting. This posting states, "First, layoffs that began in troubled sectors like housing and construction are now apparent everywhere. . . In fact, the last time the country saw such a steep decline was toward the end of the last recession, more than five years ago" (p. 1).

January 10, *The Wall Street Journal* online site carried the following article, “Yearly Job Loss Worst Since 1945” (Evans & Maher, 2009, p. 1). The first paragraph of the article states, “The worsening U.S. economy hit the nation’s work force hard in December, as the unemployment rate climbed to 7.2% and brought the total number of jobs lost last year to just over 2.5 million – the most since 1945” (p. 1).

In the article, “U.S. Payrolls Fall More Than Forecast,” (Trading Economics, 2009) the global economics research site, tradingeconomics.com, reported:

Employers in the U.S. cut 467,000 jobs in June, the unemployment rate rose and hourly earnings stagnated. . . The payroll decline was more than forecast and followed a 322,000 drop in May, according to Labor Department figures released today in Washington. The jobless rate jumped to 9.5 percent, the highest since August 1983, from 9.4 percent. (p. 1)

These headlines and job loss articles are not limited to the United States, although the United States seems to have the greatest decline. The allAfrica.com web site reports similar dismal news. An article dated January 13, 2009, contained the heading, “Nigeria: Job Losses Loom as Naira Crashes Further” (Komolafe, Komolafe, Ahiuma-Young, & Alli, 2009, p. 1). The authors stated:

A thick cloud of uncertainty descended on the nation’s foreign exchange market yesterday as the Naira fell further by N6 to N150 per dollar in the official market, with dire implications for the national economy” (p. 1). And the article goes on to state, “Already, there are indications that the banking industry would soon experience massive job cuts as banks have concluded plans to lay off thousands of workers as part of strategies to cope with the impact of the global financial crisis. (p. 1)

With economic news like this constantly bombarding our students, they cannot help but be uneasy about job possibilities after graduation. What should faculty tell them? Where should they go to get advice on searching for a job in this dismal economy? Today, the Internet is probably one of the first places to suggest students look for advice on how to get a job with the current state of the economy, both in the U.S. and worldwide. In fact, Rainie and Smith (2009) reported in “The Internet and the Recession” from the Pew Internet & American Life Project that, “Some 69% of all Americans have used the Internet to cope with the recession as they hunt for bargains, jobs, ways to upgrade their skills, better investment strategies, housing options, and government benefits. That amounts to 88% of Internet users” (p. 1).

Of course, a key reason for suggesting the Internet is its ability to be very up-to-date. However, what advice is available on the Internet? What is the likelihood someone looking for job hunting advice on the Internet will come away more confident of getting a job? Are nontraditional ways being recommended that business communication faculty are not covering in their job search units?

Purpose and Method

To answer these questions, the purpose of this research was to locate job-hunting advice on the Internet to determine what readers are being told to do in order to obtain a job at this time in history. From the information at the sites reviewed, a list of recommendations was developed that can be shared with current students and former students who call and say, “I lost my job and am having

difficulty getting another position. What advice can you give me?” This research is intentionally being done in the same way most students would go about doing research on the web—using a key word search on the search engine “Google” or similar search engine.

Literature Review

As expected, over the last ten years, a variety of employment advice has been given. Jerome Curry (1998) at The Pennsylvania State University, Mont Alto, in “Tapping the Internet’s Job Search Resources,” presented the following guides (p. 100):

1. Maintain a Notebook [a record of where applications have been sent]
2. Consult the Internet Job Search List [a list of Internet sites provided by the author at a link to the specific university’s homepage]
3. Begin the Job Search which includes (1) Post E-Resumes to Bulletin Boards, (2) Send E-Resumes to Job Search Guides and Databases, (3) Send E-Resumes to Potential Employers, (4) Network, (5) Prepare for Interviews, and (6) Search for Job Fairs Online.
4. In “Get Wired, Get Hired?” Kirk Steers (1998) gives a seven step plan he used when seeking to make a lateral move (pp. 193-196).
5. Research, Research, and More Research [go to the Web and learn everything you can about how to find a job and about yourself—what you like and are qualified for]
6. Make Contacts [finding companies that are hiring by discovering sources, individuals, who know]
7. Scan the Listings [using job listing organizations on the Web like Monster]
8. Think Small, Think Local [do not use just the big sites like Monster; search for smaller sites that deal with local and regional employment opportunities]
9. Get an (Electronic) Agent [sites that scan the Web for jobs based on a stated criteria and post the finds to a personal folder]
10. Craft That Resume [have a good electronic resume]
11. Post and Toast [posted resume to Websites and expected many offers; found out recruiters do not have time to scan large data banks of resumes but view those responses to specific job listings; also, if individual strengths are not describable by keyword, a more traditional job search may work best].

