

INTERNET JOB HUNTING: A FIELD STUDY OF APPLICANT EXPERIENCES WITH ON-LINE RECRUITING

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This field study examines the experiences of managers and professionals searching for jobs via the Internet. Results suggest that facility with Internet navigation is significantly associated with the amount of general job searching, particularly for those who want to explore job options initially in private without fear of retribution from supervisors. The data also suggest that managers and professionals are more likely to use the Internet for job hunting when the geographical scope of the job hunt is wide, when a major salary increase is desired, and when both small and large firms are being considered as potential employers. Use of the Internet is perceived as a somewhat less effective job search strategy than personal networking, but far superior to searching for jobs through newspaper ads and "cold calling." Major issues found to impede the effectiveness of on-line recruiting are the degree and speed of follow-up on-line applications, lack of specific and relevant job descriptions on a company's Web site, concerns about the security of personal information, and difficulty in customizing, formatting, and downloading resumes to companies' specifications. The article concludes with recommendations for improving the effectiveness of on-line recruiting. © 2002 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

The Internet has dramatically changed the ways both job seekers and companies think about the recruiting function. In many sectors of the economy, the use of the Internet as a means of finding jobs and recruiting job applicants has expanded in remarkable ways. For example, 90% of the Fortune 500 use some on-line recruiting and over eighteen million people annually are posting their resumes on Monster.com (Capelli, 2001). More than 75% of HR professionals are now using Internet job boards in addition to traditional recruiting methods (*HR Focus*, 2001). The Recruiters Network (the Web site for the Association for Internet Recruiting) reports that 45% of companies polled had filled 20% or more of

their positions through on-line recruiting (Charles, 2000).

Moreover, Web searching and Web recruiting are not limited to high-tech industries. It is true that computer-related companies are likely to find Internet recruiting more useful; a recent study reports that 60.2% of computer firms find on-line recruiting useful compared to only 2.3% of construction companies, for example (Caggiano, 1999). Nonetheless, 65% of all Internet job seekers are from nontechnical professions and most new college graduates now view the Internet as a major source for help in locating job opportunities (Martinez, 2000; Quick, 1998; Useem, 1999).

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Furthermore, the Internet is clearly beginning to cut into other types of employment advertising revenues. During the past five years, expenditures on newspaper advertisements and headhunter retainer fees have dropped 20% as Internet advertising revenues have increased (Boehle, 2000; Quick, 1998). As dramatic as the rise in Internet recruiting has been in recent years, far greater is the potential for more widespread changes in the years ahead (Useem, 1999).

The present article presents the results of a field study that examines how the Internet affects applicants' job hunting behavior, the factors that influence how much individuals use the Internet to look for jobs, and the aspects of on-line recruiting perceived as most user-friendly and user-hostile to potential job candidates. The article concludes with recommendations on how organizations might improve and expand their on-line recruiting capabilities.

Theory

Internet Fluency

The first question that the present article addresses is whether "Internet fluency" (i.e., familiarity and competence in Internet navigation and "Web surfing") itself influences the extent of a candidate's job hunting. Recent research suggests that cognitive ability and personality characteristics are related to job-search behavior, perhaps because those variables are related to perceptions regarding the availability of attractive job opportunities and the likelihood of ultimately obtaining a job offer (Boudreau, Boswell, Judge, & Bretz, 2001). We argue that Internet fluency will affect job search behavior because it is also likely to affect perceptions regarding job opportunities and the likelihood of obtaining an offer. Since the Internet offers easy access to information about career opportunities, those individuals who are more Internet fluent may be more likely to see such information.

Exposure to information about alternative job opportunities (e.g., similar positions in other firms paying considerably more money) may prompt even further job search behavior. Indeed, active Internet users may be more

likely to receive unsolicited "feelers" or job offers. Some computer-savvy recruiters now can gain access to resumes posted on other companies' job boards. Other on-line recruiters engage in "Web flipping" (i.e., accessing other companies' Web directories) and "Web lurking" (i.e., entering job-related Internet news groups and e-forums) to find potentially interested job candidates (Boehle, 2000; Starcke, 1996). Thus, the likelihood of being contacted from potential suitors is greater for individuals with high Internet fluency.

Furthermore, although job hunting is significantly related to job dissatisfaction (Dalton & Todor, 1993), this relationship is attenuated by exit costs (Bretz, Boudreau, & Judge, 1994; Kopelman, Rovenpor, & Millsap, 1992). That is, dissatisfied employees might not seek employment elsewhere because they do not have the time or resources to search for another job (e.g., Dickter, Roznowski, & Harrison, 1996; Herman, 1973; Hirschman, 1970; Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainus, 1988; Turnley & Feldman, 1999). For example, the Internet allows individuals to gain quick and easy access to information on a wide range of job possibilities twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, thereby resolving potential conflicts between employees' current job responsibilities and the time demands associated with active job hunting (Maher, 2000; Silverman, 2000). Internet job hunting also gives employees the opportunity to look for jobs without taking any visible or public action, thereby enabling individuals wanting to exit their current jobs to do so without incurring the wrath of supervisors displeased with open or tangible acts of disloyalty. Also, for some job seekers, Internet job hunting serves as a means of eliminating or lessening the amount of interpersonal awkwardness associated with selling oneself or soliciting job offers in person (Leonard, 2000).

P1: Level of Internet fluency will be positively associated with effort expended in job hunting.

Type of Job Desired/Scope of Job Search

The second question that this research ad-

addresses is whether the type of job desired or the scope of the job search influences the extent to which individuals use the Internet for job searching. The factors considered here are geographical scope of the search, number of functional areas and industries being searched, the size of firm desired, the level of supervisory responsibility desired, and the salary increase desired.

