Your Cyber Career: Using The Internet to Find a Job

Tips on Resumes, Searches— And Security

By Rebecca Quick
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MARK LUHRING never felt more wanted in his life than when he went looking for a job on the Internet.

The 35-year-old computer consultant posted his resume on the Web merely so he could explore his job options. But days after it became public, recruiters were flooding his home answering machine in Milwaukee with dozens of offers. He finally had to change his message ("If this is a recruiter, I already have a job.") and remove his resume from a handful of Web sites. Even so, he continues to get the occasional call from a headhunter.

"Once it's out there, it can just get propagated all over the place," he says.

Mr. Luhring's embarrassment of riches illustrates the central advantages—and pitfalls—of searching for a job on the Internet. With a few keystrokes, you can beam your talents and background to hundreds of potential employers—and save yourself lots of envelope stuffing. Job postings from around the globe are available at your fingertips, and search engines will let you quickly scan through thousands of postings to find those that best match your skills.

But once you transmit your resume into the digital realm, you quickly lose control over which and how many people see that information. Your resume could fall into the hands of annoying companies you don't want to work for—or worse, the annoying company you *already* work for. And if you're a highly skilled employee in one of the more sought-after professions, such as computer programming or analysis, you could attract a torrent of responses that may bury your dream job offer.

Still, job hunting has become a particularly hot growth area on the ever-burgeoning Internet. The number of job postings on the Monster Board, one of the leading job sites, has jumped from about 16,000 to 50,000 in just one year and covers positions ranging from a taxidermy clerk to a chief operating officer. Traditional tools for job seekers pale by comparison: The national edition of the New York Times, for example, held roughly one-fifth as many postings on a recent Sunday.

Indeed, those job seekers who have struck gold in cyberspace swear by the method. Renee Wright, a 24-year-old software specialist from Toronto, wanted a change of scenery. Within the first two weeks of posting her resume on-line she had 10 offers. "I saw a whole job market I wouldn't have seen otherwise," says Ms. Wright.

She accepted a contract job with Burger King, which just this month led to a full-time position—and a $17,000 pay raise. Ms. Wright says that if she switches jobs again, the Internet would be the first place she would go.

If you decide to look for a job in cyberspace, here are some tips to make the most of your time:

HOW TO PRESENT YOURSELF

Just like in the real world, you need a

The Internet's so-called Usenet bulletin boards, where people can post comments, hold plenty of job listings. One Web site, the Bullseye Job Shop (http://interoz.com/usr/gcbristow), catalogs some of these bulletin boards. The site's creator says the effort resulted from his own job search.

Comments in the site's guest book range from the grateful ("Thanks for the help, this Internet thing is almost too much!") to the desperate ("I need a job.").

Search engines, such as Alta Vista (http://www.altavista.digital.com) and Yahoo!, dredge up postings that aren't as well-read as those on the job boards—just enter specific search words such as "Texas employment" or "electrical engineer and hiring."

One basic but commonly overlooked tip: If you have a particular company you are interested in working for, go straight to

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Some Starting Points...

■ THE MONSTER BOARD

http://www.monster.com

PROFILE Helps job seekers build and store a resume on-line, and has over 50,000 job listings. Its Resume City section finds job listings that match your profile, then e-mails them to you once a week.

COST free

PLUS Allows you to post a "private" resume, with personal details left out. You're informed of interested recruiters, and have the option of contacting them.

PITFALL Can generate more interest than a casual job seeker wants.

■ CAREERMOSAIC

http://www.careermosaic.com

PROFILE Offers thousands of job postings, as well as information about companies.

COST free

PLUS Breaks postings down by city and even ZIP Code, so you can find a job in a particular part of town, say, on the north side of Chicago.

PITFALL Can generate more interest than a casual job seeker wants.

■ COLLEGE GRAD JOB HUNTER

http://www.collegegrad.com

PROFILE Offers job postings and plenty of helpful hints for newbies to the job market, such as how to write a resume, interview and negotiate.

COST free

PLUS Offers a wide range of information on job hunting.

PITFALL Definitely for those without much work experience. Some of the tips are rather basic: "Yes, you really need a resume."

■ HRS FEDERAL JOB SEARCH

http://www.hrsjobs.com

PROFILE Database of federal jobs available across the U.S. Fill out a profile with desired job type, salary and location, and the site will e-mail applicable postings to you.

COST free

PLUS Offers a wide variety of job positions, from archaeologist to weapons-delivery assessor to head dam operator.

PITFALL E-mails each job posting that fits your profile separately, which can clog up your e-mail account. A test profile resulted in 184 e-mails on the first day.

■ NATIONAL AD SEARCH

http://www.nationaladsearch.com

PROFILE This Web version of the national print publication offers 10,000 to 12,000 help-wanted display ads from newspapers in 60 metropolitan areas.

COST 10 cents for each ad viewed.

