

Job Search in Cyberspace

by Jack Wilson



ACM's career consultant, Jack Wilson, answers questions from students about their forthcoming careers in computing and information technology.

In response to many inquiries, this month's column is devoted entirely to the subject of using the Internet to conduct a job search in cyberspace.

The burgeoning use of the Internet for recruiting purposes has opened up an entirely new dimension to your conventional job search. Any attempt to cover this subject fully however is bound to be met with frustration, as the number and variety of career and job-related web sites seems to increase daily. In its 1998 Career Guide, *U. S. News and World Report* states, ``With thousands of career-related sites on the Internet, finding promising openings can be time consuming and inefficient (``Putting the Net to work'', October 27, 1997)". In practical terms, for you the job seeker, this means you could use a fast modem, an ISDN line, an unlimited-use plan with your ISP, and a lot of patience. That said, let us see whether we can help you tackle this problem with some structure and understanding.

At the ACM web site (www.acm.org/membership/career/careerline.html), you will find a monograph entitled ``The Job Market and the Four-Corner Offense'', outlining the four ways to find a job. We believe these same four ways apply to the Internet, the only difference being this new dimension, an electronic one. Just as in print, you can find company ads on the Net. You can also find agencies, or agents, who are performing a role similar to that of recruiters in the mundane world. You can also select and make direct contact with potential employers via their own web sites, just as you might in campus recruiting or job fairs. And you can do networking through a variety of news groups, chat rooms and forums. In our monograph, we also mentioned the use of research in the center of these four corners, and that too is facilitated by the Net and company home pages.

Before we get into the how-to portion of this, we want to stress our belief that job search via the Internet should not be a substitute for the conventional approach, but rather a supplement to it. Certainly there are some advantages to the electronic search in that the Net never closes and is available 365 days a year. It can also help you do things faster and more efficiently. For example, in responding to an ad and transmitting your resume. At the same time, we must remember that it is very impersonal, and you risk some loss of privacy when launching your resume or other personal information into cyberspace.

But in our view, the biggest drawback for the serious job seeker is the difficulty in attacking the unpublished job market, which is typically done through interpersonal contact and face-to-face networking; and it's networking that accounts for the majority of successful job searches. That's an important reason for using the Internet only to augment your search. On the flip side, even though the Net addresses just the published job market, it can be advantageous to those of you seeking employment from afar, especially a foreign country, where personal contact with people in your preferred location is not feasible.

So how does one navigate through this maze of more than a million job openings on more than 5,000 sites, both of which are increasing every day? Not to disappoint you, but as yet there is no perfect solution, just as there is no perfect solution to finding the ideal job. You work hard at it, and you play the odds. Here's an approach that we hope you will find helpful.

Start with ``The Riley Guide: Employment Opportunities and Job Resources on the Internet", www.dbm.com/jobguide/. The author, Margaret F. Dikel (nee Riley), is considered by many as the preeminent expert on Internet job search. Her web page is regarded as one of the best gateway sites for this purpose. The first hyperlink on this page will take you to the site of one of the ``gurus" of the job search business in general, Richard Nelson Bolles, author of the famous ``What Color is Your Parachute" books, republished every year since 1970.

Surf your way through Bolles' Net Guide, first by going to the Introduction and reading the entire page, then by clicking on each of the links that interests you. Under his ``Parachute Picks -- Gateway Sites" you will notice the first two (as of this writing) are ``The Riley Guide" (where you started) and ``JobHunt: A Meta-list of On-Line Job Search Resources and Services". The latter will take you to yet another level of detail, where you will find a plethora of job listings and resources. As you proceed through this surfing, place bookmarks wherever you find something you want to come back to.

To complete this orientation phase, go back through Bolles' Net Guide to The Riley Guide, and the section entitled ``What Are You Interested In?" Click on the topics of interest and put additional bookmarks where appropriate.

Take your time going through both the Net Guide and The Riley Guide, as this is building process, and you are developing a roadmap to be used when you actually start the execution phase of answering ads, using agents and agencies, and making direct contact with employers.

So far you have only keyed in one URL, but you have surfed your way through what we feel are potentially the most useful sites and relevant information. Through this process, you have gained access to a wide range of information and resources. You are now prepared to take advantage of these as they apply to your specific needs and interests. In our opinion, you could simply stop here, catalog the relevant sites, start a successful internet search with the probability that you have hit 80% of what is pertinent and useful.

If however you want to test some other avenues or feel that you may have missed some specific components of the search, here are some further suggestions.