Proposition 2a suggests that when the scope of the job search is broad, potential job seekers will be more likely to use the Internet to locate job opportunities. While a broad job search typically requires more effort in general, Internet job searching may be particularly useful in such circumstances. Although Internet job searching may be inefficient (relative to following local newspaper ads) if a candidate is looking for jobs only in one city, Internet searching may be much more efficient when looking for jobs region-wide, nationwide, or globally (Laabs, 1998). Similarly, when individuals are willing to consider jobs in a number of functional areas and in a wide spectrum of firms differing in industry and size, Internet job hunting is likely to be perceived as a more time-efficient search strategy (Hays, 1999).

P2a: The broader the scope of the job search (in terms of geography, job functions, industries, and firm size), the more likely individuals will be to use the Internet for job hunting.

The Internet may also be more effective for locating some kinds of jobs over others (Proposition 2b). For example, firms may use the Internet more extensively to look for junior and mid-level candidates than for senior executives. Managers at the higher levels of organizations may respond more positively to prolonged “relationship building” and being personally courted by potential employers; executives may also have greater concerns about confidential information regarding their job hunting reaching their CEOs (Boehle, 2000; Quick, 1998). Because it is more difficult to find jobs that offer very large pay raises, individuals looking for sizeable compensation increases may also turn more readily to the

Internet to access a more extensive set of potential job opportunities (Zall, 2000).

P2b: Individuals are more likely to use the Internet for job hunting: (a) to obtain junior and mid-level positions and (b) to obtain very large pay increases over their current salaries.

Technology Problems in Web Searches

As efficient as Web surfing may be for job hunting purposes, several recent articles have pointed out difficulties that Internet job seekers encounter in their searches and the less-than-universal satisfaction with on-line recruiting (Capelli, 2001; Conhaim, 1998; Kay, 2000). Some of these problems are related to the technology itself: difficulties finding companies' Web pages, poor links between general job boards like Monster.com and company Web sites, poor quality graphics, and difficulties in navigating through a company's Web page. Another major problem in this area appears to be the difficulty of reformatting and submitting resumes to various Web pages' specifications (Farris & Dumas, 1999; Useem, 1999).

Network Problems in Web Searches

Other problems originate from network difficulties. These concerns include anxiety about the privacy of information submitted, site shut-downs, lack of access to Web sites during normal business hours or off-hours, and inability to download information in a readable format. A more minor problem here can be the costs of posting resumes and downloading information and applications (Hays, 1999; Quick, 1998).

Web Content and Recruiting Practices

A third set of problems Internet job seekers encounter derives from the actual content of material on Web sites and companies' feedback and follow-up procedures. For example, applicants have complained that they cannot access relevant information on specific job descriptions, job specifications, salary ranges, geographic locations of job, and travel require-

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ments. Others have reported difficulties in receiving acknowledgment of applications, getting feedback on the status of their applications, and contacting a specific company representative for a follow-up conversation (Charles, 2000; Martinez, 2000; Zall, 2000).

In a more exploratory fashion, then, this study also examines the perceived effectiveness of Internet job hunting, problems encountered while using the Web in job searches, and satisfaction with on-line recruiting practices. Both quantitative and qualitative data are used to explore these issues.

Methods

Sample

Data were collected from graduate business school alumni of a large university in the Southeast. Surveys with stamped return envelopes were sent to all MBA graduates from the last six years' classes. Respondents were not asked for their names and were promised confidentiality. A total of 755 surveys were mailed; of these, 722 were deliverable. Two hundred fifty-six surveys were returned, for a response rate of 35%. Respondents came from 28 states, ranging from New Hampshire to California; 51% of respondents came from Southeastern states and 49% came from other regions of the country.

The sample was 71% male and 29% female. Thirty-four percent of the respondents had been day MBA students; 66% of the respondents had been evening MBA students. Sixteen percent of respondents had been marketing majors; 28% had been finance and accounting majors; 21% had been general management, HR, or strategy majors; and 35% had been operations, production, or information technology majors. These figures closely parallel population statistics, with no significant differences observed.

Twenty-nine percent of the sample was under age 30; 33% were between ages 30 and 34; 22% were between ages 35 and 39; 16% were age 40 or older. The average respondent had 10.6 years of full-time work experience at the time of data collection ($SD = 6.7$).

Job Characteristics and Job Attitudes

Participants in the study were asked to indicate their current functional areas and the industries in which they worked. Thirty-three percent of the sample worked in engineering, computer science, and operations; 24% worked in finance, banking, or insurance; 25% worked in marketing, sales, or e-commerce; and 18% worked in other functional areas, such as HR and general management. The industries in which participants were most frequently employed were heavy manufacturing (31% of the sample), high tech, electronics, and telecommunications (19% of the sample), and banking and financial services (17% of the sample). Sixteen percent of the sample earned less than \$50,000; 34% of the sample made between \$50,000 and \$70,000; 19% made between \$70,000 and \$100,000; 15% made over \$100,000.

All participants in the study completed two scales on their attitudes toward their current jobs. The first scale was an eight-item job satisfaction measure (Taylor & Bowers, 1972). Using five-point responses, the scale has a mean of 3.64 ($SD = 0.87$); the alpha for the scale is .89. The second scale was the continuance commitment scale, originally developed by Meyer and Allen (1984) and subsequently refined by McGee and Ford (1987). The six-item scale had a mean of 3.21 ($SD = 0.85$), with an alpha of 0.85.

Job Search Behaviors and Strategies

Participants were asked four Likert items about their level of job hunting over the past three months. These items come from Begley and Czajka (1993); a sample item is: "Over the last three months, I have actively looked for another job." On a five-point scale, the mean was 1.89 ($SD = 1.23$); the alpha was .96.