The above recommendations came during the “dot-com” bubble build up. Then the bubble burst and the attacks of September 11, 2001, occurred, sending the U.S. into a recession. During that time, Julia King (2002) wrote an article for *Computerworld* for individuals seeking IT employment. King provides the following advice in the article (p. 8):

1. Obtain security technologies training and a government security clearance.
2. Upgrade skills to the hot areas, Oracle9i, C++, SQL software and Java.
3. Write the resume in business terms. Do not use a laundry list of technical skills; instead, focus on contributions to the employer, particularly saving company money.
4. Spotlight management and customer contact and communications skills (those most desirable in new hires as ranked by the Fortune 1000 in a survey of 150 senior executives—December 3, 2001, to January 22, 2002, by Accenture Ltd.)
5. Broaden your skill base.
6. Lower expectations and swallow ego.
7. Consider working for the government.
8. Keep contacting and networking.
9. Although this information is directed toward IT employment, recommendation 3-8 could certainly apply to all business graduates.

Kathleen Isaacson (2002) also gave advice about seeking a job during the 2001-2002 recession, particularly for job hunting on the Internet. She suggested starting by visiting popular websites and mentions that using a general search engine can be helpful. Isaacson also stated that Kelly McGee at Edward Jones said they rely more heavily on the completed job application than a resume. And “what gets noticed is a complete job history which reflects stability, increase in responsibility and/or income” (p. 24). Larry Slesinger (2005) stressed the importance of having and using a good network in his article, “A Recruiter’s Guide to Mining Your Network.” And Karla Taylor (2005) indicated to be sure to get the basics correct. First, do the resume and cover letter right. Taylor says some of the things recruiters dislike the most are

... submitting boilerplate resumes that have obviously gone to 50 different jobs. Using lots of different fonts, especially in lots of different colors. Sending testimonial letters the recruiters didn’t ask for. Not sending what they did ask for, such as references from three different positions or sample work products. Eliminating exact dates of employment or graduation. . . Writing functional resumes that are long on tasks you performed and short on the clear chronology of your career path. (p. 74)

Following the eight-year period mentioned above, the job market made leaps in improvement. Then about mid 2007, things started downhill right into the current recession. So what is the advice today for getting a job in the current market? And, in particular, what kind of advice can be found on the web?

Current Job Advice from Websites

As a student would, the researcher used the Google to search for advice on getting a job in the 2009 economic situation. Several different search phrases were used all similar to “how to get a job” or

“advice on getting a job.” Of course, there were hundreds of hits. Ten have been selected out of all the hits examined, and those ten are reviewed below. The following ten sites were generally chosen for one of two reasons. First, the sites were recognizable as having supplied reliable information in previous searches. Second, the sites provide information that seemed to be unique, something not considered before, such as the www.brazencareeist.com site where the use of a blog led to a job (Site Number 10).

Stony Brook University Career Center (Site Number 7) provides nine excellent guides that are developed from a poll of Career Center directors from universities across the United States. Only ten sites are included because information tends to start being duplicated at additional sites.

1. <http://www.ehow.com>

The eHow member, LilBlackDress (n.d) gives ten recommendations, summarized as follows:

- a. Keep notes of where applications have been made and the names of the individuals spoken to.
- b. Let everyone know you are looking for a jobs and asked if they know of any openings.
- c. Contact past employers and co-workers as well as friends asking for tips, leads, and the possibility of sharing your resume with someone they know.
- d. Sign up for “linkedin.com,” a site where networking contacts can be made.
- e. Use the Internet job listing sites, keying in on sites that will be better suited for the area in which employment is desired.
- f. Check classified ads in local papers.
- g. Consider getting the help of a recruiter or headhunter.
- h. Contact the alumni association of any college attended.
- i. Attend job fairs.
- j. Set goals for the number of contacts to be accomplished each week.

2. <http://findajoblistings.com>

At Hot Job Links, Kevin Donlin (n.d.) makes three suggestions using a short scenario to illustrate each recommendation. The three recommendations are related to the marketing area. First, Donlin says start working before getting the job. He uses the illustration of someone who comes to the interview with sales leads in hand. Second, Donlin says to start before the interview. He uses his own experience as an illustration. Donlin asked for copies of the company’s publications before the interview. Thoroughly analyzing the publications, he found proofreading errors. During the interview when proofreading came up, he showed the interviewer what he had found and indicated he could improve the company’s image, if hired, by preventing this from happening.

