

# Conducting Your Job Search

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## Job Search

Whether you are looking for your first full-time position, changing jobs, or seeking summer employment, having a solid game plan will make your job search more manageable. By understanding the components of a job search, and the jobs available in your field, you may effectively outline a process which will help you reach your goal. If you devote time and energy to finding a position the results will be great for both you and the employer. Job searches are influenced by a number of factors, so be patient and develop a timeline that satisfies your needs. Success will result in a position that provides new challenges and furthers your career plans.

Here is an overview of the strategies that commonly lead to successful employment. Depending on the labor market,

geographic specifications and your personal qualifications you may draw from and employ any of these key strategies.

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As you progress, you may decide to add new strategies to increase your awareness of the employment opportunities. By exploring as many options as possible you will feel confident knowing the offer you accept is right for you.

## DEVELOP A PLAN...CHART YOUR PROGRESS

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Each job search is influenced by many situational circumstances. Studies show, however, that university undergraduates typically secure employment three to six months after graduation. Alumni who have gained work experience and who are looking for positions with increased responsibilities within their fields have the advantage of being part of an established network. Others hoping to break into a new field may spend time developing a new network which may extend the length of the process. Job searches are affected by employment trends as well as organizational policies and processes. Consequently, there are several variables to take into account before launching into a search. With a realistic understanding of what is involved in the process, it will be easier to progress with enthusiasm.

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Setting interim goals throughout your job search will keep you motivated. If your only goal is to “find a job,” it may be hard to determine your effectiveness at a given point in time, or if you should consider changing directions. Small goals are often easier to accomplish and can help you progress to the next stage. Once your goals are set, develop a

timeline for achieving them. It may take more time to find a position if you do not have reference points to check along the way. Your timeline will be based upon your personal plans and when you wish to start working. If you want to have a new job in two months, your goals will be much different than a friend who hopes to have a new position in a year. Consider setting these goals: identify your areas of interest, construct your job search tools, target organizations and contact employers in your field. By developing a plan you are more likely to actively approach your job search and secure a position in a timeframe that works for you.

There are many ways to contact employers and meet professionals when looking for a job. With initiative and persistence you will be interacting with a number of employers simultaneously. To ensure that your professionalism shines through in every aspect of your search, you may

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want to devise your own strategy for keeping track of your job search information. Some people have found a job log very effective. By creating separate pages for each employer, job searchers can monitor their progress with each organization. For instance, if they needed to send additional information, arrange an interview, or call someone who has been out of town they have it written in their logs. Some job

searchers have developed separate calendars which chart their progress and highlight important dates, while others create systems (e.g. check lists or card files) which only they understand. Whatever your personal style, being organized will help you implement your different steps, keep you on track, and assist you in celebrating the victories along the way.

## DEVELOPING A FOCUS

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When using a 35mm camera you would adjust the lens before taking a picture. If the image still appeared a bit hazy, you would focus the lens even more. The same principle is true when looking for a job. Before beginning a job search you will want to have a clear focus. Job seekers often believe that the first step in the job search process is developing a resume; however, it is impossible to develop an effective marketing tool when your direction is still hazy.

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Before contacting employers, you will want to focus on the types of positions you are seeking, the sectors in which they exist, job responsibilities, and skills required. Just as you would check your camera to ensure it was in working order before identifying a photo opportunity, you will also want to “check” what you have to offer employers. By reflecting on your past, your skills, interests and abilities you can construct a list and investigate how your strengths may be best applied in a work situation. Are you looking for a professional position to launch your career? an interim position because you plan to go to graduate school in a year? or are you an experienced professional seeking a career change? You can begin a search when you have answered some of these questions and identified your focal point. For example you may be launching your career, as was the case with a recent college senior. After evaluating her skills, she discovered that she had strong analytical and decision making abilities. She came to realize that similar skills could be applied in very different positions. She investigated research positions in a not-for-profit organization and in investment banking. After exploring each field she decided that research positions in government merited further consideration.

You may find that you change and narrow your focus as you uncover new jobs and specific responsibilities which relate to your background and past experience. Focusing your job search allows you to concentrate on one or two related areas and tap into the networks that exist in those

fields. Since 80% of available positions are never advertised, there are a number of positions to be discovered through other, more creative, means. By having a focus you can meet and get to know the professionals in your field who may have unadvertised jobs available.

