

Welcome to **Advancing Your Career**, a new column on job hunting and career advancement. As a technical writer who became a technical communication manager, and from there transitioned to a recruiter who specializes in placing technical communicators, I have sat on both sides of the interviewer's desk. Similarly, in my career I have worked as a captive (full-time) employee, was laid off and became an independent contractor, and finally started my own company. No matter if you are an employee, contractor, consultant, or business owner, you have to market your services. Each column will focus on some aspect of career growth—from starting your tech comm career to finding a new job to taking your career to the next level. If you have a question you'd like addressed in a future column, email it to jack@prospringstaffing.com with "Career Question" in the subject line.

Avoiding Job Application Black Holes

By JACK MOLISANI, Associate Fellow

How many of you have seen a job posted on the Internet that seemed perfect for you, and the posting said, "To be considered, send your résumé to *resumes@BlackHoleNeverToBeHeardFromAgain.com*"?

The Internet is both the best and the worst tool when it comes to job hunting. It is the best tool because you can search for a job anywhere in the world and have the results in seconds. It is also the worst tool since it takes all human interaction out of the job application process, and along with it all possibility of your ability to assert positive control over your job search.

So what's a job hunter to do?

Keep what works, skip what doesn't, and figure out how to make the system work for you.

By all means, search Internet job boards such as DICE.com, Monster.com, and the job listings at STC.org and your local chapter.

Make a list of all the jobs for which you'd like to apply. If the job posting lists an actual person to whom you can send your résumé, then go ahead and send your résumé per the submission directions. Follow up in a week or so if you haven't heard back.



But what should you do if the job description doesn't list a real person, just a URL to an online application? Or worse, a generic email like *jobs@BlackHoleNeverToBeHeardFromAgain.com*?

Good news! There is a datum, a natural law about job hunting:

The better the personal relationship you have with the person to whom you are sending your résumé, the better your chances of getting an interview.

For example, what would your chance of getting an interview be if your mother's best friend is the hiring manager at XYZ Company with a job opening? Pretty good, I'd bet! (You might not get the job, but at least

you'd get an interview.) Conversely, what do you think the relative chances would be of getting an interview if you applied for that same job by just sending your résumé to *jobs@XYZCompany.com*? I bet not nearly as good.

Personally, I've never been that keen on waiting in line with the masses. Instead I try to find a more expedient, personal, and favorable solution. For example, say you are at an airport and your connecting flight is cancelled. Don't wait in line for an agent to handle the 40 or 50 people in front of you; pick up a phone and call the airline's reservation number—instantly you are next in line!

A similar approach can be taken when job hunting. When a job is posted on a company or Internet job board, the company will receive tens, if not hundreds, of résumés from applicants. An even worse scenario is when résumés from all job applicants at a company get sent to one email address (e.g., *jobs@XYZcompany.com*); now your résumé is not just one of many sent for one job, but it's also mixed in with résumés for all open jobs at the company, plus those who are just submitting résumés to be kept on

file, *plus* the inevitable spam that arrives at a company's *jobs@* email address. (All of which, by the way, are probably processed in the sequence in which they were received, meaning who knows when they will get around to reading and processing *your* application.)

Which brings me back to my airport analogy. How can you avoid "waiting in line" until someone gets around to processing your job application?

Locate a job using the Internet boards and then apply for the job using a personal relationship.

When I say "personal relationship," I mean contacting a specific person with a direct communication such as email (good), phone (better), or in person (best). And assuming you don't have family members who are hiring managers, you're going to have to build those relationships.

The first thing I suggest is to use your professional networks. Go to chapter meetings and find someone (*anyone*) who works at XYZ Company. Ask that person to pass on your résumé to the hiring manager. Not only will you stand out by getting a personal referral,

but the referring person may also get a finder's fee.

Can't find anyone who works at XYZ Company? Check professional and social networking sites such as LinkedIn.com, Plaxo.com, Facebook.com, MySpace.com, Classmates.com, etc. to see if there is anyone at the company to whom you are connected. Look for someone who has a similar job who might be in the same department (a tech writer if you are applying for a tech writing job, a project manager if you are applying for a project manager job, etc.), but don't be afraid to try anyone else in the company if you don't have a connection to a direct counterpart. Then ask for an introduction/referral to the hiring

manager or to someone in human resources (HR) if your contact doesn't know the hiring manager. Emailing your résumé to someone in HR is the third option, somewhere between a personal referral to the hiring manager (best) and emailing your résumé to *jobs@* (worst).

One more tip about finding someone in HR to whom you can email your résumé: Over the past year or so I have observed this curiously illogical phenomenon: rarely do company websites or job postings list HR or recruiter contacts at the company, *but almost all corporate recruiters have a profile on LinkedIn who is!* So if you can't find someone that you know at XYZ Company

through networking and the job posting doesn't list an HR contact, then search LinkedIn for someone who is an HR contact at the company, and send a message asking if you can apply for a job by sending your résumé directly to him or her.

He might say "Sure!" or he might say "Apply online and I'll watch for it to arrive." Either way, you now have someone who will *personally* handle your application and pass your résumé on to the hiring manager!

Getting Creative

Suppose you have tried using your personal and professional network and you *still* can't get a personal introduction to someone in the hiring process. What then? Well, now you have to get creative.

Here is an example of how you can be creative and in control of your job search, but keep in mind that this is only one idea out of hundreds of ideas—the sky's the limit!

Chapter newsletter editors always need articles, so write an article on hiring trends in your area. Pick the top ten companies in your area for which you'd like to work, call their documentation manager (or whatever field you are in), and ask, "I'm writing an article for my professional organization's newsletter on hiring trends in the industry—do you have five minutes for a quick interview?" Start by asking generic questions about their department, then ask about their plans to hire contract and permanent people over the next six months. Finish by asking if he/she would like to see a

copy of the article when it is published. (They almost always will.) Then get their contact info. Suddenly, you are on a first-name basis with the very people who would hire you! Plus, you know *if* they are hiring, *when* they will be hiring, and which positions will be open!

You still have to write the article, of course, but you have a reason to follow up and an opportunity to mention that you are interested in the position if they say they are currently hiring or will do so in the future.

There are many ways to assert positive control over your job search. Network, get referrals, become more than an anonymous email in a generic HR inbox. All it takes is a little creativity and a whole lot of legwork.

But if you are unemployed, you've got the time, right? **1**

Jack Molisani (jack@prospringstaffing.com) is an educator, award-winning technical writer, STC Associate Fellow, and the president of ProSpring Technical Staffing (www.ProSpringStaffing.com), an employment agency specializing in staff and contract engineers, project managers, and technical writers. Jack has a degree in computer engineering from Tulane University, is known internationally as a dynamic and entertaining speaker, and reports on employment trends at the trends session of the STC Technical Communication Summit. He also produces the LavaCon Conference on Professional Development (www.lavacon.org). The sixth annual LavaCon Conference will be held 25–27 October 2009 in New Orleans.

Wherever you are . . .

Connect to STC's Live Web Seminars

Four timely continuing education topics presented each month . . . And archived on the STC website.

