

Finding The 'Key Words' To Advance Your Job Search

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It's all about information.

Odds are, you have a computer, or at least access to one. Go to your local library if you don't and jump on the internet highway. When you're out of work, the internet is your best tool for amassing information that can help in your job search, provided you utilize it effectively.

In a previous column, we discussed internet socializing as a method to increase contacts during your search for employment. Using sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook allows you to reach out and build your network of contacts, let those contacts know you're on the market and keep in regular touch with a quick update on your social network home page.

But simply letting potential employers know you're out there is not enough. Getting back to work will require you to do some research work of your own. And the internet puts a library full of information at your fingertips.

You can find open jobs in your field posted on numerous job boards, but that's only scratching the surface. Few companies post all available openings. So how do you find out not only who is hiring, but what companies might have careers in your field even if they're not currently hiring?

The answer: Key words. Utilizing the right key words on the internet can mean the difference between amassing useful information and staring blankly at a computer screen for hours. Filling that open space after the cursor with accurate words can put you in touch with companies you know, companies you never heard of, professional associations, virtual opportunities which would allow you to work from your home location...the list goes on.

By way of a brief background, the internet utilizes "search engines" to find information. Search engines use key words to mine information from the vast amount on the internet and get you what you ask for. There are numerous search engines available; the most well known is Google. But check out Yahoo, Bing and Ask, to name a few. To access a search engine, simply type the name in the address bar on your screen. Hit "Enter" and you're off. (You can also load a search engine directly into the tool bar for your browser to avoid having to go to a search engine's home page. This keeps a search box open for you at all times.)

So how do you begin to amass information about companies, associations, etc., to build your information portfolio? Start with companies you know. In this instance, the company's name is your key word. If you don't know the company's website address, go to your search engine of choice. When the search engine page opens, simply type the name of the company in which you are interested in the open space bar and click search. You'll be provided with a list of options usually beginning with the company's Web site, on which you can click and be directed to. From there, you can search for job opportunities as well as the names of department heads and hiring officials. (If you're having trouble finding names, try the "About Us" and "Contact Us" pages available as options on most company sites.)



But don't pass up the other options listed too quickly; there's information to be had there, too. For example, if you type IBM into the Google search engine space bar, the first listing to come up is IBM's corporate website. However, the second listing is a site for IBM Recruitment — jackpot! Further down the Google results page you'll find sites about IBM's current research and technology projects and news articles on the corporation, any one of which could lead you to the first touch point toward a new job.

Now, how about companies you don't know? Head back to the Google search page. This is where you get to play around with the all important "key words." If you're looking for a position as a mechanical engineer, type "mechanical engineering firms in Philadelphia, Pa." The first few listings are usually job boards such as Career Builder and Monster. Check out job board sites frequently. Even if a company isn't posting an open position in your exact field of expertise, you can often tell if a company utilizes your skill set by the types of positions they do have posted. Once you have a company's name, go to their website, find appropriate contact information and initiate a phone call, email or some other first point of contact.

On the job board sites, you can search for positions by typing anything relative to your areas of interest into the key words space. If your skill set is flexible and you're willing to look at other options, use more general key words; you can even search for positions in terms of geography by typing in the names of specific locations in which you might like to work. Remember, the idea is to amass information. Keep a list of any company names and open positions which may have even a remote connection to your job requirements.

If you return to the search engine page on which you typed the "mechanical engineering firms in Philadelphia, Pa." key words, you'll find other listings of companies posting jobs. Again, even if your skill set is not listed, keep track of the info and make an initial contact. Eventually, a job that fits your qualifications will open up.

Use the search engines and key words to find professional associations on the internet as well. If you type "mechanical engineer associations in Philadelphia, Pa" into Google, the first listing is the Engineer's Club of Philadelphia — a valuable resource which provides an entire roster of associations and organizations along with contact names.

As always, there is a down side. Since a search engine simply looks for listings including the key words you've entered, you'll get lots of information that doesn't apply. For example, the search for mechanical engineering associations yielded 141,000 results; don't even think about trying to read through them all. Bear in mind that the farther down a listing appears, the fewer times your key words appear on the site. In other words, listings lose relevance as they move away from the top of the list. Checking out the first few pages of results should provide more than enough information to give you a good start in your search. After that, it's time to play around with new key words and look for new information.

The internet offers volumes of information which you can utilize to jump start your job search. Working with appropriate key words and exploring company Web sites, job boards and professional association listings will lead you towards amassing a portfolio of information that can help you get back in the employment game.

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