If you are not yet convinced about the value of focusing, consider the employer’s perspective. Employers are seeking candidates who know about themselves, the industry, the organizations and the positions, similar to a campus organization that accepts members based on similar interest and commitments. Employers are looking for individuals who are motivated and excited about contributing to a field. If an employer has to choose between a candidate who is “just looking for a job,” and one who “knows that an editing position is exactly what he wants based on his skills and past experience,” which candidate do you think the employer is more likely to choose? Employers believe that it is easier to train and work with employees who understand the jobs and the organizations, and who have the skills needed for the available positions. By focusing your job search and identifying career areas in which you can be most effective you are preparing yourself to be a competitive candidate in the job market.

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There are a number of ways to investigate different fields. One convenient way is to attend employer presentations on campus. Many employers from different fields arrange presentations to showcase career paths within their organization, and to share philosophies and insights about their industries. Sessions are open to anyone interested in attending. You may find them helpful in identifying your interest, providing specific information on a number of organizations, to ask questions, and meet professionals in organizations or fields which interest you. These sessions help bring organizations “alive” and complement the numerous written resources at Career Planning and Placement (CP&P) which will be helpful in your investigation.

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## INTERVIEWING THE PROFESSIONALS

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Another way to narrow your focus is to conduct interviews with professionals employed in your areas of interest. In informational interviews the job searcher acts as interviewer and the professional is the interviewee. Consequently, the content of the interview is based on questions you have. Note that informational interviews are conducted with the expectation that they will supply information that may be helpful in focusing your search, not for job leads or interviews.

By talking to people who currently work in your field of choice you can develop a better perspective of job specifics, the potential career paths and the types of skills necessary to succeed. A professional may provide general insight into the industry, job market information, potential geographic

areas best to target, or offer specific suggestions for your resume.

CP&P offers students and alumni who are exploring careers the opportunity to conduct informational interviews through the Alumni Career Network (ACN). The ACN is comprised of University of Michigan alumni and friends who have volunteered to talk about career areas. By taking advantage of this resource you may become more familiar with the mechanics of an informational interview and can then branch out and contact professionals in other organizations, or in your preferred geographic areas. Family, friends and neighbors are also excellent resources for informational interviews; even if they are not employed in your area of interest, they may be able to connect you with others who are.

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## JOB SEARCH STRATEGIES

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A University survey sent to recent graduates indicated that most students who found employment within six months after graduation incorporated numerous strategies into their search instead of relying on only a few. You may find some of these techniques may be more familiar than others. Begin

with the ones which are most comfortable, then try some others. Each strategy has its strengths and shortcomings; collectively, they represent the most effective and efficient means of conducting a search. The pros and cons of these strategies are outlined below.

### LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGNS

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One way to introduce yourself to potential employers is via mail. By sending your application materials to organizations you may learn of existing openings or upcoming positions. Keep in mind, however, that some employers receive many letters of application each day. To overcome the shortcomings of this strategy you will want to spend

time developing application materials that are professional, communicate interest in your field and stand out among the rest. With letter writing campaigns you can contact personnel representatives as well as managers of functional departments of interest to you.

- best when you have researched the organizations
- most effective when sent to a specific contact person in the organization with “hiring power”
- easy to obtain lists of organizations through numerous directories
- best when cover letters address employers’ needs
- can elaborate on pertinent information in your resume
- may discover positions not yet posted
- enables you to contact employers long distance
- organizations may keep information on file for as long as six months
- generic letters usually do not receive much attention
- organizations may be inundated with numerous letters of application
- need to convey how you can make a contribution in your letters
- personnel offices deal primarily with currently existing vacancies
- can be a “hit or miss” strategy
- need to take the initiative to contact the employers after letters are sent

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## NETWORKING

If 80% of the jobs are never posted how do you tap into that market? Since many positions are found through “word of mouth” you will want to connect with professionals in your field and develop a personal network. Parents, relatives, neighbors, friends, faculty, volunteer affiliations, former and current employers, social group members and

- may discover positions not posted
- after meeting with professionals you may be recommended for upcoming positions
- often referred to speak with other professionals in your field
- gain information that will be helpful in future interviews

alumni are great resources for uncovering job leads and information. Arrange brief meetings with each professional; solicit job search advice and information on your field. The more contacts you make, the more your network will take shape.

