

THE CREATIVE JOB SEARCH

1. Targeting Your Search

If you don't know what you want, you will never find it! Too many job seekers simply apply to advertised positions that seem to fit their qualifications. In doing so, they are competing with hundreds – or thousands - of other candidates for 20% of the available jobs. The other 80% are never advertised.

Our job search strategy is designed to help you uncover and tap into this hidden job market.

The first stage is to develop a list of target companies. To do this, you need to take some time to really think about your next position.

Do you want to stay in the same industry or are you open to other options? What salary level are you looking for? Do you prefer smaller companies or do you want to work for a large corporation? Does the company culture matter to you? Are you looking to work for an industry leader? Are you willing to relocate?

Answering these questions will help you develop a list of your target companies and this list will form the basis of your job search campaign.

If you plan to stay in the same industry, developing your list of target companies will be relatively straightforward as you probably already know the key players and you have contacts (customers, suppliers or co-workers) who can help you put your list together.

But if you are open to changing industries, you will need to do more research to determine your list of targets. Check our [links](#) for associations and directories relating to your industry interests.

Use the internet to hunt down less well-known companies. Hoovers (www.Hoovers.com) is a valuable resource with searchable databases of hundred of thousands of companies. You can sort by location, industry, company size etc. Their service is subscription-based, but can be well worth a short-term commitment during a job search.



If you would rather not subscribe to Hoovers, make use of your local library and ask a librarian for help. There are many directories which list associations, companies and contact information and your local library should have access to most of them.

Your target company list could take some time to compile, but it is critical work to do. Once your search is focused, you can make sure that you focus much of your effort on uncovering their “hidden” positions. This does not mean you should not continue to apply for advertised positions, but simply that your efforts should be balanced.

Your job search strategy will include each of the following:

- Networking
- Direct approach to your target companies
- Contacting executive recruiters
- Researching ‘hidden’ opportunities
- Applying to advertised positions
- Posting your resume online (if confidentiality is not an issue.)

As you create your list, prioritize employers. Identify the ones you most want to work for. Again, this will help you budget your time and make sure that you are giving the appropriate amount of attention to each target.

Once you have your list, you’re ready to start your search.

1. Networking

You may have heard people say that networking is the most effective way to find a new position. All the research indicates that this is true. And it makes sense – employers prefer to hire known commodities if possible because it’s much less risky and it saves on recruiter’s fees.

Yet many job seekers shy away from networking. If you are one of these people, there are a number of possible reasons for your reaction:



1. Perhaps you have lost touch with some of the people you need to talk to and you feel guilty about getting in touch only when you need something
2. Perhaps you feel ashamed to have to ask for help
3. Maybe you don't want to bother people who are busy
4. Perhaps you're afraid of rejection
5. Or maybe you don't think you know anyone who could help you find another job

If you are resistant, you need to determine why you feel this way because networking is crucial to a successful job search.

1. **You have lost touch with some of the people you need to talk to and you feel guilty about getting in touch only when you need something.**

Don't! Everyone gets busy and preoccupied. We all mean to write that e-mail, or make that phone call and then find the time slipped away. People will understand and they will not hold this against you.

2. **You feel ashamed to have to ask for help.**

Don't. As the corporate world has changed over the last 20 years, very few people have remained unaffected by corporate downsizing or by company closures. Losing a job, or wanting to move on from one after a few years, does not reflect badly on you in any way.

3. **You don't want to bother people who are busy.**

It's true that everyone is very busy, but most people like to help others. And as long as you approach each person in a structured way and respect their time (by asking to set up an appointment rather than just calling out of the blue) this will rarely be a problem.

4. **You're afraid of rejection.**

Remember, you are not asking for a position. You are simply asking for advice and a few new contacts. If fear of rejection is really an issue for you, start out with a polite e-mail asking when would be a good time to call. Explain in the e-mail that you are simply looking for advice on your job search. Ask for a response. Once you receive the response, you are free to call without worrying about being rejected.



5. You don't think you know anyone who could help you find another job

You cannot know this until you ask. You don't know who your contacts went to school with. You don't know who shares the same dentist, or who used to work together. Don't assume that your contacts can't help you just because they are not in a position to give you a job.

You MUST start networking. It is very likely to be the key to obtaining your next position.

Start by making a list of everyone you know. Don't limit the list to former bosses, recruiters and co-workers. Include everyone. The mailman. Your old college friends. The guy who plays squash at the gym. Your customers. Your suppliers. Your dentist.

List Everyone!

