

# Corporate Recruiting Reports

## Candidate Attitudes and Behaviors

*Staffing.org*



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# The Employer/Candidate Disconnect

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Our two research reports, *Candidate Attitudes and Behaviors* and *Marketing and Sourcing*, focus on the supply side of the corporate supply/demand equation.

Why do we feel this is important when the U.S. economy appears to be returning to an even keel and unemployment has begun to fall? Because the issue we are referring to has little to do with unemployment.

*It's about something – a disconnect – far more pervasive and consequential: the way employers today go about finding the talent they need versus the way job seekers go about finding the companies they might like to work for.*

This disconnect affects all job candidates at all levels in all types of job markets, whether they are anxiously looking for work on a daily basis or happily employed and not looking at all. Neither side is pleased with the status quo. Candidates decry the mechanistic, impersonal, unresponsive nature of the system and employers complain about its efficiency and effectiveness.

We have been researching candidate behavior since 2007. At first we accepted the common categorization of workers as either active or passive, with each group having distinctive attitudes and behaviors that required traditional, well-understood job marketing approaches. But the more data we saw, the less those categories made sense. They seemed to be artifacts from another time when most employment was long-term and most people changed jobs infrequently. But they made less sense at in a fragmented, turbulent job market where employers increasingly sought highly flexible, worldwide workforces and job seekers increasingly held a dozen or more jobs between school and retirement.

Our corporate clients are well aware of the internal adjustments they have had to make over the past decade to remain competitive in the job market. In the years ahead, those changes will not stop; more probably they will accelerate. The drivers of marketplace change – globalization, demographics and technology – will continue to roil the job marketplace.

These drivers have changed the hiring equation for both employers and candidates, but more so for candidates. The old job marketplace was information-scarce and hard to navigate. Candidates played on a field tilted sharply in the employer's favor. Today that field is at least level, with abundant information about job opportunities and employers only a mouse-click away. This information has greatly empowered job seekers, who can now shop for career opportunities just as easily as they shop for homes, cars or vacations.

In this new environment employers need updated intelligence about what candidates are thinking and doing.

# Job Seeker Adaptations

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It's easy to overstate the significance of attitude studies in several ways: first, by suggesting that a spot measurement signifies a trend; and second by stating that the trend is significant. Professional pollsters know that the public mood is notoriously fickle and can reverse itself very quickly. Academics are better at collecting data over time and examining it rigorously for meaning and significance, but their work takes time and often appears long after it might have had a practical business application.

What we attempt to do here is thread the needle. Our clients have talent acquisition and management needs today. They can't wait for the results of a ten-year longitudinal study. We have been studying candidates for four years and see consistency in both our formal and anecdotal data as well as in the data reported by others. For our purposes that is sufficient.

Obviously the following conclusions do not apply equally to all candidates. Many people work for unselfish reasons, would never relocate or job-hop for career reasons, and are perfectly happy at the lower or middle rungs of the corporate ladder. But the group data does provide useful guidance that can inform staffing decisions today and improve staffing results tomorrow.

The two tall poles around which the following changes in candidate attitude revolve are: a) information access and; b) the employer-employee social contract.

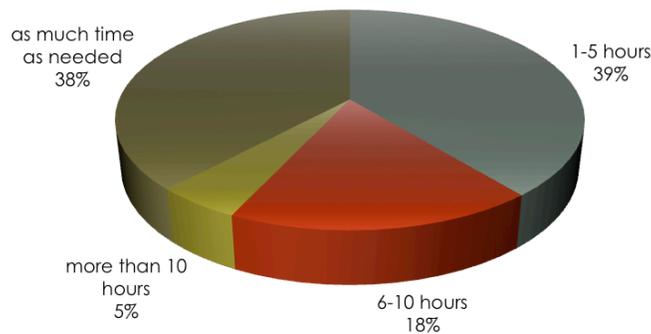
## **Tell Me More**

Yesterday's job market was built around information scarcity. Standards for corporate self-disclosure were low, so employers could release relatively little information and not be viewed as secretive. Candidates who happened to be diligent researchers could find ex-employees to talk to or unearth company intelligence in a business library, but such searches were time-consuming and inconvenient, and good local library resources were unavailable in many places.

Comp, benefits and lifestyle information were considered privileged company information, to be released only to job finalists, and even then only as individually relevant. To a considerable extent, job hunting was a caveat emptor proposition.