- expensive use of professionals’ time
- may be difficult to contact some professionals and arrange meetings
- requires initiative, assertiveness and finesse on the part of the job searcher

## PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

For every field there is at least one professional organization with the primary purpose of providing news, addressing current issues, and sighting important developments in

- positions regularly posted in newsletters
- many have job lines in geographic areas
- associations often have membership lists which you can use to generate your list of potential contacts
- may host local chapter meetings in your area or preferred geographic area
- provides networking vehicle to meet professionals
- may discover new job leads

the field. *The National Trade and Professional Associations (NTPA)* directory is a comprehensive resource which you may use to investigate organizations in your area of interest.

- must investigate professional organizations related to your interests
- may be a fee for affiliating with the organization
- need to take the initiative when approaching professionals at meetings

## ON-CAMPUS RECRUITMENT PROGRAMS

On-campus recruitment programs are sponsored by the University and provide employers with an opportunity to come on campus to discuss employment opportunities for the upcoming year. Organizations that use this service are usually hoping to fill entry level positions. Since on-campus recruiting is a substantial investment of their time and money, these organizations tend to be larger organizations

- interviews take place on campus
- primarily designed for graduating seniors
- some organizations express interest in students completing graduate programs
- opportunity to see organizations from across the country without incurring travel expenses
- indicates employers are interested in U of M students
- best when complemented by other strategies

which anticipate a significant number of openings in the near future. Placement services are decentralized at the University of Michigan. In addition to CP&P, on-campus recruitment may also take place through your school or college; programs are offered through Business, Chemistry, Engineering, Geology, Law, Library Science, Natural Resources or Pharmacy placement offices.

- interview opportunities for alumni are designated by the employers
- interview opportunities are limited by the length of an interview day: typically 13 interviewees per schedule
- not all organizations or career fields choose to use this program for hiring

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## **JOB BULLETINS**

Job bulletins list descriptions of positions which employers hope to fill immediately. They are published by universities, governmental agencies and organizations and associations in a variety of fields (e.g. art, international, higher

- represent actual vacancies
- specialized publications may target jobs in your area of interest
- applicant pools may be smaller due to selective distribution
- best when used closer to the time you are available for employment
- a job bulletin is published by CP&P

education). A brief job description, contact information and application deadlines are usually provided in the listings. You are then encouraged to contact the employer directly.

- openings may not coincide with your availability date
- may be a charge for the publication

## **WANT ADS**

This strategy is one which traditionally comes to mind when thinking about job searching. Want ads are found in newspapers and can be used to assess the job market in your field. Although a frequently used strategy, at most only 20%

- useful for seeking positions in a specific geographic location
- effective when conducting long distance job searches
- employers often use want ads in fields where special skills/qualifications are necessary
- can pinpoint growing organizations
- best when a specific area of interest is identified

of all available positions are posted in want ads and other printed publications. Even though the percentage is small, do not ignore want ads as a means for uncovering worthwhile opportunities.

- applicant pools tend to be larger
- resume must be targeted to the field
- organizations' names and contact information are often omitted
- organizations often do not notify all applicants of their status
- internal candidates may already have applied for the posted position

## **JOB FAIRS AND CONFERENCES**

Job Fairs and conferences are arranged by universities and colleges, professional organizations or independent groups at different points throughout the year. These events allow candidates and employers to engage in a mutual

- able to interact with several employers in a concentrated time
- may attend organized conferences in specific fields or geographic areas
- may uncover opportunities you did not know existed
- opportunity to present your candidacy in person
- CP&P hosts: Summer Job Fair, Minority Career Conference and Education Career Conference

screening process. By speaking with several employers in your area(s) of interest, you will get a better sense of the range of positions available, and the qualifications necessary to assume those roles.