Approach your contacts respectfully, show gratitude for their help and be clear about what they can do to help.

Most people want to help but many won't know how unless you are specific. Ask:

- Does she know anyone in your target companies?
- Does he know of any other companies you should be targeting?
- Does she know anyone who might be helpful in your job search?
- Does he know any executive recruiters he could refer you to?
- Does she have any other advice? (Always ask this question. You'd be surprised where the best advice comes from.)

If one of your contacts provides you with names, ask him if he will introduce you personally or by e-mail. If that is not possible, get permission to use his name when making your approach. Doing so will greatly enhance your chances of a response.

You should also consider online networking. This has the advantage of being less threatening than personal networking and many job seekers say they have had success with this method. Employers are finding that referrals are the best way to hire when they are inundated with resumes and therefore more and more of them are turning to these online networking groups to fill positions. To start with, check out www.ryze.com or www.linkedin.com. Some sites require that you be invited to join, but others have open access.



Approaching People You Don't Know

If you want to seek advice or make a connection with someone very well known in your field, you will need to be creative. Simply sending an email, or calling to ask if he/ she would meet with you probably won't work, although even that is better than nothing. Unfortunately, most of us are just too busy to respond to unsolicited requests for help from strangers.

That doesn't mean you should give up. Instead, try the following:

1. Try to get an introduction from someone else. This is always the most effective way to make contact with strangers.
2. If this is not possible, start to move in their circles – volunteer for an organization they work with, attend the same conventions, try to meet other people who know the person you wish to meet.
3. If you can't get an introduction and you don't have the luxury of the time needed to network your way to your desired contact, make your unsolicited approach a creative one. (see our [e-portfolio](#) for a great way to introduce yourself that will really grab their attention.)

TIP! When meeting with your network, or speaking on the phone, be sure to send a thank you letter after the conversation. If you are creative, you should consider designing personal stationary that contains a brief marketing message about you. (*for example, Mark Davies, Graphic Design for Print and Web.*) Create letterhead, business cards, envelopes and even thank you cards. Each one will reinforce your message – and demonstrate your talent at the same time.

2. Direct Approach to your target companies

Direct approach can be very effective – if it is carefully targeted and done creatively.

For a long time career counselors and resume writers have been advising their clients to avoid the HR department and go directly to company executives. This is good advice. The HR department only focuses on filling positions they have been told to fill. They are often not in the loop about all openings. Sometimes they don't fully understand the positions they are trying to fill and cannot recognize the best candidates. Most will ignore unsolicited resumes.



The problem with the direct approach for most people is that they handle it in an unimaginative manner. There are companies who conduct mass-mailing campaigns for job-seekers. They make great claims for their services, but the truth is less impressive. All these companies use databases that list the names of company CEOs. You can imagine how many unsolicited resumes each CEO receives every week! This is a complete waste of time. First, the CEO is rarely involved in hiring. Second he or she is probably the only person in the company who still has a secretary to filter mail. Third, he is receiving too many of these resumes to pay attention to any of them. Fourth, they all look the same!

No wonder this tactic doesn't work.

But the direct approach can be very effective when it is done correctly. Correctly means:

1. Carefully targeting companies who may need someone like you.
2. Finding names of people in a position to make hiring decisions
3. Making a creative approach that sets you apart from other people

Steve is a perfect example of the power of direct mail. Steve was a successful video game programmer but lost his position when his company closed down. He responded to several ads posted by the only other game development company close to his home. Although he seemed to be perfect for the positions, he never got a response.

After receiving his new resume, Steve took our advice and began a direct mail campaign. Because he did not want to relocate, he made an extra effort with the local game company. He took his resume in and asked the receptionist to pass it on to the Technical Director. During their conversation, he learned the Technical Director's name and asked about the e-mail protocol for the company. When he got home, he emailed a copy of his resume.

His resume could not have arrived at a better time. The Technical Director, Phil, was managing four projects, but the one that was taking his time and attention was a game due to be released in only six months. The project had been plagued with problems and was already a month behind schedule. To make matters worse, Phil had just discovered that one of his senior programmers had resigned. When



he saw Steve's e-mail, he didn't even contact Human Resources – he just picked up the phone and arranged an interview.

Of course, this doesn't happen every day but it happens more than you might imagine, provided that you target the right companies and do your research to find out who has the hiring authority.

(If some of your target companies are local, do as Steve did. Drop by with a copy of your resume and be charming to the receptionist! If he/she likes you, they will make sure it gets to the right person.)