Respondents were then asked additional questions about the extent of their job search activity and their search strategies. Among those who had engaged in at least some job search behavior over the past three months, the average respondent had been looking for a job for seventeen weeks ($SD = 24$) and had spent an average of 7.23 hours per week pur-

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suing job leads ($SD = 9.48$). This last figure is consistent with a recent study by Farris and Dumas (1999), who report that the average job hunter spends an average of five to six hours each week actually looking for work.

Alumni were also asked several questions about the focus and scope of their job searches. Respondents were asked open-ended questions about the functional areas and industries targeted in their job searches. The number of functional areas and the number of industries were then counted. For both questions, the modal response was one and the maximum response was three. Respondents were also asked to indicate the geographical scope of their job search. Fifty-seven percent of the sample were looking for a job within their present city or state; 28% were focusing on a particular geographical region; 14% were looking nationwide and/or overseas.

Three other attributes of target jobs were measured as well. Respondents indicated the size of the firm they would like to work for. Nineteen percent preferred to work for small firms, 18% preferred medium-sized firms, 23% preferred large firms, and 40% had no size preference. Participants also indicated the level of supervisory responsibility they would prefer. Fifteen percent preferred no direct supervision; 30% preferred direct supervisory jobs; 42% were looking for middle management positions; 14% were looking for senior management positions.

In addition, respondents indicated the percent salary increase they were looking for in a new job. Twenty-six percent were looking for a salary increase of less than 10%; 45% were seeking an 11–20% salary increase; 19% were looking for a 21–30% increase; 4% were looking for a 31–40% pay increase; and 6% were looking for a pay increase of greater than 40%.

Internet and Web Job Search Activity

Participants in the study who were looking for jobs were asked a variety of questions about their experiences using the Web for job searching. Respondents indicated how many hours they searched for jobs on the Internet ($X = 2.88$, $SD = 4.50$) and how many Web sites they had logged on to ($X = 10.22$, $SD = 21.17$).

Respondents were then asked which three sites they most frequently visited. The typical respondent searched both general Web sites like Monster.com and a variety of specific sites. Because the average respondent used ten Web sites and a combination of both general and specific sites, the number of Web sites visited was used in subsequent analyses.

As a measure of Internet fluency, all respondents were asked how many hours they used a computer for e-mailing friends, playing computer games, and other non-work-related purposes each week ($X = 4.08$, $SD = 5.17$). Alumni also completed a Likert scale, new to this research, on their satisfaction with using the Web for job hunting. The scale contained six items related to Internet job searching (e.g., the ability to obtain general information about industries or companies of interest). Responses ranged from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied). The mean was 3.18 ($SD = 0.59$); the alpha was .73.

Qualitative Data

Finally, respondents were asked three sets of open-ended questions about their job search activities, particularly about their experiences job hunting via the Internet: (1) What strategies have you found most effective in getting promising job leads and job offers? Least effective? Why? (2) What aspects of job hunting using the Web have you found most helpful or satisfying? Least helpful or satisfying? Why? (3) What specific changes would you like companies to make in their on-line recruiting to make job hunting more “applicant-friendly”? Responses from applicants were tabulated in simple count variables. Since applicants often listed more than one item per question asked, the total number of comments sometimes exceeds the total number of survey participants.

Results

The results for each of the major research questions examined here are presented, in turn, below. We begin with the relationship between Internet fluency and level of job hunting activity.

Participants in the study who were looking for jobs were asked a variety of questions about their experiences using the Web for job searching.

Is Internet Fluency Associated with Level of Job Hunting?

The results of the regression analysis addressing this question appear in Table I. The dependent variable here is extent of active job hunting. Besides the Internet fluency score, several variables that have previously been found to influence job search activity (Boudreau et al., 2001; Bretz et al., 1994) were included as well: job satisfaction, continuance commitment, gender, salary, industry (five dummy variables), and years since graduation. (Since years since graduation and age are correlated at the .001 level and years since graduation is a linear rather than a categorical variable, years since graduation is used as the independent variable here.)

Not surprisingly, the results suggest that individuals with low job satisfaction and commitment are more likely to expend effort job hunting. In contrast, years since graduation, gender, and industry are not related to amount of job hunting.

As predicted, however, level of Internet fluency is significantly related to the degree of job hunting. That is, the more comfortable individuals are with surfing the Internet, the more likely they are to enter the job market, even if it is in a "just looking around"

mode at the beginning. It is also possible that, over time, the more extensively individuals job hunt, the more comfortable they become with Internet searching. Proposition 1, then, is supported.

Are Type and Scope of Job Search Related to Internet Job Hunting?

The next set of analyses examine whether the type of job preferred and the scope of the job search are closely associated with the degree of Internet job hunting in which participants engaged. A series of regressions were run to investigate these relationships. The dependent variable in these analyses was hours spent using the Internet for job hunting. The independent variables were: (1) geographical scope of the job search; (2) number of functional areas of interest; (3) number of industries of interest; (4) preferences for firm size; (5) level of supervisory responsibility sought; and (6) percent salary increase desired. In addition, hours spent searching for jobs through non-Internet based means and Internet fluency were added into each equation as control variables; in each case, both control variables were also significant. The full results of these analyses appear in Table II.