- may need to wait in line to speak with employers
- many participants attend
- may not find openings in your specific area

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## **COLD CALLS**

The process of cold calling suggests that you try to reach employers without prior notification. Lists of organizations can be obtained through directories, telephone books or recently published articles. Your contact may be made via

- best when you have the name of a contact person within the organization
- most efficient if you create an agenda for your conversation
- may allow you to evaluate the organization's environment
- effective for those moving to a new location
- easily incorporated with other strategies if you have planned a trip to an area
- may improve your sense of the market

telephone or visiting the organization and leaving a resume for the employer to review. Since you will usually meet clerical staff first, politely introduce yourself and explain the reason you are contacting the organization.

- contact person may be unavailable
- may be screened by support staff
- organization may not have openings in your area
- requires strong communication and assertiveness skills
- may incur expenses if arranging a trip specifically for this purpose

## **VOLUNTEERING**

Through volunteer work you can gain first-hand knowledge of your field and establish yourself in a professional network. Volunteering is also an excellent way to round out

- opportunity to meet professionals in your field
- can become involved in relevant projects
- application processes are less stringent than full-time job processes
- if successful, could potentially lead to a full-time offer
- enables you to show future employers demonstrated success in a related field

your skills, if your research indicates that you need to gain more related experiences.

- experiences are often unpaid
- represents additional time commitment
- may assume some responsibilities unrelated to your interests

## **EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES/PROFESSIONAL SEARCH FIRMS**

Involving a third party into your job search is another alternative which may be considered but with due caution. Employment agencies serve as a clearinghouse, linking candidates with organizations which have openings. Since

most agencies work on a commission basis, it is best to identify agencies operating on an "employer paid" fee basis. This implies that the employer will pay the agency a finder's fee, and that there is no cost to the candidate.

- often specialize in specific fields
- helpful when relocating to a new area
- some employers may use agencies exclusively to fill positions

- may incur a large cost if agency is "applicant paid" fee: be particularly cautious of these agencies
- agency may be more concerned with the quantity of jobs filled rather than the quality of the match
- agency may not handle many openings in your area of interest
- most effective for those with prior full-time work experience

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## **FOLLOW-UP: A STRATEGY FOR ALL STRATEGIES**

Following-up with all the professionals with whom you interact is a very important step in the job search process. The follow-up strategy most appropriate will depend on how far you have progressed in your job search. For example, you may call an employer after your application materials have been sent to an organization, or you may be at a point where you are sending thank-you letters after job interviews. The follow-up may be with your initial contact,

another person in the same organization, or another employer in the field. Since you will be contacting several employers it is quite possible that you will use several follow-up strategies concurrently. As a job searcher it is important that you take the initiative to make the appropriate contact in a timely manner to demonstrate your appreciation for the time they have invested in you.

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## **RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS: YOUR JOB SEARCH TOOLS**

Once you have an understanding of your skills and abilities and have identified the employment areas best suited for you, you can develop the tools which will highlight your experiences for employers. It is important to remember your job search tools, such as the resume and cover letter, are often the employer's first introduction to you and your experience. Consequently, it is important that you take the time to develop tools that accurately reflect

your abilities and are targeted toward your areas of interest. Job search tools which have a professional appearance indicate to employers that you are serious about finding a job which will satisfy your career goals.

Career Planning and Placement has many resources, including specific brochures, designed to help you prepare your job search tools.

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## **PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER**

For every person and job the search will be different. As a job searcher you should try to structure a search which matches your style as well as the field in which you are applying. Have a timeline that allows you to evaluate and reevaluate your goals and progress. If you are serious about finding a job, you will need to make a commitment to yourself and devote the necessary time to developing and following up with employers. Your positive attitude and initiative will add to the success of your search. Be confident in your abilities and accomplishments and communicate that you are the best candidate through your resumes, cover letters and interviews.

The strategies described above are not intended to be a comprehensive list. Although these strategies are often incorporated into job searches, there are other alternatives which you may explore as you develop your personal plan. The Career Planning and Placement Office has a number of resources which elaborate on the approaches discussed in this brochure, as well as others you may wish to consider. Accepting a job offer that matches your goals and interests is exciting. To receive that job offer, it is important to take advantage of as many strategies as possible. As a job searcher, explore all the possibilities and uncover your own winning combination for success in your search and your career.