

HOW TO GET A JOB



It's brutal out there. But the people getting hired aren't necessarily the most connected—they're the most creative. From food diarists to Twitter stalkers to candidates tapping the "hidden" job market, here's what's working now.



ROB SPARNO RECENTLY DID SOMETHING that 12.5 million Americans would kill to do. He did something that has never been attempted by this many people at once in the 60 years the government has been keeping records. He did something that's getting only more difficult with every day.

He got a job. A really good job. A pay-the-mortgage-and-still-be-able-to-pay-your-kid's-private-college-tuition kind of job.

When Sparno, 55, a longtime salesman, lost his position at Oracle, he knew the search wasn't going to be easy. He had friends who were out of work and struggling to find jobs. He knew that getting back in the game would require every skill he'd spent his career honing. Methodical by nature, Sparno made a trip to Staples, where he bought a black hard-

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW ECCLES

cover lined notebook. He vowed to record every day what he did, whom he talked to, how he felt, how many miles he ran. He even wrote down what he ate. To keep his spirits up (another must if you're in the persuasion business), he organized a group of seven other executives—including a former COO and CFO—who also lived in his community of Princeton, NJ. They got together every few weeks on Saturday morning in the back corner of a local diner and shared tips, like what to do in a second-round interview and how to gather job

leads. And by 9 a.m. each morning Sparno and another jobless friend would call each other and check: Okay, what are we going to do with this day?

Rather than blast out resumes, Sparno drew up a list of about 15 former colleagues who were now in leadership positions—his prospect list, in sales parlance. Then he sat down to write them e-mails. One note was to someone he hadn't talked to in years, an old colleague from Netscape who now worked at Salesforce.com. In his e-mail Sparno wrote that he was looking for the

"next new thing." Minutes later he got a text message from his contact's BlackBerry with two words: "Call me."

As every salesperson knows, getting prospective buyers to meet with you is just the first step. The key is figuring out, *What do they want? What keeps them up at night?* Sparno read every story he could find on Salesforce.com. He watched YouTube videos of CEO Marc Benioff being interviewed by reporters, all the while taking notes. ("It was just like cramming for an exam.") To organize his thoughts,

Work Your Rolodex

TO SCORE AN IN-PERSON MEETING, DON'T JUST ASK FOR A JOB; OFFER SOMETHING IN RETURN, LIKE INTEL ON THE COMPETITION.



he assembled a five-slide PowerPoint presentation going through exactly how he would approach the job and what he would accomplish in the first 30, 60, and 90 days.

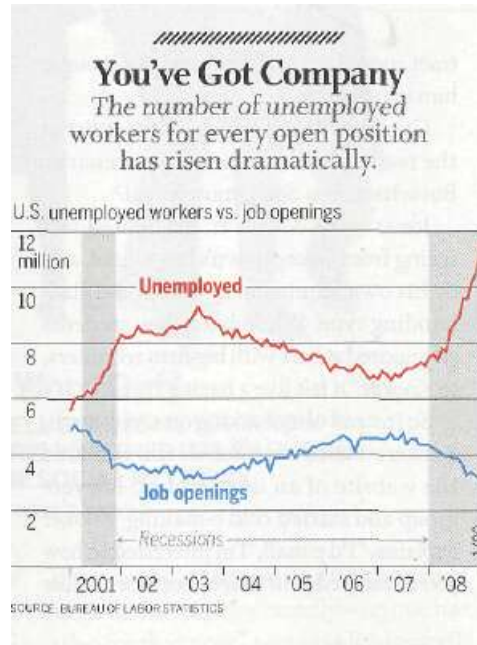
By the time he went for the final interview—his seventh—he had his pitch down perfectly. Halfway through the meeting, Sparno and the manager started discussing how to target a client Sparno had worked with before. The manager went up to the whiteboard to throw out some ideas, and Sparno leaped up to join him, until the two were standing shoulder to shoulder, markers in hand, battling strategies back and forth.

