

Job Search Strategies in a Down Economy

Job-hunting is an art that simply takes more time and work to perfect in a slumping economy than in a boom economy. You will have to work harder and smarter at finding new opportunities, but they are out there. Solid job-hunting techniques range from **utilizing the power of networking for finding hidden job opportunities (most effective)** to **responding to publicized ads (least effective)** as proven ways to find employment. Job-seekers must take full advantage of their personal and professional networks to uncover as many potential job openings as possible. Consider using cold calling techniques to find other opportunities as well. Focus more of your time and energy here than trying to respond to every job posting at Monster.com or the other job boards. In this deepening recession, don't make the mistake of relying 100 percent on one strategy and approach for finding jobs and managing your career. Rather, use a variety of approaches together and selectively rank those that work best for you. If you take advantage of the following five strategies you will be much better positioned to land a new job:

First and foremost, Focus..Focus...Focus!!: When job seekers become desperate to find employment, they tend to think that an "I'm willing to do anything approach" is best. That can't be farther from the truth. What every job seeker needs is a specific idea of the job they want and a plan on how to get it. Few job seekers start with these ideas since both require thought and time. Whether you're a new graduate seeking entry-level employment, a graduate school student making career transitions, or an alumnus who has been laid off from work, you may feel pressed to quickly find or replace a source of income. You may think that you can't afford the time needed to create a big-picture strategy and simply want to apply to as many positions as quickly as possible. The problem with this method is that it does not work, especially in a job market where employers have the pick of the litter. In fact, it does more harm than good. By posting your resume everywhere, you become indistinguishable from a plethora of job seekers with similar skills. What's more, when you try to be all things to all prospective employers by sending a standard resume to everyone, you end up being nothing to no one. Your resume won't get noticed because it doesn't stand out. By taking the time to zero in on a specific career goal and to plan an effective job search, you demonstrate to hiring managers your clarity and ability to manage projects.

Second: Evaluate and explore your career options and determine your most marketable skills and accomplishments. Take the time to explore potential careers, industries, and job titles that attract you to learn about typical career tracks and job requirements. Then research potential employers of interest and examine their ongoing needs. Experts recommend selecting two or three industries along with the region(s) where you are willing to live, and then selecting the top ten companies you'll target based on your industry and location criteria. Focusing your attention on a shortlist of prospective employers (as opposed to following up on every job ad you see) will make your research more manageable and will make it easier for you to identify the key decision-makers inside those companies with whom you need to connect.

Third: Focus on growth industries and specializations. Picking an industry that is still growing or is predicted to grow during these difficult economic times increases your chances of landing a new job and decreases your chances of getting laid off. A useful tactic in finding a new job may be to expand your subject matter expertise in key areas of need, which can include earning an industry-rated certification, pursuing self-directed training, or considering an advanced degree. If you lack specialized skills, knowledge, or advanced degrees, you can still impress cost-conscious employers by presenting yourself as a lower cost, increasing-value team player. Demonstrating your commitment to your industry and specialization with ongoing training towards key certifications or skill development impresses employers.

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Most of the job search engines, career sites and economists agree that the top industries for 2008 include... **Computers/IT, Energy, Health care, Federal government, Legal (attorneys), Aerospace manufacturing, International business, Security (physical and systems), Education, Environmental, and Science/Research & Development.**

Fourth: Consider different business environments. There are many more job opportunities than most people realize. In addition to the large national firms that the Dow Jones and *Fortune* magazine track, there are numerous other business environments to consider, such as startups, spin-offs and fast growing small to midsize companies. These organizations may be hiring more staff than traditional Fortune 500 companies. Also consider nonprofits and the public sector. In a down economy, some of the largest job growth comes from federal, state and local governments.

Fifth: Focus on results. In a down market, the bottom line still requires sales "above the line" to keep the company alive and growing. Even if you're not in sales, you should highlight the work you've done that directly improved business development, led to greater client/customer satisfaction, increased production and/or revenue, improved vendor and partner negotiations, etc.. Doing so will focus attention on how you can contribute to the success of an organization.

Sixth: Your resume is a marketing tool. Once you have created your short list of employers and the job positions you'd like to apply for, develop targeted resumes and cover letters that demonstrate evidence of your strongest qualifications to meet the requirements of each job position. Recruiters and career development specialists recommend that job seekers spend at least three to four hours customizing each resume for each opportunity. Tailoring your resume to each opportunity is even more critical in a sluggish economy and competitive job market. Employers want specialists with specific, creative solutions, not generalists with vague ideas. Focus on the immediate results you can offer as well as the long-term benefits you bring. Explain how your knowledge based expertise, skills, and experience can help your target employer address its specific challenges and achieve bottom-line results. The key is to make your points relevant to the employer's needs. One of the most important tips we can offer you is this one: **resumes are supposed to document your unique skills and accomplishments, not simply provide a laundry list of general duties and responsibilities.** Make a list of the most impressive achievements from each of your recent jobs, volunteer experiences, internships, leadership activities, etc. -- and then use them on your resume. Try to quantify or qualify achievements as much as possible. The best way to present challenges or problems that you've addressed is using the SIR approach, which breaks your challenges into situations, input, and results. Ask yourself: What were the situations or challenges you faced? What tasks or responsibilities did you take on? What actions did you undertake to address those challenges? What were the immediate and big-picture results? The point is to present the greatest information relevant to the prospective employer's needs in the briefest context to show how they would benefit from hiring you.

Visit the CDC's [Prepare for Employment](#) web page for guides to writing effective resumes and creating achievements statements. The CDC is happy to help you revise your resume once you've created a draft that targets specific employers and related job opportunities. The following Job Search Guide will offer you techniques and resources for exploring careers, industries, and job opportunities as well researching employers. If you need individual assistance with assessing your career interests and skills or specific job search assistance please contact our office at 603-897-8246 or cdc@rivier.edu.