TIP! *If you work in a creative field, make sure samples of your work are included with your submission. Don't send your whole portfolio and don't send anything that requires effort on the part of the recipient (for example, he/she may not bother to find a VCR to play the tape you included with your resume.) Instead, create a one-page brochure showing your best work, or a link to a web portfolio in an email. Or purchase one of our [e-portfolios](#), a short web-based animated promo highlighting your work and your key accomplishments. In short, find a way to show what you can do.*

So how do you find the names of the people who make hiring decisions?

First, ask your contacts – if you are staying in the same industry, customers or suppliers can be a great source of information.

If your contacts don't know anyone inside the company, you will have to find them yourself. Aim to find the name of the person or people you might one day work for. Also try to find out the name of the person or people one level up.

Start by simply calling the company. For example, if you are looking for a creative position in an ad agency, you need to find out the name of the Creative Director for the agency. Call and ask for it. If you need to send an e-mail, ask also for his/her e-mail address. Some receptionists will refuse to provide the information, but others will say yes. It's worth trying.

If that doesn't work, check industry directories. Some are mentioned on our [links](#) page, but there are many others and you should be able to find them at your local library.



Use the internet. Some senior managers will be listed on the company's website. Sometimes there is a "meet the employees" section where you can find names. Check the company's press releases which often contain quotes from key executives/managers.

If you still can't find what you need, try using Google to go deeper into web sites.

Here is an example. When companies provide information about their employees on a support section of their website, they will often call it 'meet the team.' So, on Google search for

site:.com "meet the team" + "graphic design"

The *site:.com* tells Google to target only those sites that end in .com (i.e. throw out .org or .edu), and to look for sites that contain the words 'graphic design' and 'meet the team.' You can see that the results bring up names and details about management.

Try other terms such as "meet us", "management team" or "Our Team"

This can be time consuming, but if you can't find the information you need in directories or by calling the company, the web is a valuable source of information.

3. Working with executive recruiters

Executive recruiters can be a valuable source of information and leads during your job search, but don't rely on them entirely. Each recruiter is only working on a limited number of searches at any one time and most will not pay attention to your resume if you are not an exact match with positions they are seeking to fill.

How do recruiters work?

All recruiters are paid by the company who is hiring. If anybody claims they will represent you in the job search and asks for money, be very careful. This person is not an executive recruiter.

There are two types of recruiters.



Contingency: These firms are paid only when they successfully place a candidate. Therefore, they work on as many searches as they can at any one time because they are never sure when they will make a successful placement. Contingency recruiters are sometimes given a bad rap and there are certainly a few unscrupulous people in the business (who will send your resume out without asking your permission) but many are exceptionally good. Check their policy on submitting your resume to make sure that they don't send it anywhere without asking you first.

Retained: These firms are sometimes hired to fill senior positions. They are paid whether or not they ultimately fill the position. (Even if the position is eventually filled internally, these recruiters are still entitled to their fee.) Because their income is guaranteed once they have been retained, they conduct fewer searches at one time and they dedicate a lot of time and effort to each search. They do candidate research, pre-screening interviews, prepare executive profiles to replace the original resume and recommend a final slate of between 3-6 candidates for interview by the company.

Both types of recruiters will generally ignore your resume if you are not a match for either a current search, or the type of search they frequently conduct.

Therefore, as when mailing into employers, you should research recruiters carefully and send your resume only to those who focus on your area of specialty.

Before mailing out, always check with your network of contacts to find out if anyone can refer you to recruiters. Ask your HR department at your last company whether they worked with any specific recruiters. Ask current or former managers and executives to recommend search firms.

When you write to recruiters to whom you have been referred, make sure you drop the name of your referee in the subject header of your email, or at the beginning of your cover letter if you are using snail mail. Recruiters like to feel they 'discovered' a candidate and are often suspicious of unsolicited resumes. Therefore, a referral is very helpful.

Also remember that executive recruiters start new searches all the time. Don't assume that if you sent your resume, they will call you when something comes up. Research has shown that a second mailing to recruiters



is often 70% as effective as the first mailing. So, resend your resume a few months after the first mailing. This time it may just arrive at the right time.

4. Finding 'hidden' opportunities

80% of jobs are filled before they are advertised. You can tap into this hidden job market through networking and creative approaches to your target companies. But you can also pursue 'spot' opportunities, also known as 'hidden' opportunities. These are positions that will be created but have not yet been formalized or advertised.