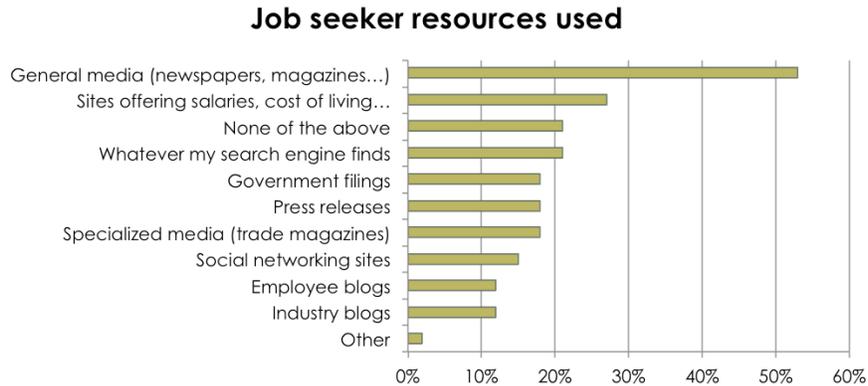
The Internet has radically changed all this. Job research is now vastly more convenient and efficient (although still not perfect), and social networks provide extraordinary access not only to ex-employees of a target employer, but also to current ones. This new information-rich environment has affected candidate attitudes in several ways.

### Average time spent researching a job



- First, it has changed expectations. A question is now *supposed* to be answered; information is now *supposed* to be there. Failure to find what one seeks is an irritant.
- Second, if information is not available someone or something takes the blame. If the search engine results are deficient it's the browser's fault. If the social network fails to find a contact then the network is lousy. And if an employer fails to provide useful, attractive candidate information on his jobsite, he now pays a direct brand penalty.

Some employers have capitalized on this new expectation by creating lavish amounts of candidate-friendly information that they offer to share in all sorts of attractive, graphically enhanced ways. Because these sites are exceptions they stand out when compared to other employers who still adhere to the old information rules. Candidates notice the difference and tell us that their job-search behavior is affected.



While information transparency has benefited both employers and candidates, we believe candidates have benefited more. In information-poor job markets employers have a decided advantage. Often the only way a candidate can really evaluate an employer is to be hired first and do their due diligence after the fact.

Today's employees need not do that. They can now easily access deep, broad archives of information that used to be only available in major business libraries, as well as powerful new, informal, social resources.

### **Tell Me the Truth**

Information quantity is not necessarily synonymous with information quality. More is not necessarily better. From the candidates' perspective, the information they seek has two purposes: to accurately distinguish between opportunities; and to synchronize pre-hire expectations with post-hire experiences. The difference now is that experiencing lots of information has allowed them to develop more sophisticated antenna about what is honest, straightforward and aligned with their interests, and what is not.

Television advertising provides a useful analogy. We look back at network commercials from an earlier era, or at inexpensive local cable television ads, and chuckle at their lack of sophistication and production values. Even if we know nothing about media, years of exposure have allowed us to develop an appreciation for camera work, editing, story lines and copywriting.

Internet recruiting is now more than 20 years old. Candidates have had ample time to develop a similar appreciation for employer pitches. The calculated, modulated, bland assertions of corporate PR ("Every company says their people are important

but our company really believes it!") no longer carry much weight. Candidates want direct, intimate, unfiltered commentary, preferably direct from the shop floor or the executive suite. Production values are less important than credibility and authenticity.

### Best information sources



### It's My Life, Not Yours

This refers to the social contract that binds all employers and employees, whether they are hourly, part-timers, contract workers, lifetime union employees, or executives. Regardless of what is written in the actual employment agreement, it's a devilishly complicated arrangement involving all sorts of implied promises and expectations.

Over the years, this social contract between the two parties has become less sure. Employers, buffeted by globalization, volatile business cycles and competition, have sought workforce flexibility. Candidates have had to accept uncertainty as a career constant. The net effect has been the near disappearance of the old, lifetime job-plus-pension arrangement and the rise of its replacement, the self-governed, multi-job career path.

A candidate who expects to remain with an employer for a limited amount of time has a different perspective on his employment than a lifer. He knows his social contract is much more self-determined, even if he lives paycheck to paycheck. Because he knows his employer's loyalty to him is conditional, he qualifies his own loyalty to the employer.