

Selling to the Hidden Job Market

by Pat O'Donnell, Recruiter at McKinley Group, Inc. and Career Counselor at Retrofit Counseling, Inc.

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Have your warm leads to former clients dried up? Not seeing many jobs posted? Frustrated that you know others are being hired for jobs you didn't know about? While being a technically competent professional is a minimum requirement of getting and holding a job, in the present economy, your ability to sell yourself is critical to success.

First, your sales process needs to recognize that a full 70-80% of jobs are awarded when the jobs are "hidden" from the general public. It does not matter whether you are looking for work as an independent contractor for a permanent position. If you don't know how to sell yourself in the hidden market, you will be competing against the larger pool of candidates available when the job is later posted in a public venue.

Second, you need to focus your sales efforts on those hiring managers for whom you are most likely to be the preferred candidate with a pitch that makes it clear why. You need to pre-empt the consideration of other candidates. You can learn what positioning will be effective through research or networking.

Third, you need to use language in your resume and verbal interview presentation that demonstrates through case histories and success metrics how you are stronger than other professionals with similar experience. You need a resume/speech that shows that you were not just "on the team" for those projects but how your thought leadership and uncommon skills made those projects more successful.

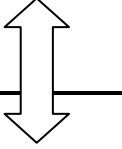
What is the hidden job market?

A job is said to be "hidden" when it is not public knowledge (posted in a newspaper ad or on a website like www.monster.com.) However, there are several intermediate stages in the life cycle of a job announcement when the job is known by some but not all. The earlier you reach the hiring manager in the evolution of the job order, the fewer people know about the job, and the more success you will have in pitching your services. If you are a good marketer, you can realize an even more aggressive goal and actually create a job for yourself by convincing the client he/she would be shortsighted not to hire you before you go to a competitor company even though the client was not actively seeking someone with your services.

Here is the time sequence for a single job posting:

Stages in Life Cycle of Job Posting

Where Job is Posted	% Jobs Awarded	Visibility
1. Hiring Manager's private thought	30-35	Most hidden
2. Key employees		
3. Cafeteria wall	35-50	
4. Company intranet		
5. SIGS, listservs		
6. Newspaper		
7. Monster.com, etc.	20-30	
8. Recruiters		Most public



In stage 1, a hiring manager may have realized he/she will need to hire a resource but has not broadcast the search. Perhaps the hiring manager has several positions to fill and has not yet decided how to organize the staff or fund the needs. The first person to walk in the door who offers an appealing solution may win the budget. This is the stage that offers the greatest to the job seeker. If you can reach the hiring manager at this point in time, you have the fewest competitors and the client is most open to hiring someone he likes and/or is willing to take a risk on. Staying in touch with clients you have a relationship with is critical to staying "top of mind" with the hiring manager so he/she doesn't spend time trying to remember all the potential candidates he/she knows. A full 30-35% of positions are awarded before the hiring manager has shared the opportunity with the rest of the company!

In stage 2, the hiring manager goes to a few key employees and asks "Whom do you know?" In stage 3, the job announcement is on the cafeteria wall so current employees can apply or submit people they have worked with

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in the past. In stages 4 and 5, people who don't know anyone related to the company can see the job announcement, but information about the job may be minimal and several people may have applied. At this stage, you would still have an advantage over other equal applicants if you had a strong resume and networking relationship. Note that 35-50% of all jobs are awarded between stages 2 and 5.

Some clients will use a recruiter before they use newspaper or www.monster.com, but in a recession it is more likely a client will publish a search in the newspapers or job websites first. A newspaper or job website ad in a major city may generate 100-300 responses in just a few days. In total, newspaper ads, job website ads, and recruiters are the source of only 20-30% of jobs awarded. Most of you concentrate 80-90% of your job seeking efforts there, where you are statistically least likely to succeed.

So I should send my resume to 200-300 hiring managers "in case" they are hiring?

No! Your strategy should be to submit yourself to a few well-researched companies where you are most likely to be the preferred candidate because of your skill set, past successes, culture fit, and previously established relationships. Clients prefer candidates who offer the maximum ROI (return on investment) for their dollar and minimize their risk. Your objective is to demonstrate in your resume, networking, and in all contacts with the client that you offer an excellent ROI with little risk. Your competition is likely to be someone with an identical list of skills rather than a more junior professional. To improve your chances to win the job, you need to research what matters most to the client among the named skill sets (which may not be in the posted job search) and quantify relevant experiences using case histories, anecdotes, and testimonials. What strategies did you bring to the projects? To what degree can their success be attributed to your input? Why are you the best professional at your skill level whom client can hire?

