

# Tackling the Hidden Job Market

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Advertised jobs only constitute a small proportion of the total number of job vacancies. In fact, if you ask most people how they initially heard about their last job, very few would say they answered an advert. Most would say they heard about the job from someone they knew.

This is borne out by research in this area and means that if you are looking for your next role, then the unadvertised job market is likely to be a productive use of your time

So what do we mean when we talk about the hidden job market? In essence this refers to job-seekers finding roles as a result of:

- Personal networking through business and social contacts
- On-line networking through professional sites like LinkedIn
- Directly approaching companies to offer your skills
- Identifying and creating opportunities in-house or externally
- Being approached directly as a result of your reputation in your field or through recommendation from others

The appealing thing about many of the above is that they are much more within your control. Responding to job adverts is essentially passive with little that you can do except wait for a suitable advert to come along. However, with the unadvertised market, the more proactive you are, the greater your likelihood of success.

Some practical strategies for tackling the unadvertised job market;

## **Personal Networking**

Ask your connections if they know of any companies who are likely to be hiring individuals with your skills. It is often surprising what good quality information you hear on this grapevine. Even if it is someone who knows you well, be very clear about what it is that you have to offer and the type of role you are looking for as they will need to repeat this to others if they are networking for you. If appropriate, ask if you can use their name as an introduction as this can definitely help to warm up a cold contact.

Your networking connections could include:

- Current and ex-colleagues, managers, suppliers, customers etc.
- Contacts through professional associations or business groups like your professional institute or business groups
- Friends, family and neighbours
- Community groups in which you are involved e.g. church, school
- Educational contacts through university alumni, tutors, training courses
- Anyone you happen to meet e.g. fellow dog-walkers, the newsagent, other party guests

## **On-line Networking**

There has been a huge growth in on-line communities with the express aim of enabling people to connect up with each other for both social and business purposes.

Advertising yourself on-line via sites such as LinkedIn is essential for any business professional who wants to network and be visible to others in their business community. The site has many interest groups that are occupational or sector based. These not only act as a useful information resource, but are also frequented by head-hunters who use these sites to source candidates.

It's also worth checking out your professional institute, associations and educational establishments which often have their own on-line networking forums

## **Direct Approaches to Companies**

Sometimes called the “speculative approach”, this involves proactively contacting organisations to offer your services. The success of this approach depends on the following factors:

- Targeting companies that are likely to require someone with your specific skills and expertise
- Writing a persuasive letter and CV that matches a particular need they have at that time
- Understanding the employer’s needs and being flexible enough to think on the spot about how you can help meet those challenges
- Ideally having a contact whose name you can use to help introduce yourself to the company in the first instance

## **Creating opportunities internally or externally**

Individuals often overlook the possibility of career opportunities within their own organisation, taking the view that it may be better to present their employer with a resignation letter than face what they feel could be an awkward conversation about their career prospects.

However, your organisation could offer opportunities that are useful stepping stones to your next role. Secondments, work shadowing, project work, committee representation, etc. could increase your marketability to external employers and be achieved in a fairly low-risk way. There is also the possibility that once you gain experience in a different area that further opportunities may open up to you internally. However, unless you feel able to talk with your manager regarding these development opportunities, then they are unlikely to happen.

Cultivating longer-term business relationships external to the organisation is likely to surface opportunities as you learn about problems or challenges that you could help solve. A good relationship already in place is the perfect springboard to start talking about possibilities for working together.

## **Summary**

- Network internally and externally
- Approach companies directly
- Use on-line networking to raise your profile
- Try to create career development opportunities internally