

How to Uncover Job Opportunities

This resource covers ways to connect to job opportunities beyond traditional job boards. It will teach you to create a target company list so you don't have to rely on what happens to appear up on job boards. By following these strategies, you will be able to develop your professional network and gain access to job openings that might not be posted publicly. In addition, you will understand how to connect with hiring teams to get their attention in the crowded market, where hundreds of people might be applying for the same role.

Limitations of Job Boards

Monitoring job boards is an important part of any job search as it can surface opportunities that you would never come across otherwise. Aggregators, such as Indeed and Google for Jobs, make discovering jobs easier by consolidating postings from various job boards and other relevant internet sites. Before going into strategies for uncovering opportunities beyond job boards, let's discuss why it is not sufficient to limit your job search to what's discoverable through job boards.

Competition

Job boards' convenience is also one of their challenges. Once the job is posted to an online job board, it is easily discoverable by any job seeker, which results in a high volume of applications and competition. Even with a well-written resume it can be challenging to stand out among tens, and often hundreds, of others.

Lack of visibility into the job status

Another challenge of job boards is that you don't know whether the hiring team is what stage the hiring for the role is in. Even if the role had just popped up on a job board, it might have been open for a while and new applications are no longer being reviewed.

***Tip:** When you find an opening through a job board, use LinkedIn to find someone on the recruiting team and inquire whether they are still sourcing applications. If they confirm, ask to send your resume directly to them rather than submitting it through the automated system.*

Limited information about the role

When applying to a role based on a job board posting, your knowledge about the requirements and the role is limited to what's in the job description, which can be imprecise. That means that something that looks like a perfect fit for you "on paper" might not be one in reality. Relying solely on job descriptions can also cause you to miss openings that are actually a great fit.

Not everything is posted

There are often openings that are not captured by job boards. This can happen for multiple reasons, for example, if the role is still in the process of being approved and published. Unpublished opportunities often provide the best chances of having your application turn into an interview because you are not competing against a large number of other candidates.

Networking Is the Solution to Job Board Limitations

The challenges with job boards outlined above can be addressed with networking. Direct connecting within hiring companies can help you find out what roles are open or might be opening up soon and what exact qualifications those roles require. Referrals resulting from networking will also help you stand out from the competition.

Create a target company list

To identify people you should be adding to your network, begin with developing a list of target companies that you would like to work for. These won't be the only companies you are open to working for, but they'll be the ones you actively pursue, outside of job boards. It is important to have a significant list of 30 to 50 companies because not all of them will have jobs open at the right time. Remember, companies do not have to have relevant jobs posted immediately to be on your list.

To develop your list, identify which parameters that are important to you, such as location, industry, size corporate culture, etc. Then research companies that meet your criteria. There are many online resources ranking companies on everything from being great places to work for parents to their commitment to social responsibility. If you are interested in a specific industry, you can begin with one company and research its competitors. If location is of utmost importance to you, check what companies post jobs - any jobs - in your target area and research them to see if they might hire for your target role. Be creative in finding companies for your list, the more you start with the better.

Speak with people within your target companies

Once you have a list of potential companies, begin developing connections there. Your ultimate goal is to speak with someone in your target group within the company - someone who could be your teammate or a hiring manager in the future. Through a simple 15-minute informational conversation with them, you will be able to:

- Confirm whether this company is indeed a good fit for you and you should monitor it for opportunities
- Understand the requirements for your target role *at this company*. It will enable you to tailor your resume and prepare for interviews if/when the opportunity comes up
- Learn about ways to monitor and apply for opportunities there

- Develop an important professional relationship that one day might turn into a referral

Tip: *If it seems daunting to reach out to strangers, remember that all you are asking for is advice, not a job. You want to understand whatever this company and type of role are a good fit for you. Many people enjoy being helpful and happy to share their expertise with a stranger who asks nicely!*

Finding and reaching out to people. LinkedIn is a great tool for establishing new connections. LinkedIn People Search function will help you locate people on a specific team at a specific company. Use your target job function as the search string and add a filter for “current employer.” Voila! Now you can review the results and send a connection request to people who you are interested in connecting with. Always include a note to explain why you are reaching out to them.

Sample LinkedIn outreach message:

Hi <name>, I discovered your profile because of the interesting work you do as a <role> at <company>. I'd appreciate an opportunity to ask you a few questions to learn more about what you do, and what it is like to work at <company>. Thank you in advance for connecting with me!

If they accept your connection, follow up with a message thanking them and asking to schedule a 15-minute phone/video call to learn about their role. Make scheduling easy by suggesting a specific time to speak, offer to work around their calendar, and send out a calendar invitation with information on how you will connect (phone, video conferencing, etc).

Do not take it personally if your connection request goes unanswered. Some people don't monitor their LinkedIn messages or are simply too busy. Try reaching out to other people at the company. Focus on those you have something in common with: maybe you went to the same school, have the same hobby, there is just something about their profile that speaks to you. Reach out to them with the same goal of having a 15-minute conversation, but focus on the company rather than the role. If it feels appropriate at the end of that conversation, ask them whether they'd be open to facilitate an introduction for you with someone on your target team.

Tip: *On LinkedIn, you can only access profiles of people who are in your network (i.e., your 1st-degree, 2nd-degree, and 3rd-degree connections), as well as fellow members of your LinkedIn groups. You can expand your network by adding more 1st-degree connections and joining groups.*

Best practices for a networking conversation

On the day of your informational conversation, it will be your responsibility to set the tone and agenda for it. Your goal is to make the other person feel comfortable, valuable, and appreciated. Always begin with a short overview of why you reached out and what you are hoping to learn from the conversation. Remember to speak to your relevant skills, accomplishments, and personal qualities so that the person can be compelled to refer you to a role on their team if and when the opportunity comes up.

Since you are there to learn about their experience and company, the primary focus of the conversation should be on the other person. Some people might be more talkative, while others may need more input from you in order to engage. Ideally, they should be speaking for 50% to 80% of the conversation. Don't be afraid of short pauses, and be respectful and patient if they need time to gather their thoughts.

Always send a thank-you email within 48 hours. Express your gratitude for their time, address any action items that came up during your conversation, and offer to return the favor in the future.

Follow up and monitor opportunities

After every conversation, evaluate whether the organization you just discussed should stay on your list of target companies. Does it sound like a good fit for you, and can you expect openings to come up in your target time frame? If so, make sure to check the company's careers page for opportunities regularly, and take any other steps recommended by your new contact. If not, remove the company from your list and move onto the next one.

If you think there is a good synergy between you and the company, it will be important to keep the connection with the person you just spoke with active over time. You can do that by sending occasional updates on your job search or sharing articles and other resources that you think they might find useful. Doing so will strengthen the connection you had established, and keep you top of mind for the person in case a relevant opportunity comes up.

Continue Growing Your Network and Target Company List

In this article, we discussed how to identify target companies for your job search and to speak with people who work there in order to uncover and connect to opportunities. Remember that your goal is to speak with someone on the team you want to join at each of 30 to 50 companies on your target list. It might take you a few weeks to do so, and these networking activities should consume the bulk of the time you spend on your job search.

In addition, remember to continue monitoring job boards and attend networking events to discover opportunities at companies you would not have thought about otherwise. Whenever you come across a company that is interesting to you, and it is on your target company lists and begin to build out your network there. The longer your list is, the more opportunities you will have access to.