How do I find out what matters to a hiring manager or corporation?

You can research what philosophies and projects are important to a company through several avenues:

- a) Read past job ads. Some job websites allow you to read postings up to a year old even if they are not still open. You should be collecting and storing them for your targeted companies. Make a point to read job ads for other titles as they may give clues to culture and the important projects and skills at a company. Use www.indeed.com to see current job postings in company intranets and across a myriad of job boards like www.careerbuilder.com and www.monster.com.
- b) From the hiring manager's point of view Internet and newspaper job postings are more likely to attract unqualified job seekers than qualified. Depending on their willingness to screen the hundreds of resumes that may be sent in response to a posting, more and more hiring managers are avoiding posting altogether and are reverting to using their networks to find mid-level and junior personnel. Similarly, you will need to depend on networking to find those clients and what they think.
- c) The most senior and more consultative jobs are less likely to be posted in a job site. Networking or using recruiters to find the "tried and true" performers with a well-respected and well-known image in the market is a more efficient use of a hiring manager's time than any public posting. So you need to use networking, cold calls, and recruiters to learn about those jobs.
- d) Scan the resumes of other people with your skill set (or all people) who have worked at the company. Resumes of your peers are visible through some job websites even if you are not a recruiter or corporate hiring manager. Find resumes through advanced web mining, especially in ISP-based virtual communities (e.g., <http://geocities.yahoo.com/> or <http://hometown.aol.com/>.) See www.isprank.com/ for a list of ISPs. Look for resumes on listservs. Start looking for listservs at www.groups.yahoo.com, <http://groups.google.com/grph?hl=en&tab=wg&q=>, or www.topica.com. Network with professionals who have worked with the company and ask what kinds of people are most likely to succeed. Collect the reference names found in step b) for this purpose and to market yourself to.
- e) Examine individual company sites and intranets for clues about culture and corporate direction. Start with www.google.com. Because company intranets don't always have the company name in the URL you will need to uncover the "hidden" company sites for your targeted companies that your competition probably has not seen. Find all URLs for Oracle Corporation, for instance, at www.altavista.com/web/adv by typing the web mining command `host:oracle` in the box labeled "Search with this Boolean expression."
- f) Try social networks: they are most useful to connect to mid-level management. The two most popular are www.linkedin.com and www.jigsaw.com. The real powerbrokers generally avoid them. Others to consider are www.facebook.com and www.myspace.com (regardless of your age),

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<https://www.plaxo.com/info/corp/pulse>, www.doostang.com, www.spoke.com, www.zoominfo.com, and maybe www.spock.com. Don't use pictures of you at a wild party as employers check sites to see what you are like in your personal life.

- g) Ask the company to mail you marketing materials and the annual report. Tell them you are a potential investor. Many companies post this type of information on their website.
- h) Review annual reports for public companies in the public library. They are available there by law. There are also many available at these Internet sites:
http://vcall.ar.wilink.com/asp/A502_search_ENG.asp?mkt_code=googadword or
<http://www.annualreports.com/>.

If it turns out after all this research you decide you are not a good fit for a corporation, don't send a vague resume in hopes that it will get you an interview where you can then talk the company into hiring you. It will be a much better use of your time to concentrate on the clients where your assets (versus others with the same title) are clear and preferable. You need to be at the top of a resume pile, not lost in the middle of it.

How do I identify new companies to target?

Identify companies to investigate further with these methods:

- a) Mind-map your skills/attitudes and people connections. You need to extrapolate from technical and non-technical skills because either might be more important to the client. Technical experience might include knowledge of a given industry, a deliverable that can be shown to have increased business or reduced waste, or 10 years of experience in a particular software tool. Softer, less technical skills might include outstanding mentoring skills, someone who can calm hysterical customers quickly over the phone, or the ability to present effectively to stock analysts. Non-technical attitudes might include a love for medical issues or a preference for entrepreneurial start-ups. OK, who are all the companies in town who write accounting software programs? Use this software tool more than any other tool? Who are all the companies who look for entrepreneurial spirits? Which companies spend a lot of time dealing with the highest-anxiety customer service calls? Whom do I know who works (or worked) in these companies and can tell me more about them or help me arrange an informational interview?
- b) If the Internet search engine you normally use is not finding content buried deep in the website, go back to www.altavista.com/web/adv/ or www.google.com/advanced_search?hl=en and search there. Make sure the keywords you are searching for go beyond the obvious: "Customer Service" may be called "Software Support" at a given company. Search on "financial" and "mutual funds" as well as the word "accounting." Look for specialized search engines at www.searchenginewatch.com. Go here to learn advanced web mining syntax that works in many search engines:
<http://www.altavista.com/help/search/syntax>.
- c) There are many directories available with brief descriptions of companies and contact information. Start your research with these:
 - www.sec.gov/edgar/quickedgar.htm
 - www.wetfeet.com/research/companies.asp
 - <http://today.reuters.com/investing/default.aspx/>
 - <http://www.hoovers.com/free/>
 - www.thomasregister.com/
- d) Identify new companies in a narrow industry category by using the NAICS (North American Industry Classification System) (evolved from the SIC or Standard Industrial Classification) sorting system. I can access my favorite, the Dunn & Bradstreet Million Dollar Database from my home computer and the Hennepin County Library website using the ID number on my library card. It is paid for by state funds, so ask your librarian how to access it from your library.
http://http://www.selectory.com.ezproxy.hclib.org/Selectory/SearchPage_s/LibrarySearch.aspx.
Reference USA is harder to use but is available from the same source.
<http://www.hclib.org/pub/search/LoginAction.cfm?id=21972015966109&db=RefUSA&DBFullName=ReferenceUSA&Image=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Ereferenceusa%2Ecom%2Fimages%2Flogo%5F03x%2Egif%20border%3D0%20width%3D299%20height%3D79&RemoteURL=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Ereferenceusa%2Ecom%2F&GoDirect=0>
- e) Network at industry-wide organizations like the Midwest Manufacturer's Association or Lifescience Alley. Consider giving a speech to the local association on a strategically complex subject. Ask if there is a topic they would like to hear research on. If you are shy and don't like presenting to strangers, you could

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- offer to write an article for their newsletter (few editors turn down free articles). Once it is published, get professional copies made and use it whenever you contact someone in that association.
- f) Find associations and member names through <http://aip.completeplanet.com> and www.altavista.com/web/adv. Try variations on the Boolean expression "host:association and anchor:members." As a second choice, uncover a brief description of an association and minimal contact information at:
 - <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/AU;jsessionid=19CF977E070F1B255450D8ADBC12F54A?locID=hennepin>
 - <http://www.asaecenter.org/Directories/AssociationSearch.cfm?navItemNumber=16581>
 - www.weddles.com/associations/
 - g) Search for industry listservs in www.groups.yahoo.com, <http://groups.google.com/grphp?hl=en&tab=wg&q=>, or www.topica.com. Write commentaries on issues important to the listserv to establish your reputation and visibility. Make sure you don't send a resume to a listserv that doesn't want resumes sent to it. You will be banned from that listserv for life. Read the etiquette rules of the listserv before you send anything. (Ask the moderator for the link where they are posted.)
 - h) Determine whether a targeted industry is growing or shrinking through networking, published articles (like the *Wall Street Journal*) and a big database like www.monster.com or www.careerbuilder.com. Search on words like "telecommunications" and "financial" once per quarter and log how many job openings are available across all companies for the entire quarter. If you had been doing this over the last three years, you could see that while the telecommunications industry has shrunk badly, hiring in the financial industry has fallen off less than 20%. This is also a useful technique to see if there is still demand in the marketplace for a given piece of software. Another way to examine industry patterns is through state and federal level employment trend databases. Go to www.bls.gov/oes/, or find more recent quarterly updates through state government portals <http://www.mnwfc.org/> or <http://www.dwd.state.wi.us/lmi/>.

How do I prioritize my time?

If you haven't been doing many of the activities I've mentioned, you have a lot of homework ahead of you. However, as a recruiter and career counselor I see lots of job seekers busy in a flurry of activity that turns out to be largely ineffective because the job seeker has not spent enough time thinking through the strategies up-front and prioritizing their time. Or they have skills but do not know how to write them in a resume or showcase them in a networking encounter. (I can't recommend all-purpose styles for either networking or a resume. An effective verbal or written marketing presentation exploits the paradigm of the hiring manager and the strengths of the job seeker. I provide resume coaching in person or by phone for a fee.) Many candidates include long list of keywords but do nothing to show to what degree they own those skills. Your objective is to send a resume to ten (not a hundred) well-chosen companies with an approach that is so effective that you net seven-to-eight inquiries, five-to-six interviews and three job offers. To realize this goal you should:

- a) Establish a firm "To Do" list of activities with a time line for completion. If you miss a deadline, invest extra effort to make up for lost time.
- b) Stick to an activity long enough to see if it really is worthwhile, but be willing to abandon or shelve it if you discover a strategy that works better for you. For instance, I know I get many of my recruiting and counseling customers as a result of my speaking at association meetings and referrals, so I make facilitating referrals and establishing speaking venues the mainstay of my marketing efforts rather than continually trying different things. (But some experimentation is good and necessary for growth.)
- c) Use the mind-mapping exercise as the key exhibit to establish which strategies to pursue. Determine which strategies will be most effective for you by writing down the "cons" as well as the more obvious "pros" for all of the options and leads you could pursue. Examine the pros and cons to establish a To Do list that has priority scoring like "things to do in the next two weeks," "things to do one-two months from now," "things I can't execute until I get more information." Keep the mind-mapping notes and To Do lists accessible and you will find yourself continually adding possible leads to them. The exercise often becomes a grass roots marketing plan or networking road map that you can use for the rest of your career, to identify resources whether you are job hunting or not.
- d) Establish goals on your To Do list that are achievable and that suit your strengths and lifestyle. For instance, if you have small children at home you may not be able to attend more than two association meetings per month but you could send four emails per week as networking outreaches. If you are

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uncomfortable giving speeches, you could set a higher goal for newsletter articles. If you are currently working, you will probably not be able to do the same amount of homework expected of someone not working and you will not get the same level of success.

- e) Don't reach out the same company too many times in a short period of time especially through their website. It makes you look hungry and even desperate. Far better to let a networking contact reach out to them on your behalf.
- f) Find out how long a corporation keeps resumes and if they are shared across the corporation. The rule of thumb is that if you have applied once in 12 months, you are covered for all job postings, although there is a recent trend among the biggest corporations that they are changing to a 6-month rule. One of my F100 clients recently told me they receive 30M resumes a month through their website for a 20M employee corporate division. They are "drowning" in inappropriate resumes. This client throws most away immediately and the rest after 6 months.

What should a To Do list look like?

This varies for every individual, but the key is to make the results concrete and measurable. Include numerical goals with quantities by week or month. Keep track of how many objectives you actually achieve. Re-evaluate priorities on the To Do list about every six weeks as you find some activities working better for you than others. My list discusses the bigger themes; yours needs to include weekly details (e.g.: Friday: Get to Library to check out NAICS listing of industries). Keep a journal so you can track problems, record which activities worked, and capture advice people give you.

To Do List

Due Date	Activity
	Make a list of my assets, skills and attitudes that I may be able to market.
	Collect anecdotes, testimonials, case histories to demonstrate my assets, skills...
	Do the first draft of the mind-mapping exercise.
	Research which companies should be targeted and what my pitch might entail.
	Write resume(s) to reflect my new stronger positioning. Write elevator speech.
	Set numerical goals for networking activities and make list of initial contacts, e.g., 4 emails/week, 2 association meetings/month.
	Begin meeting with warm networking contacts to ask their advice.
	Begin networking activities related to targeted companies with goal of interview.
	Send cover letter/resume first only when I can't find a way to network.
	Add new companies and industries to explore opportunities in.

Conclusion

These strategies are intended to generate some new ideas and to build some successes outside of your normal comfort zone. Keep a small notebook in your pocket to capture related ideas so they don't get lost, because they will pop into your head while you are standing in the hardware store. Read up on networking, mind-mapping, web-mining and salesmanship to get really good at the techniques. I also recommend reviewing your strategies with a mentor or a professional career counselor to make sure you are not missing any opportunities and to fine-tune the processes to your personal strengths. Write me to tell me of any cool stories that result from using these techniques so I can use them in my speeches!

Pat O'Donnell is a Recruiter and Career Counselor specializing in the placement of Marketing, Product Management, Training, Writing, Organizational Development and Human Resource professionals. Pat began her recruiting career in 1994 with Hayden & Associates and joined the McKinley Group in July 2004. Retrofit Counseling is a sole proprietorship through which she does career counseling and training workshops. She is a frequent guest speaker at industry associations and local universities on job search strategies and is on the Board of Directors of two professional associations. Prior to her role in the career industry, Pat spent 20 years as an executive in the advertising industry. She holds a BA from Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts.

Association affiliations include:

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- *American Marketing Association*
- *American Society for Training and Development*
- *Human Resource Professionals*
- *International Association for Business Communication*
- *Midwest Direct Marketing Association*
- *Metro State Department of Communications Advisory Council (Board Member)*
- *MN Technical Recruiters Association*
- *MN International Society for Performance Improvement (Board Member)*
- *Organizational Development Network*
- *Professional Adult Computer Training*
- *Product Development Management Association*
- *Sales and Marketing Professional Network*
- *Society for Technical Communicators (former Board Member)*
- *Twin Cities Human Resource Association*

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