And third, Donlin says start work after the interview. He uses the example of a young woman who had the interview but was unable to get a positive or negative response from the individual in charge or recruitment. So on the advice of Ron McManmon, a former recruiter and Executive VP of Careeradex.com, she located 100 customers who were interested in the technology the perspective employer furnished. She walked into the office of the individual in charge of recruitment and placed her list on his desk to show she was already working for the company. In each of the scenarios, the individual got the job.

3. <http://www.nydailynews.com>

In “Looking for Jobs in today’s economy,” Heidi Evans and Christina Boyle (2008), suggest it may be time to change careers and that patience and persistence are a must. They also mention that many individuals may not want their friends and relatives to know they are out of work but that this is not a time to be shy; it is a time to call in all favors.

4. <http://minnesotajobs.com>

Mary Bradford (2008) gives three job strategies for these stressful economic times. Her strategy 1: Go where the jobs are. She recommends JobBait.com that shows what markets are growing and hiring and in what states. Strategy 2: Turn off the television. There’s too much bad news that overshadows the good, and watching TV becomes all consuming, time that could be used job searching. Strategy 3: Commit to at least two job search methods that are non-traditional. Bradford basically means, find ways to locate jobs that are not advertised. After all, if it’s not advertised, there’s less competition for the position.

5. <http://ezinearticles.com>

“5 Tips for Landing a Job in Today’s Brutal Economy” are given by Anthony Weber (n.d.). Weber’s first tip is to do the footwork. Don’t sit home waiting for the job to come to you; start knocking on doors. Second, take the job hunt seriously. Spend time every day doing something that will get you closer to a job. Third, make your resume stand out from the crowd. Make sure the important information comes first, like what you are looking for and your skills. Fourth, charm your interviewer because people are often hired because they are liked by the interviewer. Be polite, charming, and funny. Fifth, about a week after the interview, follow it up with a call and restate what you have to offer the company.

6. <http://www.about.com>

In an interview with Roberta Chinsky Matuson, founder and principal of Human Resource Solutions with over 20 years of human resources experience, Karen Schweitzer (n.d.) of About.com obtained some suggestions for readers seeking jobs.

Matuson says job seekers need to rely on themselves. Just registering with a college career placement office will not get the job. And she says job seekers need to make themselves stand out in a very crowded field. To accomplish this, she recommends the following:

- a. Make a perfect resume—error free.
- b. Update your clothing and hair style.
- c. Network the old fashion way—face to face meetings, not just sitting behind a computer.
- d. Define specifically what you can bring to an organization.

Also, Matuson recommends having two or three versions of the resume along with several good cover letters that can be modified to specific situations. And she says to be prepare to answer the following three questions in an interview:

- a. How would your previous boss or co-workers describe your performance?
- b. What are your weaknesses?
- c. Why should I hire you?

7. <http://www.careersunysb.edu> (Stony Brook University Career Center)

The article, “Your Job Search in Today’s Economy: Advice from Career Directors,” (Stony Brook University Career Center, n.d.) provides nine suggestions as the result of a poll of Career Center directors from universities across the United States.

Suggestion 1: Keep in mind you only need one job. The unemployment figures can be overwhelming. They show how many are unemployed without noting how many are still employed.

Suggestion 2: Keep searching for a job and keep a positive attitude.

Suggestion 3: Use the Career Center on campus—do not overlook it.

Suggestion 4: Be open to all possibilities, even temporary and contract. These often lead to full-time positions.

Suggestion 5: Be open to smaller, less familiar companies.

Suggestion 6: Stay open to relocation. Relocation does not mean it’s permanent.

Suggestion 7: Network. Network. Network. It has never been more important.

Suggestion 8: Be prepared. Do your homework on the company and be able to show how what you have to offer can be immediately used by the interviewing company.

Suggestion 9: Use every resource available to you—career services, faculty, family, friends, online resources, the phone book, etc.

8. <http://www.bestarticlelist.com>

Anastasia Zoldak (n.d.) gives some tips for using the Internet for job hunting in the article, “Successful Job Hunting in Today’s Economy,” posted on bestarticlelist.com. The article appeared at the site in March 2009 but does refer to information obtained in 2005. The information seems relevant since the Internet is used more all the time in the job search area.

Zoldak gives five tips. The first, use online job boards. Second, go to company sites where jobs may first be posted by a company. Third, use networking. Particularly keep in mind that many professional organizations have their own links for members to post job listings. Fourth, when posting to a resume database, be sure to fully complete all questions. Companies are using resume tracking software that may use this information and get your application selected in the first screening. Fifth, be sure to have your personal house in order as companies today may use background checks, drug checks, credit checks, and other checks in the interviewing process.