PLUS Brings local classifieds to job seekers from out of town.

PITFALL There is some lag time—ads from Sunday papers aren't available online until Tuesday or Wednesday.

Just like in the real world, you need a resume. But putting one together is a little different in cyberspace.

For one thing, how much information should you give out? Full disclosure is fine for a resume you e-mail directly to a company. But if you don't want your current employer to find out you're looking to leave, be careful how much personal information you give out on the Internet.

"Your employer is looking for the same skills you're posting—that increases the odds that you'll be found if they look for recruits on the Internet," warns Brian Krueger, a hiring manager for consulting firm Keane Inc. in Milwaukee. Mr. Krueger recommends that a job seeker make his or her company, job title and start dates generic, so he or she is less easily identified. If you work for, say, Delta Air Lines, your resume could instead inform readers only that you work for a major commercial airline.

Another tip: Use a nondescriptive e-mail address. Using your work e-mail address—joe.smith@ford.com—may offer a little too much information, as well as possibly violate company policy. Instead, sign up for a free e-mail account at a service such as Hotmail (http://www.hotmail.com) or Yahoo! (http://www.yahoo.com), experts suggest.

As for what your resume should look like, the plainer the better is the rule of thumb. Don't spend time prettying up your resume with different fonts and point sizes, centered words or bullets. Professionals in the industry recommend that you save it as a plain text document. "Otherwise, when you e-mail it to a company, it can end up looking pretty bad—you never know what software package will be used on the other end," advises Lynn Taylor, a vice president at recruiting company Robert Half International Inc. in Menlo Park, Calif.

WHERE TO POST

Once you have a document ready to go, you can take it a step further and code a version of the document into hypertext markup language, or HTML, the native language of the Web. That will allow you to generate your resume as a crisp, clear Web page, a format that is easy on the eyes for recruiters surfing the Internet. Sites like Resumix (http://www.resumix.com) will automatically code your resume in HTML free.

However, that's not a prerequisite for the job boards. These sites, where listings are compiled for your perusal, are one of the most useful aspects of the Internet. Over 100 of these sites exist—from the vast boards such as Monster Board or Career-Mosaic, to very specialized boards such as the Librarian's Job Search Source (http://www.zoots.com/libjob/libjob.htm). You also can e-mail resumes directly to companies or other employers you may be interested in working for; most corporate Web sites offer such a service.

WHERE TO SEARCH

After you've posted your resume, you'll probably want to do more than sit back and wait. The best places to actively search are the job boards, but there's a wealth of other material out there, too.

tip: If you have a particular company you are interested in working for, go straight to that company's Web site. You find key information about the company and its practices, and many firms also post jobs on their sites. Contacting the company directly can give you a competitive edge by allowing you to stand out. This way, you aren't lumped in with 20 or 100 other people coming in from the job boards.

Most professional recruiting companies, meanwhile, insist that the job search doesn't stop with the Internet. The Internet is a tool, they say, just like classified ads or professional groups. Recruiting firms are more effective, they say, because they get to know the job candidate and hiring company—that way, they can tell if the match is right.

But analysts say the Internet, because it is such an effective technique in the job search, has recruiting companies running scared. "The Internet is like Toto, pulling the curtain back on these recruiters," says Tom Rodenhauser, an independent analyst in recruiting and consulting issues. He says the Internet often turns up as thorough a job search as a recruiter can.

WHAT JOBS TO LOOK FOR

Conventional wisdom says the Internet is chiefly the place for techies to find a job, and as recently as a year ago computer openings made up the overwhelming majority of postings. But in recent months, a sizable number of nontechnical job listings have sprung up—from construction workers to archaeologists.

Yet employers say that many of these nontechnical postings go unanswered. CompUSA Inc. has posted hundreds of positions on the Internet over the past year. At one point, the computer retailer searched for 150 software trainers and found about 50 of them through the Web. But CompUSA's success with nontechnical postings, such as merchandising and accounting positions, has been more limited. "The Internet is a growing avenue and one everyone will use eventually—it's just not there yet," says Mel McCall, the Dallas-based company's senior vice president of human resources.

That creates a golden opportunity: The Internet is an unexploited mine for nontechnical postings. The jobs are there, but the competition isn't yet.

HOW TO CLEAN UP

You've found your dream job, relocated to sunny Silicon Valley and moved into a beautiful house. But you've forgotten something: Don't leave your resume lingering in cyberspace.

Julia Lynn Botsko found a new job and moved away over a year ago, her former roommate testily informs a caller. But her job search lives on in cyberspace, to the chagrin of those still receiving recruiter calls.

An old resume on the Internet can be more than just an annoyance, some experts say. It can pose a very real risk: If your new employer comes across it, he or she may assume you're on the prowl again. Once your job search is completed, remove your resume from the sites where you posted it. And search for your name using search engines, just in case your resume has migrated to other locations.