In order to find these as-yet non-existent jobs, you have to stay in touch with industry developments. Subscribe to every industry publication and online newsletter that you can find. Read the business sections of local and national newspapers. Visit your target company's websites frequently.

You will find some information on industry newsletters and association websites in our [Links](#), but this list is by no means exhaustive and you should do your own research to complement the information we provide.

Read everything and note which companies are expanding or announcing new products/development or forming new strategic partnerships. All these changes may present an opportunity for you.

Also check the careers websites for each of your target companies. Notice who is hiring – even if they are not advertising a position which would suit you. Often a hiring spurt in one area will indicate more hiring to come in other areas.

Watch press releases and look for changes in management. New managers often want to make changes.

Do your research to find out the key players and then create a compelling package to mail in with a note tailored to the specific situation (e.g. "I noticed that XYZ is moving into video games and, given my background, I think we should talk.") The [e-portfolio](#) is an excellent way to approach these situations.



5. Applying to advertised positions

Adapting your Resume

If you have worked with Blue Sky on your resume, you now have a strong document that accurately represents your skills and accomplishments and that looks great on the page. But, when you are responding to an advertised position, you should consider making changes to the resume we created for you. Sometimes, certain companies will be looking for a skill that you have, but which we did not emphasize on your resume. Or they may have a title for the position which is a little different from the way we positioned you. There is nothing wrong with making changes to your resume as long as you are truthful.

By making small changes to your resume, you can raise the odds that you will be viewed as a match for specific position.

But how do you make the right changes?

Take the ad and a highlighter pen. As you read, highlight every key descriptive word or description. If the ad for an animator specifies that character modeling is essential – and you have that skill – make sure the words Character Modeling are clearly visible and prominently placed on page one.

Your Blue Sky resume begins with a positioning statement – if that statement does not accurately reflect the job posting you can change it. (For example, one of our clients had a background in writing and TV production. She changed the header of her resume depending on the position she was applying for. Both were true, but that simple change made her much more likely to get interviews.)

The only caveat is you should **never** be misleading just to get the interview. No matter how much you want the position, this always backfires. Instead, you should emphasize the aspects of your background most relevant to the position.

If you need help targeting your resume towards a specific position (and we created the original) just send us the ad or job description and we will rework your resume for a small fee.



Once your resume is right, work on your cover letter to make sure that you quickly and clearly hit all the main points from the ad. And don't forget to check your letter carefully. Too many people send cover letters addressed to the wrong company! Those resumes always find their way into the trash can quickly!

If you need help creating an appropriate cover letter, [contact us](#).

The application process

If you simply follow the instructions on how to apply and then wait for a response, you'll probably be disappointed. You cannot rely on someone in the Human Resources department to know that you are perfect for the job. You can't even assume that anyone has seen your resume. (Many companies now use online database systems and receive so many resumes that they rarely read them all.)

You should certainly follow the application instructions because there are always exceptions and a successful job search requires that you utilize every avenue available to you. But you must also do more.

So, once you have applied as instructed, it's time to get creative.

Ask everyone in your network if they know anyone working in that company. Talk to people in industry chat rooms. Call the people at associations of which you are a member. If you do find someone with a contact inside the company, ask for an introduction.

If you do find a contact within the company, call that person and ask if he/she would spend a few minutes talking to you about working at XYZ. What do they like? What don't they like? What is the culture? (Besides being a way to build the necessary rapport, this is a way to gather valuable information for any future interview.) When you are comfortable, express your interest in working at XYZ and ask if they could help make sure the relevant manager sees your resume. Ask if they could also tell you names of other people who should also see your resume.

If you are unable to find such a contact, you will need to do more research.



As discussed in the section on Direct Approach, there are many ways to research and obtain the names of key individuals. Always try calling and asking directly first – in many cases you can get all the information you need with that one call.

See if you can also find out the e-mail protocol for the company. (For example, do they use lastname@xyz.com, or initial.lastname@xyz.com?) Often you can find this from the company website or press releases where someone's email will be listed. If you can't, you can also ask the receptionist. "Can I just check that I have the right email for him ...it's dbonner@xyz.com. Is that correct?"

Once you have one or more contacts, send versions of your resume by email, by fax and by mail. The reason to do this is to make sure that at least one of the documents reaches your target. If the company is local, go in person to the offices and speaking with a receptionist. Note: Be very nice to the receptionist and anyone else you meet or they won't pass on your resume and they'll talk about how rude you were!