TABLE I Internet Fluency and Job Hunting

| <i>DV: Extent of Job Search Activity (High score = More hours searching)</i> | | | | |
|--|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|-------------|
| <i>IV</i> | <i>Parameter Estimate</i> | <i>Standard Error</i> | <i>T-Value</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
| Intercept | 3.819 | 0.400 | 9.79 | .0001 |
| Years since graduation | -0.030 | 0.046 | -0.66 | .2548 |
| Gender | -0.204 | 0.177 | -1.15 | .1253 |
| Job Satis. | -0.388 | 0.099 | -3.91 | .0001 |
| Commitment | -0.191 | 0.104 | -1.83 | .0347 |
| Salary | -0.007 | 0.039 | -0.18 | .8594 |
| Industry 1 | -0.123 | 0.226 | -0.54 | .2938 |
| Industry 2 | -0.137 | 0.218 | -0.63 | .2658 |
| Industry 3 | -0.132 | 0.310 | -0.43 | .3347 |
| Industry 4 | -0.283 | 0.311 | -0.91 | .1824 |
| Industry 5 | -0.118 | 0.210 | -0.56 | .2881 |
| Internet fluency | 0.023 | 0.014 | 1.63 | .0500 |

R^2 : .20

TABLE II Type and Scope of Job Desired and Level of Web Searching

DV: Hours spent on Internet job search

| <i>IV</i> | <i>Parameter Estimate</i> | <i>Standard Error</i> | <i>T-Value</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Intercept | -0.921 | 0.783 | -1.18 | .1211 |
| Hrs. Search Non-Web | | | | |
| Means | 0.617 | 0.278 | 2.22 | .0001 |
| Internet fluency | 0.188 | 0.065 | 2.88 | .0025 |
| Geographical Scope | 0.359 | 0.058 | 6.13 | .0144 |
| R ² : | .386 | | | |
| Intercept | 0.446 | 0.871 | 1.78 | .0394 |
| Hrs. Search Non-Web | | | | |
| Means | 0.371 | 0.059 | 6.81 | .0001 |
| Internet fluency | 0.176 | 0.067 | 2.59 | .0010 |
| Functional Area Scope | -0.277 | 0.521 | -0.05 | .4800 |
| R ² : | .356 | | | |
| Intercept | 0.023 | 0.704 | 0.03 | .4865 |
| Hrs. Search Non-Web | | | | |
| Means | 0.375 | 0.059 | 6.28 | .0001 |
| Internet fluency | 0.173 | 0.066 | 2.60 | .0010 |
| Industry Scope | 0.3536 | 0.442 | 0.80 | .2134 |
| R ² : | .360 | | | |
| Intercept | -1.261 | 1.026 | -1.23 | .1110 |
| Hrs. Search Non-Web | | | | |
| Means | 0.364 | 0.058 | 6.19 | .0001 |
| Internet fluency | 0.186 | 0.065 | 2.83 | .0028 |
| Firm Size | 0.579 | 0.309 | 1.87 | .0322 |
| R ² : | .377 | | | |
| Intercept | 0.983 | 1.191 | 0.83 | .2055 |
| Hrs. Search Non-Web | | | | |
| Means | 0.365 | 0.060 | 6.07 | .0001 |
| Internet fluency | 0.195 | 0.070 | 2.79 | .0032 |
| Level of Job Desired | -0.233 | 0.405 | -0.58 | .2828 |
| R ² : | .365 | | | |
| Intercept | 0.090 | 0.846 | -0.11 | .4600 |
| Hrs. Search Non-Web | | | | |
| Means | 0.283 | 0.060 | 4.66 | .0001 |
| Internet fluency | 0.089 | 0.071 | 1.25 | .1075 |
| Salary Desired | 0.511 | 0.333 | 1.53 | .0600 |
| R ² : | .251 | | | |

Individuals interested in large pay raises over their current salaries may have to search farther and wider to find such positions—and may perceive the Internet as an effective means to that end.

Proposition 2 was partially supported. Two of the predictors were significantly related to the extent to which individuals use the Internet for job hunting. The wider the set of geographical locations being considered for job opportunities, the greater the extent to which individuals used the Internet for job hunting. For example, individuals who were looking for jobs in one particular city or one particular state expended only 2.38 and 2.11 hours per week, respectively, looking for jobs on the Internet. In contrast, individuals looking for jobs nationwide and globally spent 6.33 and 5.50 hours per week, respectively, in Web searches. Also, the broader an individual's set of preferences for firm size, the more extensively he/she used the Internet for job hunting. For instance, individuals with no preference over firm size spent more hours on the Internet job searching than individuals with a specific size preference (3.53 hours vs. 2.44 hours weekly).

The relationship between desired salary increase and extent of Internet job hunting was significant at the .06 level. The higher the salary increase desired in a new job, the more likely participants were to use the Web for job searching. For instance, individuals who were looking for jobs with pay raises of less than 20% spent less than two hours per week searching for jobs via the Internet. In contrast, individuals looking for jobs with pay raises of 40% or more spent over six hours per week searching for jobs on the Web. Individuals interested in large pay raises over their current salaries may have to search farther and wider to find such positions—and may perceive the Internet as an effective means to that end. The other three variables investigated here were the number of job functions considered, number of industries considered, and level of supervisory responsibility desired. These variables were not significantly related to Internet job search activity.

What Is the Perceived Effectiveness of Internet Job Hunting?

Data on the perceived effectiveness of Internet job hunting were collected in two ways. First, respondents were asked to indicate which job search strategy had been most helpful to them.

From a review of the job search literature, common job sources for managers and professionals were identified: Web searching, newspapers, professional journals and associations, personal contacts and networking, head hunters and search firms, and other strategies. Here, Internet job hunting ranked second among respondents. Forty percent ranked personal networking as the most helpful strategy, whereas 29% ranked the Internet as the most helpful strategy. Use of headhunters ranked third (17%) and newspaper ads ranked fourth (10%).

