

Exploring the Hidden Job Market

It is a well-known fact that many job opportunities are never advertised. It has been estimated that more than half of positions vacant are filled through an informal network rather than being formally advertised. Often called the "hidden job market", these positions can only be accessed through networking or cold calling. The following tips and hints are an effective way of finding a job, and planning and practice will increase your confidence.

Research the Industry or Occupation

Now that you have decided what industry or type of job you are seeking, thorough research is called for. Make notes about what you already know about the industry or the type of job you would like, for example:

- Where the industry or job type is geographically located? Would you have to relocate to work in this area?
- Is this industry growing or shrinking? Is this a high-demand occupation or are unemployment rates high?
- Are formal qualifications required to work in this industry or occupation?
- Where will you find these types of jobs? Only in large corporations, or in small businesses as well?
- Are these types of vacancies generally filled by recruitment agencies or directly by the companies?

Reading employment sections of major online job sites and newspapers over a period of weeks can provide a good feel for this information. Your local library may keep copies of newspapers. If you are at university or high school, make use of your career guidance services. Make full use of the internet - it's worth taking some time to explore different search engines and how to refine your search for information. Yellow Pages directories may be a good starting point for identifying names and locations of companies.

Complete this process by compiling a list of the companies you would like to work for. It might be a specific department of a single company, or your list might include every company in the industry that is located within a 40km radius from your home.

Research the Companies

Your next job is to find out everything you can about your target companies, i.e.

- Product lines
- Competitors
- Prices
- Growth prospects
- Organizational structure
- Employment policies
- Staffing

Exploring the Hidden Market continued...

You can find this information in places like:

- Annual reports
- Customer newsletters
- Trade magazines
- Product brochures and catalogues
- Sales representatives

A great idea is to speak to someone directly who works there, or knows someone who does. This is where your personal contact list will be vital.

Personal Contacts

Start your list. These may consist of co-workers [past and present], neighbours, previous employers, family members, friends, professionals, lecturers, sporting buddies, suppliers and customers.

Once you have prepared your list, start to explore opportunities and to gather more information. Asking outright for a job can put a contact in an embarrassing position - it is more appropriate to ask them for their advice or recommendation.

Questions you could ask include:

- Do you know anyone who works for Xxxxx?
- Do you know anyone who works as a Sales Executive?
- I'm looking for a job in the pharmaceutical industry. Do you know anyone who works in that field?
- I have excellent people skills and familiar with pharmaceutical products. Can you give me any advice or do you know anyone who may be able to help me?

Attend Conferences, Seminars and Trade Shows

Trade shows are a showcase for companies in your industry of interest. They'll give you a good feel for corporate size, culture, reputation and you can have a chat with representatives of each company.

Seminars and conferences provide valuable opportunities for informally meeting people who are already working in the industry. These are most likely in professional occupations and they are often expensive. They are worthwhile as long as you're willing and able to "work the room."

Ask for the Job

Cold calling still means phoning strangers and asking for a job. You'll be better equipped to do this once you're armed with a good knowledge of the industry or company.

- Know the name and title of the person who has the power to hire you.
- Rehearse your opening line, including demonstrating your knowledge of and specific interest in that company.
- Mention how you can benefit the company.

Continued

Exploring the Hidden Market continued...

Depending on the type of work, your goal in making a call may be to organise a visit or to send your résumé, which you then follow up. Your research should have revealed what is the more effective strategy for the industry and job you are chasing.

Think about how you can create opportunities to explain what you can offer. Role plays can be a very effective way of preparing for cold calls. Practice with a friend — in person or over the phone.

Getting Past the Switchboard

Some receptionists can be very intimidating. It is increasingly common practice for receptionists and PAs to "announce" incoming calls. Accordingly they will ask everyone who calls for their name and where they're calling from. Be pro-active. Announce who you are, rather than waiting to be asked. The more senior the person you're calling, the harder they will be to reach. Being at the least polite, and at best, charming to receptionists and PAs will only help your cause.

Keeping Records

Keep a record of all the contacts you make. This record could be as elaborate as creating a database or a Word macro on your home computer, laptop or smart phone, or as simple as an exercise book, ruled into columns. How you do it isn't nearly as important as keeping your records accurate. You'll want to record:

- Company name
- Date
- Contact name
- Title
- Address
- Phone
- Fax
- Position sought
- Discussed
- Outcome
- Referred to
- When to contact again

Tips

- If you've arranged to send a résumé to a potential employer, send it promptly and always include a cover letter.
- Always call back exactly when you say you will.
- Always carry business cards and/or your CV on you or in the car. You never know when an opportunity may present itself.

Send thank you notes to anyone who helped you. Firstly, because it's appropriate to recognise people's efforts to assist you. Secondly, it may create a good impression with people you probably want to stay in touch with. Keep thank you notes very simple. Email is excellent, as it's low-key but still makes the point.