Two-and-a-half months after leaving Oracle, Sparno got the job. All it took was a scheduled daily pep talk, a fraternity of out-of-work neighbors, voluminous research, seven rounds of interviews, a bout of inspiration at the whiteboard, and, of course, a food diary.

You may have heard—it's rough out there. Not only is the unemployment rate the highest it's been in 25 years, but the situation is deteriorating fast. This is not your run-of-the-mill recessionary job market. If unemployment hits 10% next year, as some economists expect, the country will have seen the fastest rise in joblessness since the 1930s. What's more, as you've no doubt noticed from talking to neighbors and friends, the phenomenon is hitting a broad swath of the population: The unemployment rate of college graduates, 4.1%, is the highest on record since the government started keeping track in 1992. At this pace, economists at the left-leaning Economic Policy Institute estimate that in 2010 fully one-third of the U.S. population will at some point in the year be unemployed, or working part-time when they'd rather be full-time.

It's enough to drive the average job seeker to distraction. Like just about every unemployed twentysomething, Jamie Varon, 23, had her heart set on working at Twitter. She had already applied for a position through the company's website. And asked a contact at Google to put in a

good word for her. And showed up at the company's headquarters with a bag of cookies in an attempt to charm a recruiter into talking to her. But she still hadn't landed an interview. What Varon did next made her feel a little crazy. But then, it's a crazy time to be looking for a job. She created a website



called twittershouldhireme.com, including her resume, recommendations, and a blog tracking her quest. Within 24 hours the company contacted her. She had a lunch meeting set up at Twitter, and in the meantime got two job offers from tech companies that had noticed her site, which has even spawned imitators: googleshouldhireme.com and facebookshouldhireme.com.

Getting noticed is a big accomplishment: Many companies have so many applicants that they're leery of advertising open positions. Just four hours after the Phoenix Coyotes of the National Hockey League posted a position for an assistant on Jobing.com, a manager called the site pleading for the ad to be taken down; the company had already received 180 resumes. UnitedHealthcare, for instance, asked *Fortune* not to disclose the number of jobs it has open. The spokesperson said he feared an onslaught of job seekers, citing a recent incident he had heard about where 700 people applied for a janitorial position at an Ohio school.

Still, hiring has not stalled entirely. Ac-

cording to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, while 2.5 million people were laid off in January, 4.4 million new workers were hired (bet that's a number you missed amid all the depressing news). But with the ratio of job seekers to openings at 3.9, vs. 1.7 at the start of the recession, the tactics that might have worked when the economy stalled in 1991 or 2001 simply won't cut it anymore. Just finding openings is a project in and of itself. "When you're in a recession and employers are all going stealth, you're probably looking at 90% or more [positions] being in the hidden job market," says David Perry of executive search firm Perry-Martel International and co-author of *Guerrilla Marketing for Job Hunters*.

Meaning a job seeker must be part detective, part consultant, part salesperson. Rob Sparno and Jamie Varon were willing to do whatever it took. Are you?

WHERE THE JOBS AREN'T

It's hot inside the National Capital Region Job Fair in Falls Church, Va., and it smells like sweat. Hundreds of nervous job seekers are navigating narrow hallways and waiting to talk with recruiters. You know it's bad when even the line for Freddie Mac is long.

Lisa Hamm, a recruiter for consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton, takes a swig from her Aquafina bottle. It's all she has time for between talks with job hunters. People are waiting as long as an hour for just a few minutes of her time. The more impatient give up and simply plop their resumes onto a pile and walk away. You get the sense they're just buying an extra lottery ticket.

When *Fortune* called Hamm after the job fair, she reported that Booz Allen had received 250 resumes that day, but only four people were immediately asked in for interviews. In other words, those fair attendees might as well have played the lottery. "The thing to avoid is thinking that by sending out a ton of resumes, you're looking for a job. You're not," says Steven J. Greenberg, publisher of jobs4point0.com, a website targeted at job seekers over 40.