As noted earlier, respondents were also asked several open-ended questions about their experiences job hunting. Table III presents the respondents' answers to the questions concerning the most effective ways of getting jobs and the least effective ways of getting jobs; search strategies are displayed in order of frequency of response by study participants. Note that frequency of mention, while likely to be correlated with perceptions of effectiveness, is not a perfect proxy for perceived effectiveness.

In the qualitative data, Internet search engines and Web sites were mentioned third in frequency as a means of getting jobs, behind networking/personal contacts, headhunters, and professional recruiters. As the comments from participants reflect, networking may offer personal advantages not typically associated with Internet usage:

Personal contacts/networking are by far the most effective strategy for getting promising job leads and offers. Timing is everything. Knowing about a position early gives you an edge...

Networking works best...because you feel comfortable with the people you are dealing with and they feel comfortable with you. Also, there is a level of trust that develops in relationships that can't be leveraged over the Internet.

My most promising job leads came from friends who worked for the companies at which I interviewed. I found that referrals from current workers put me on the fastest track for interviews and offers.

TABLE III Effectiveness of Job Hunting Strategies

| <i>Strategies Most Frequently Mentioned as Effective</i> | |
|--|--|
| <i># of Comments</i> | <i>Job Hunting Strategy</i> |
| 100 | Networking and personal contacts |
| 34 | Headhunters and professional recruiters |
| 16 | Internet search engines and Web sites |
| 9 | College/alumni placement services |
| 8 | Newspaper advertisements |
| 5 | Cold calls/sending resumes & cover letters |
| 5 | Professional and civic organizations |
| 3 | Career fairs |
| <i>Strategies Most Frequently Mentioned as Ineffective</i> | |
| <i># of Comments</i> | <i>Job Hunting Strategy</i> |
| 30 | Newspaper advertisements |
| 22 | Internet search engines and Web sites |
| 20 | Cold calls/sending resumes & cover letters |
| 15 | Posting resumes on the Web |
| 9 | College/alumni placement services |
| 6 | Headhunters and professional recruiters |
| 2 | Trade publications and associations |

Participants in the study were also quite positive about using headhunters and professional search firms to find new job opportunities. Primarily, confidence in headhunters was based on the belief that executive recruiters had the best contacts, had the best understanding of the broader labor market, and were most efficient in turning up multiple job offers at one time:

I have had tremendous success through headhunters, particularly non-local headhunters. I believe they have more “real” contacts, not just “friends” in lofty places, within organizations...

Headhunters work best. By knowing (more) about a lot of jobs offered, they can usually make a good judgment at matching job skills and job requirements. They are usually able to deliver multiple opportunities at one time. A good headhunter is much better at job searching than I am.

Headhunters not in huge (executive search) firms work best. They have a significant financial stake in you and will get you more interviews more quickly.

Internet search engines and Web sites also received a high number of positive comments. In particular, potential job applicants were pleased with the Internet: (1) as a good source of general information on a wide array of industries, career paths, companies, and jobs; (2) as a helpful way of focusing a job search on a specific geographical region, job type, or industry; (3) as a quick and easy way of learning about job opportunities; and (4) as an effective means of getting an idea of how hot/cold the job market was for people with their skills and what other firms were paying for people with their experience:

It's great for researching potential jobs and career paths ... I found it helpful because of the quantity of information out there and how quickly I could find what I was looking for.

Using the Web for job hunting proved helpful in understanding the current demand for my skills, locating job openings, and sending out resumes as efficiently as possible.

To be honest, I have an interest in knowing my "worth" in the market. From the "surfing" that I have done in job searches, I like the ease with which you can get salary information for positions utilizing a certain skill set.

Being able to search for jobs in a specific field in a specific geographic location is wonderful. Keyword searches are also extremely useful (MBA, for example).

It's great to be able to apply on-line or send a resume and cover letter via e-mail. Job hunting in other geographical areas is much easier now via the Web. You also have better access to information for researching a particular company/industry (which helps for interviews), as well as gathering information on geographical regions, salaries, cost of living, etc.

What Are the Major Difficulties Encountered in Internet Searches?

Next, the research examined the major difficulties potential job applicants experience as they look for jobs over the Internet and/or company Web pages. Table IV displays the extent to which survey respondents experienced difficulties in Internet job hunting in fifteen different areas. Because there is no existing scale assessing difficulties using Internet Web sites, respondents were presented with all the difficulties that had been mentioned or cited in a comprehensive review of existing articles on Web job hunting. For each area, the percentage of respondents who had "some" or "a lot" of difficulty with this aspect of Internet job hunting are reported.

Clearly, the three areas which participants identified most frequently as most problematic with Internet job searches were slow feedback and follow-up from potential employers, not enough appropriate jobs listed to make Web searches worthwhile, and lack of relevant information in a company's Web site. The qualitative comments from respondents highlight why these three factors hindered the use of the Internet for job hunting purposes:

I received a large number of hits with the key words "manager" and "project manager," but the definitions of those job titles vary tremendously by industry. Internet searches returned a large number of hits, but after time-consuming screening, few real potential positions matched my skill set.

It was frustrating when there was no acknowledgement of my application and no responses were received....It would be nice to be updated as to the status of my application. If the position is filled or my credentials do not meet an employer's needs, then a short notice (to that effect) would be appreciated.