9. <http://www.cnn.com>

In her article, "How to Find a Job During a Recession," Kate Lorenz (2008), Editor at CareerBuilder, makes the recommendations below. In her recommendations, Lorenz refers to suggestions by other individuals, naming the individuals. However, Lorenz gives no documentation for these suggestions. As in Lorenz's article, the individuals' names are stated here to give credit to those making the suggestions.

- a. **Take a closer look at industry data.** Concentrate job search efforts in industries that are still hiring because they are growing or experiencing worker shortages. This information may be found at the Bureau of Labor Statistics site.
- b. **Freshen up your skills.** Lorenz says Diane Morgan, director of career services at London Business School, suggests everyone should have basic skills in Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. Also, brushing up on such things as business etiquette, project management, keying skills, and another language can be helpful. And strengthening sales skills can be helpful since you are selling yourself.
- c. **Try part-time or freelance work.** Having multiple part-time jobs gives a certain amount of job security; if one comes to an end, you still have others going suggests Katy Piotrowski, career counselor and author of *The Career Coward's Guides*. This also accumulates job experience and develops networks that can lead to full-time positions.
- d. **Rev up your social networking.** Make use of the social networks developed on the web. Find out what jobs friends may know about. Networking is made so much easier today through the social networks on the web.
- e. **Think in terms of results.** What can you offer a company? How can you add value to the perspective employer? According to Lorenz, Wendy Enelow, author, trainer, and career consultant, advises showing this through the resume, social networking sites, and other job search communications.
- f. **Role play.** Lorenz says J. T. O'Donnell, a nationally syndicated workplace columnist, recommends practice interviewing with an individual to become comfortable answering the really hard questions, like why you are not working right now.
- g. **Polish your brand and market it.** Make yourself relevant to the employer. O'Donnell says know your strengths and put them forward in the most positive way in every job communication.
- h. **Find opportunity in your current position.** Diane Morgan suggests attending conferences, joining associations and being active in them. Take on tasks that might lead to something you really want to do.
- i. **Be realistic.** Recognize that it takes time to find a job in this economy and keep at it.

10. <http://www.brazencareerist.com>.

The last site is a blog site called *Brazen Careerist*. By its own definition, it is a community of top Generation Y thought leaders. Allie Osmar (2009) shares an email from a friend who had been laid off and Osmar encouraged to blog. The friend in her email tells of a company contacting her about a job. She said she barely remembered applying to the company, but the recruiters from the company had located and read her blog. They called her and had a phone interview. They liked her work and experience but what really sold them was her blog. The interviewer told her that it was the blog that enabled them to come to know her personality. It was the blog that led the company to call, invite her to the company, and know they wanted her. So blogging could be another job search tool in today's economy.

Summary and Conclusions

It is a trying time to be searching for a job when news reports almost daily report discouraging unemployment figures. Many business communication faculty trying to guide students on their job searches rely on textbooks for job search units. Faculty are also likely to use this information to help former students who come to them seeking advice after losing a job. Traditional textbooks tend to concentrate on three items, the resume, application letter, and interview. All three are important. But in today's economy, it's going to take more. So, where do you go?

The Internet provides a ready source of information that is constantly updated; a place current students and graduates already in the workforce are likely to use to find information. Search engines turn up hundreds of articles when using such terms as "how to find a job." In this research, many sites were viewed but only ten sites have been chosen. It becomes evident as more sites are viewed, the basic ideas are being repeated although stated a different way. Some of the sites chosen present a unique illustration or idea for the job search in these difficult times.

The following list of job search recommendations for the today's difficult job search is based on the ten web articles reviewed in this paper. The 20 recommendations are not listed in order of importance nor any other type of order.

1. Set goals on weekly contacts, keep notes of all applications, and follow up on the applications.
2. Network, particularly using web social networking sites.
3. Let people know and call in favors—no time to be shy.
4. Use Internet job listing sites.
5. Search local job listings.
6. Contact career services and alumni associations at schools attended.
7. Know what you can do for the company and how to present that ability to the company.
8. Do your homework on all companies to be approached.
9. Go where the jobs are.
10. Look for nontraditional methods such as blogs.
11. Find ways to locate jobs that are not publicly listed.
12. Make yourself stand out in the crowds—perfect resume, updated appearance, face-to-face meetings.
13. Keep a positive attitude and don't listen to all the bad economic news—remember news programs rarely report the good news.

14. Look for smaller and less known companies.
15. Keep your personal house in order—background checks, drug checks, web checks, etc., are likely to be done.
16. Keep skills up-to-date (advice for previous graduates who have lost their jobs).
17. Consider part-time positions and consulting.
18. Practice interviewing being prepared to answer hard questions while being polite, charming, and funny.
19. Have a perfect resume and cover letter that truly show what you can do for the company.
20. Consider changing careers (advice for previous graduates who have lost their jobs).

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