One other option for applying for positions is to have someone who is well known and respected in your industry act as a referral for you. If you are friendly with such a person, ask if they would be willing to email your resume with a note of recommendation for any position you are interested in. To help your referrer, you may want to write a letter for him/her that they can edit and send.

An example of such a letter, created for one of our clients, reads:

Dear (name)

As a production executive with Disney and Pixar, I have known many talented animators, but David Brey stands out as one of the most gifted and hard-working artists I have had the pleasure to know. I saw your posting for a senior animator and felt I had to let you know about David, who is currently exploring career opportunities.

He has given me permission to forward his resume (attached) and I would be delighted to answer any questions you might have about him. I can be reached at (555) 555-5555

Best wishes,

Robert Smith

This technique is particularly effective if your referrer is well-known and respected in his/her field.



6. Posting your resume online

You should never post your resume online if your search is confidential. Word can get back to your current employer very quickly once your resume is in cyberspace. (Some companies even search the web regularly to find resumes that include their own company name so that can tell who is trying to leave!)

But, if you are unemployed, or have been open with your employer about your desire to leave, posting online is worthwhile. Recruiters and HR departments do search resume databases regularly and, provided you post your resume correctly, you should generate at least a few calls this way.

If you do decide to post online, you should make sure your resume is featured on both niche sites and the mass job boards such as Monster.com. Recruiters often bypass the larger job boards in favor of specialty sites.

Some key tips for posting your resume:

1. Always convert your resume to a text-only file otherwise it won't read properly when posted online. You can do this by simply saving it as a text-only file and then going through to remove any special formatting.

Open the resume in your word processing program and "save as" plain text (in Word 97/2000/XP, select File > Save As > Save as Type, choose "Plain Text" or "Text Only"). You may then get a prompt stating that your document "may contain features that are not compatible with text only format"; choose Yes. Then do any "clean up" necessary.

- Change bullets to asterisks or dashes.
- If columns or tables were used in the original document, make sure the text is coherent.
- Review the heading to ensure that the address, phone number(s) and email address are placed in a logical sequence.
- Add stylistic elements to the header sections so that they stand out. A horizontal line (up to 60 characters) may be created by using a series of dashes or asterisks.



- If a resume is longer than one page and contains contact information on the additional pages, remove this information from the ASCII version. The ASCII resume is meant to be read on a computer screen, so there is no distinction between page numbers.
2. When recruiters search sites like Hotjobs and Monster, they are able to view a summary of the candidates who fit their initial search criteria. They browse this list to determine whose resume deserves closer attention. The summary includes name, salary desired and a brief description (which was provided by the candidate when he/she posted their resume.) When you are posting your resume online, look for this field and use it wisely! (On Monster.com it is called the "Resume Headline.") A recent quick search of Monster's resume database turned up some headlines that will definitely deter recruiters from reading the resume. One said "Cool chick looking for a job." Another read "Seeking \$100,000 salary. Will not relocate." Others were simply filled with typos. Your goal is to persuade the recruiter to open your resume and learn more about you. So, when entering your information onto one of these sites, use the positioning statement from your Blue Sky resume. We chose that statement because it is a powerful message about your value to an organization. It should be the first thing people see.
 3. Change at least one word on your online resume every week so that it stays fresh. The search engines retrieve the most recent resumes first and if you don't refresh yours regularly it will quickly fall to the bottom of the list.

Summary

1. Research companies to determine your list of targets and prioritize them.
2. Develop a list of networking contacts. Include everyone!
3. Approach each of your networking contacts with a polite e-mail, letter or phone call and request their assistance.
4. Research all available sources to build a mailing list of key contacts in your target companies.
5. Conduct a creative mail campaign targeted towards these executives/managers. (Use attractive print materials, a web portfolio or a Blue Sky e-portfolio to ensure that you are noticed.)
6. Make contact with a targeted group of specialty recruiters and confirm that they will not submit your resume without your permission



7. Subscribe to every free newsletter dealing with your industries of interest. Consider joining associations. Read the business sections of major newspapers. Look for 'hidden' opportunities due to business growth, new management or new products.
8. Bookmark all the major job boards and any specialty boards pertaining to your industry (see [links](#) for some suggestions.)
9. Apply for advertised jobs as instructed and then do your research to find contact names within the company so that you can apply directly to the hiring manager/executive. Be creative in your approach.
10. Ask respected colleagues if they will act as a referrer for you, responding to ads on your behalf.
11. Post your resume to the major job boards and also on specialty job boards (providing confidentiality is not an issue) and refresh your postings weekly.

GOOD LUCK!