Many company Web sites do not provide a specific contact person and a specific e-mail address (not just HR@company.org). Also, companies often don't post specific salary

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TABLE IV Difficulties Encountered in Internet Job Searches

| <i>Rank</i> | <i>Difficulty</i> | <i>% A Lot or Some Difficulty</i> |
|-------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. | Slow feedback or follow-up | 55.67% |
| 2. | Not enough relevant jobs listed to make worthwhile | 42.83% |
| 3. | Lack of relevant data in a company's Web site | 33.33% |
| 4. | Concerns about security of personal information | 25.77% |
| 5. | Poor links to specific firms' Web sites from general sites | 25.77% |
| 6. | Want more personal contact | 26.53% |
| 7. | Difficulty in posting resumes | 23.66% |
| 8. | Site navigation problems | 19.19% |
| 9. | Difficulties downloading or printing out information | 15.15% |
| 10. | Computer glitches in Web site | 15.00% |
| 11. | Trouble accessing sites during normal business hours | 12.50% |
| 12. | Difficulty finding company's Web site on the Internet | 10.10% |
| 13. | Trouble accessing sites evenings and weekends | 4.12% |
| 14. | Costs of downloading data | 3.06% |
| 15. | Poor quality graphics | 2.06% |

information. The phrase "salary commensurate with experience" just means "we want to pay below market salaries if we can get away with it."

The most frustrating part of Web searching is the lack of company response and feedback ... Even just a short acknowledgement would be appreciated. Also, many times outdated postings remain on Web sites and create wasted time and effort...

The Web is great for finding out general information on a company and industry. But, I think the response times from applications to individual company Web site postings are terrible. It's hard to tell who in the company gets your resume and how to follow-up when using the Web.

Four other aspects of Internet job searches presented difficulties for substantial numbers of survey respondents as well: concerns about security of personal information on the Web,

The difficulties most closely associated with dissatisfaction with Internet job searching are lack of relevant information in a company's Web site, problems in posting resumes, and poor directions on navigating through a company's Web site.

poor navigational links within and between Web sites, the impersonality of on-line recruiting, and difficulties in posting resumes. Again, qualitative comments from respondents highlight the ways in which these factors hindered Internet job hunting:

The least helpful aspects of Web searching: poor Web site reliability and fears about posting personal information.

Waiting for Internet sites to post unnecessary graphics is frustrating. I am also irritated by inaccurate links and sites that crash or are difficult to navigate...

It's very time-consuming to load your resume on to some of the job search sites. Also, re-formatting leads to problems with characters being added that shouldn't be there...

I sense the problems with on-line recruiting are the number of responses employers get and the failure of HR professionals to respond to those responses because of the magnitude of the applicant pool.

The Web is impersonal...lack of response and feedback...no personal follow-up...

Make it easier to post resumes! The sites I have logged on to make it very difficult. And I'm not even sure when I have been successful doing it (because) I get no acknowledgment ...

Which Factors Are Associated with Satisfaction with Web Searching?

Next, a regression was run to discover which problems with Internet job hunting (outlined in Table IV above) were most closely associated with overall dissatisfaction with on-line recruiting. Internet fluency was also added in as a predictor variable. The results are reported in Table V.

The results here suggest that difficulties in three areas, in particular, seem to color individuals' overall satisfaction with using the Internet for job hunting. The difficulties most closely associated with dissatisfaction with Internet job searching are lack of relevant information in a company's Web site, problems in posting resumes, and poor directions on navigating through a company's Web site.

For example, participants who had little difficulty with finding relevant information in a company's Web site had an average on 3.47 (out of 4) on the "satisfaction with Internet" scale. In contrast, participants who had a lot of difficulty with this aspect of Internet job searching had a mean of only 2.80. Similarly, the mean response on the "satisfaction with Internet" scale for those who experienced no difficulties posting resumes was 3.26 (out of 4). In contrast, the mean response on the satisfaction scale for those who experienced a lot of difficulties posting resumes was 2.56. As expected, Internet fluency was also positively related to satisfaction with on-line recruiting.

Implications for Management Practice

In this final section, we examine the implications the present research has for organizations which are currently engaged in, or planning on starting, Internet recruiting. In particular, we focus on the five suggestions most frequently made by respondents and summarized in Table VI.

Provide More Feedback and Follow-Up/ Provide Specific Contacts

Clearly, the most requested recommendation from participants in the study was that companies provide more and quicker feedback to on-line inquiries and applications. At the minimum, this would include acknowledgement of receipt of an application, notification of when a posted job has been filled, and some specific person with whom an applicant can follow up:

Actually respond to resumes. I have many years of experience and an excellent background, supposedly what employers are seeking. However, when I send resumes via

TABLE V DV: Satisfaction with Web Job Searches. IVS: Difficulties Encountered in Web Searches

| IV | Parameter Estimate | Standard Error | T-Value | Sig. |
|--|--------------------|----------------|---------|-------|
| Intercept | 3.601 | 0.306 | 11.75 | .0001 |
| Difficulty finding company Web site | -0.131 | 0.115 | -1.14 | .1280 |
| Lack of relevant info in Web site | -0.178 | 0.091 | -1.95 | .0278 |
| Difficulty downloading | 0.088 | 0.093 | 0.95 | .1736 |
| Cost of downloading | 0.138 | 0.146 | 0.94 | .1750 |
| Poor links to company sites from general sites | 0.016 | 0.085 | 0.19 | .4260 |
| Not enough good jobs listed | -0.084 | 0.071 | -1.18 | .1216 |
| Difficulty posting resumes | -0.134 | 0.077 | -1.75 | .0421 |
| Trouble accessing site during day | -0.020 | 0.099 | -0.21 | .4175 |
| Trouble accessing site nights and weekends | -0.005 | 0.144 | -0.04 | .4810 |
| Computer glitches in Web site | -0.001 | 0.097 | 0.00 | .4900 |
| Concerns about privacy | 0.092 | 0.069 | 1.33 | .0943 |
| Poor navigational facility | -0.211 | 0.092 | -2.29 | .0124 |
| Poor graphics | 0.249 | 0.129 | 1.94 | .0284 |
| Slow feedback from companies | -0.006 | 0.066 | -0.11 | .4580 |
| Want more personal contact | 0.026 | 0.068 | 0.39 | .3500 |
| Internet fluency | 0.028 | 0.012 | 2.38 | .0100 |

R^2 : .33

e-mail, I receive a return call .0001% of the time.