Let's start with your resume. Yes, you do need an electronic version of your resume, and many of the sites you will have visited have electronic forms you can fill out and submit. Also you will have encountered in one or more sites a procedure for creating your own version. In case you missed it, one such site for resume writing is www.resumix.com/resume/resume-form.html. Another helpful site for resume development is www.jobsmart.org/tools/resume/index.htm.

Next let's consider the advertising corner. If your travels did not take you to www.careerpath.com, we would be very surprised. This is a unique site featuring the help-wanted ads from dozens of newspapers of major metropolitan areas all over the country. You can access the relevant ones in your field simply by using key words, such as *computing* or *information systems*.

As to agents and agencies, there are many but among the more prominent are:

- America's Job Bank, www.ajb.dni.us, a service of the U. S. Department of Labor and state employment agencies;
- The Monster Board, www.monster.com;
- Career Mosaic, www.careermosaic.com;
- Online Career Center, www.occ.com;
- E-Span, www.espan.com;
- IntelliMatch, www.intellimatch.com;
- Career Builder, www.careerbuilder.com;
- Career Mart, www.careermart.com;
- Career Site, www.careersite.com;
- 4Work, www.4work.com.

A couple of sites specific to the computing profession can be found at www.softwarejobs.com and www.is-careers.com.

And for the computer consultants there is, among many, the Data Processing Consultants Exchange, www.dice.com. To find others, we recommend using the Internet Sleuth, www.isleuth.com, or if you prefer, your favorite search engine with the words ``computer consultants or consulting".

For students, we have some special recommendations, the first of which is to visit your own career center and see what they have to offer. Then compare that with one of our favorite sites from Purdue University, www.ups.purdue.edu/Student/jobsites.htm. The first two links on this page will take you to the other two best student-related job sites, JobTrak and Job Web. The latter is maintained by the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

Most job bank services are free to the job seeker, as employers or recruiting firms pay for the listings, or in the case of AJB, it's the U. S. taxpayer. Our advice: Don't let anyone take a fee from you! Exit that site ASAP.

Let's look next at making direct contact with selected employers. This is where you can indeed use the internet to great advantage, as most companies and not-for-profit organizations now have web sites. Many of these sites have a page listing employment opportunities and a convenient way to apply. While you may not know the URL, you can make a pretty good guess based on the company's name or initials (e.g., www.acm.org). If that doesn't work, try a search engine like www.hotbot.com to find their home page. While you're there, take the opportunity to do some research on the company and arm yourself for a forthcoming interview. For further research, we recommend Hoover's Online, www.hoovers.com, a comprehensive directory of businesses.

Following your response to a company's or agency's ad, don't be surprised or disappointed if you do not hear anything right away. Your response is just one of many, perhaps hundreds. But you may get an e-mail message or phone call with some screening questions, so you should keep a good record of each response you make. Be prepared to say why you are interested, why you think this is good match for your skills, and what you think you can contribute to their needs.

Finally, on the subject of networking, we're not too keen on joining all kinds of newsgroups, unless you know them to be very professional and pertinent to your interests. But we are keen on maintaining your network through organizations like ACM and its SIGs. Professional societies offer opportunities not only to keep informed of the technology and events, but also to develop very useful contacts for the present and the future. These contacts can be great sources of job leads and referrals to others in the profession, who in turn can become part of your network.

In surfing the Net, look for information on conferences, seminars and symposia. Identify speakers or authors in your subject area and send them an e-mail message expressing your interest in their talk or their paper. It could be the beginning of a beautiful relationship (professional, of course)!

Following is a list of some relevant books.

[*Electronic Job Search Revolution*](#), Second Edition, Joyce Lain Kennedy and Thomas J. Morrow, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1995.

[*Electronic Resume Revolution*](#), Second Edition, Joyce Lain Kennedy and Thomas J. Morrow, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1995.

[*The Guide to Internet Job Searching*](#), Margaret Riley, Frances Roehm, Steve Oserman; Public Library Association, VGM Career Horizons, 1996.

[*Finding a Job on the Internet*](#), Alfred and Emily Glossbrenner, McGraw Hill, Inc., 1995.

[*Be Your Own Headhunter Online*](#), Pam Dixon & Sylvia Tiersten, Random House, Inc., 1995.

[*NetJobs: Use the Internet to Land Your Dream Job*](#), Michael Wolff & Company, Inc., 1996.

The Job Seeker's Guide to On-Line Resources, Alice Snell, Kennedy Publications, 1995.