I would like two weeks' response times and a contact person and phone number to call for follow-up...instead of submitting to a "black hole."

Provide phone numbers so you can talk to recruiters. E-mail is efficient, but impersonal Put a real reachable person behind the job opening.

Starcke (1996) reports positive results along these lines from use of such on-line automatic

tracking systems as The Good Guys!, Restrac, Recruitsoft, and Brass Ring. Specific data for each applicant are located in databases compiled by the software's artificial intelligence; resumes can be extracted according to specifications set by recruiting specialists. A "recruiting workbench" feature lets companies track where individual candidates are in the application process in order to prevent applications from falling through the cracks. Another feature of these software packages allows companies to automatically generate letters acknowledging receipt of resumes and applications.

American Express, for instance, has revamped its Web site so that the company's computer software can quickly scan resumes, sort by fields, and track results. An applicant

TABLE VI Corporate Strategies for Making On-Line Recruiting More “Applicant Friendly”

| <i># of Comments</i> | <i>Recommendation</i> |
|----------------------|---|
| 52 | Provide more feedback and follow-up on applications; provide more frequent application status updates; provide a specific contact person, phone number, and e-mail address for each listing |
| 37 | Provide more detailed job descriptions and job specifications so applicants can determine whether their profiles match company needs; provide more specific data on geographical locations and travel demands |
| 22 | Make it easier to submit resumes; use a standardized form across Web sites; don't make applicants re-key in resumes |
| 19 | Update Web sites; list original posting date of each job listed; drop filled positions from Web sites |
| 8 | Improve reliability and efficiency of Web sites; make them easier to navigate by dropping needless graphics; provide better links to other sites |

responding to a specific job requisition number gets “channeled” via the Web site to a specific recruiter. If a resume comes in unsolicited, it goes into a database where it can be pulled at any time to fill a vacancy (Hays, 1999).

The recommendations made by respondents on this issue take on increased importance given that many firms want to use the Internet to develop relationships with “passive” job candidates (Boehle, 2000). Quicker feedback and more personal attention may be especially critical to building relationships with these candidates, who are not seriously looking for jobs at present but who may become viable and attractive applicants for future openings.

Provide More Detailed Job Descriptions and Job Specifications

Organizations face a delicate balancing act in their recruiting efforts. On one hand, companies want to provide broad enough job descriptions and specifications so that a large enough pool of potential candidates will apply. On the other hand, job descriptions and specifications may be so vague that either too many unqualified job seekers apply or the best potential applicants fail to apply.

From participants' comments, it appears that on-line recruiters are erring too much on the side of generalities and fail to provide potential applicants with sufficiently detailed information about positions. Also, some on-line recruiters appear to be posting “wish lists” as job specifications rather than realistic skill requirements. In addition, some job searchers may be reluctant to apply when no ranges are provided for either salaries or benefits, perhaps on the assumption that no news on compensation is bad news:

HR managers put a laundry list of qualifications out there...Last year, WebMD placed a position on the Internet requiring five years of Internet marketing experience in the healthcare field. How many Internet healthcare companies were around in 1995?

It would be useful if organizations would list realistic (specifications) for responsible positions instead of posting vague, “Save the World,” requirements.

Provide more details, especially on salary and benefits. I often exclude potential jobs if they don't list that information.

Always post salary ranges, percent travel required...and specific geographical locations of jobs.

Borck (2000) suggests that software programs like ICplanet can take much of the guesswork out of matching employee prospects to job requirements. Appropriate sets of candidates can be compiled by job category, specific areas of specialization, and/or geographical region. ICplanet also provides an optional prescreening service that verifies an applicant's background and work history, thereby saving HR professionals needless legwork.

General Electric has also focused extensively on improving the quality of its on-line recruiting, particularly in its Power Systems Division. In its own internal review of on-line recruiting, GE determined that its job descriptions were too vaguely written and were geared primarily for internal, rather than external, use. Over half of GE Power Division's job listings were subsequently rewritten and reposted (Martinez, 2000).

A/E/C WorkForce is an Atlanta-based job site for architects, engineers, and contractors. Besides posting jobs, the site has a section called "AEC Career Mentor," where applicants can submit questions and get responses about postings. GeoSearch, an on-line recruiting firm in Colorado Springs, also offers a "full service" package to potential employers. With this service, GeoSearch will assign a specific recruiter to each on-line candidate and will interview all prospects over the phone. Services such as these facilitate on-line recruiting from the perspective of both potential candidates and potential employers (Murphy, 2001).

Improve Procedures for Submitting and Processing Resumes

As noted earlier, the logistics of posting resumes on many companies' Web sites appears to be "user-unfriendly." While it may not yet be possible to develop a generic resume format that all organizations can use, it may be possible to allow applicants to attach their resumes in Word documents or find other ways of making the process for submitting applications easier:

(Companies) need a simpler process for just cutting and pasting resumes without having to fill in each company's own template.... How about a quick and easy standardized form that does not require too much re-typing?

Get rid of resume building to (a company's) specific criteria. Just simplify the process by letting applicants download an application and fill it out in Word. Then, let people send in an e-mail with the filled application and the resumes they've already prepared.

When using Web sites, it is frustrating to have to retype your resume information in (each company's) format. It would be so much easier and more efficient to be able to simply attach a Word document.

Cisco Systems has one of the most user-friendly resume-building programs in the industry (called Cisco Profiler). That program even includes an "Oh No! My Boss is Coming" button, which an individual can click and which will quickly switch the screen to a display of "Seven Habits of a Successful Employee." Visitors can take a virtual tour of the San Jose headquarters, can fill a shopping cart with openings that interest them, or join the "Make Friends @ Cisco" program, which connects potential applicants with real-life people from the department in which they want to work (Boehle, 2000; Useem, 1999). In addition to facilitating resume submission, Cisco's program also enhances its image as a good employer to potential recruits.

Moreover, the processing of on-line resumes can be expedited as well. As Capelli (2001, p. 144) suggests, vendors like Brainbench provide extensive testing services to verify applicants' skills, while companies like Hire Check provide software for performing background checks. Similarly, Kforce.com and other job boards allow applicants to submit audio and video clips of themselves for evaluation and assessment.

Update Web Sites and Keep Postings Current

Another recommendation is keeping Web sites updated and postings current. At the mini-

Appropriate sets of candidates can be compiled by job category, specific areas of specialization, and/or geographical region.

mum, this would include listing the date of the original job posting and removing filled positions from the Web site:

Always provide the date the ad was posted...Take old postings down when filled.

Keep the site current. Too often, jobs that are listed on a company's Web site have already been filled.

Let me know if an opening is available and don't waste my time with "leave us your information." I want to know if something is available for me to pursue or not NOW.

Software programs like Restrac also allow companies to identify the most likely "back up" candidates if initial job offers are rejected. This program is also formatted to include new applications that have been received since a "filled" job was withdrawn from the Web site, and to automatically send application-status update e-mails (Starcke, 1996). To give their members a leg up on the competition, the American Marketing Association posts its most recent job listings on a Web site accessible only to AMA members ten days before positions are publicly posted in other sites (Murphy, 1999).

Another promising tool is Recruiter WebTop. As a hosted service offering, Recruiter Web Top creates a recruiting site linked to the company's homepage. It features advanced applicant tracking systems and skill-based screening procedures. Already, corporations like the Bank of Montreal, Dow Chemical, Hewlett-Packard, Cabletron Systems, Deloitte & Touche, Hasbro, and Metropolitan Life have implemented this service in order to keep their Web sites updated, their postings current, and their hiring-cycle time down (Goodridge, 2001).

Make Web Site Navigation More "User-Friendly"

Finally, companies engaged in online recruiting might want to reexamine the reliability and efficiency of their Web sites and the ease of

navigation to, and through, their Web pages. In some cases, this might include improving links between a company's Web site and generic sites like Monster.com. In other cases, it might mean making links within the Web page clearer and easier to follow. Another recommendation made by survey respondents was that a company's taxonomy for job openings should better reflect the terminology and categories used by potential job seekers, so that people can more quickly and efficiently search for possible positions:

Sometimes it's hard to find a company's link to specific employment opportunities...

I do not like the vast number of postings on big sites, all the time sorting options....I also find the speed of Web sites to be frustratingly slow. I don't need all the frills (e.g., banner advertising), just the job information.

The least helpful part of Web site searching is having to sort through hundreds of jobs to find just one possibility.

Job classifications are not clear or well-organized. If you're a manager of technical professionals, should you look under engineer, manager, technical, or professional?

General Electric has been a leader in making its Web sites more "applicant friendly." It established a "two-click" benchmark rule; that is, it should only take two clicks of a computer mouse for a visitor to retrieve sought-after information. GE also simplified its search categories into such groups as "Entry level" and "Experienced Professionals" to make job hunting easier for potential candidates. The navigation system was redesigned based on recommendations from employee focus groups; for instance, slow-loading graphics were deleted and key features of GE in general and specific job opportunities were made more salient (Martinez, 2000).

In a recent survey of the Fortune 500's best practices conducted by iLogos Research,

Finally, companies engaged in online recruiting might want to reexamine the reliability and efficiency of their Web sites and the ease of navigation to, and through, their Web pages.

73% of the Fortune 500 now link their Careers section directly to their home page and 56% adhere to the “one click to apply” practice (*HR Focus*, 2001). Nonetheless, much more work needs to be done in this regard. Negative first impressions of job sites discourage further searching and Web sites that are difficult to navigate are particularly likely to frustrate those with low Internet fluency. Job seekers move rapidly from one Web site to another; less than 10% of “surfers” scroll for information beyond that presented on the top page. Consequently, companies only have a narrow window of opportunity to influence a potential applicant’s decision to proceed further in an Internet job hunt (Cober, Brown, Blumenthal, Doverspike, & Levy, 2000).

Conclusion

Without question, the use of online recruiting has tremendous potential benefits for corporations. As reported in Capelli (2001), online recruiting can cut a week off the hiring cycle at the job advertising phase of recruitment. On-line recruiting can also be integrated with overall corporate marketing and branding through links to company advertising on

homepages. While newspaper advertisements can cost as much as \$1,000 for one print appearance, the price of posting a job online for a month can be as low as \$100. In addition, e-recruiting cuts down expenses on mailings, brochures, and on-site interviews (*HR Focus*, 2001). It is also possible that online recruiting can reach a more diverse applicant pool and, at the same time, yield a higher quality set of candidates.

Furthermore, online recruiting can cut down on expenses incurred in using headhunters and external search firms. For instance, many companies pay placement fees of up to 30% of a hire’s first-year compensation package. Recruiting budgets can be stretched much further through increased use of on-line recruiting (Corsini, 2001).

As both this study and previous research suggests, Internet recruiting is still developing as a major component of companies’ staffing process. The use of Internet recruiting has doubled since 1998—and yet only about 17% of jobs are filled by on-line recruiting today (Corsini, 2001). The results of the present study suggests some important avenues for improving HR practice in this critical management task.

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