. That was a lesson Alfred Garcia, 43,



David Stevens, 28

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS MANAGER, CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, MOUNTAIN VIEW, CALIF.

I was nervous about losing my job, so I joined the Santa Clara Chamber of Commerce and started going to networking events. I'd meet 40 or 50 people, make notes on their business cards, and then when I got back to a computer, I'd search for them on LinkedIn. When the time came, I updated my status to "I'm up for grabs." I got a call with a lead that led to my job.

learned fast. At the end of last year he found himself job hunting for the first time in his professional life when he had to shutter his Internet startup after funding fell through. "I came out of law school in '89, 'go. You didn't so much look for a job as a job found you," he says.

The jobs he saw online were far below his experience and pay grade. So he hit the phones, calling about 40 former colleagues. A month into his search he reached a contact from his days at AOL who had started his own firm, Perfect Sense Digital, which helps companies manage their online strategy. As they chatted, it emerged that the CEO did know of some opportunities—at his own company. He hired Garcia as a con-

tract consultant and a month later brought him in full-time.

Garcia had an enviable contact list at the ready. That's the best-case scenario. But what if you don't know a soul?

Jonathan Kooker, 31, graduated last spring from Georgetown's law school, and by his own admission he wasn't the glad-handing type. While his fellow students schmoozed at bars with big-firm recruiters, to Kooker "it felt like a hazing ritual."

So instead of embarking on a job search, Kooker went on a mentor search. He found the website of an immigration-lawyers group and started cold e-mailing. Kooker explains, "I'd e-mail, 'I'm interested in how you developed your career because I'd like

to have that position in 20 years. Would you let me come interview you?'"

Before a meeting, Kooker would smooth out his curly dark hair and put on a suit, and he always arrived with ideas on how firms could attract more clients. He once walked into a meeting with the head of a firm's immigration department, and the woman said she would have to cancel because she was inundated with clients dealing with a new compliance rule. Kooker immediately responded, "Well, it's my opinion that this is a good thing, because I see it as an area to home in on for business." The attorney agreed to give him 15 minutes while she ate a sandwich at her desk. They ended up talking for 45 minutes, and by the end she basically said, "You're incredible. We're going to have to find you a job."

She referred him, and the next day Kooker received a call from another firm, which turned into his first offer. Another lawyer with 13 years' experience proposed a joint venture with Kooker. He even got an offer from a firm in Israel for some of its caseload—a job that Kooker took on. After contacting 60 lawyers and talking with 2.5, Kooker found it difficult to stop networking because he was learning so much. "They're all potential mentors, and although they may not have a job now, in four years they might. And they'll remember me," he says.

If you need to fill out your network quickly, one of the easiest moves is to join a professional association. David Stevens sensed he was on the verge of losing his job selling ads for two radio stations, so he joined his local chamber of commerce in Santa Clara, Calif. In the span of three months, while still working, Stevens forced himself to attend as many events as possible. Anytime he met someone at an event, Stevens would add him as a contact

Target Your Search

ONE OF THE WORST MISTAKES JOB SEEKERS MAKE IS SENDING OUT HUNDREDS OF RESUMES. THAT'S NOT LOOKING FOR A JOB; THAT'S BUYING A LOTTERY TICKET.





Get the Word Out!

DON'T BE ASHAMED. TELL EVERYONE YOU KNOW YOU'RE LOOKING FOR WORK, WHETHER IT'S BY PHONE, E-MAIL, OR ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORK.

on LinkedIn, the social-networking site aimed at professionals. "When the time came, he says, I updated my [LinkedIn] status to Tin up for grabs—who wants me?" Soon after, the CEO of the Santa Clara Chamber of Commerce called. There was an opening at the Mountain View Chamber of Commerce. Within a week Stevens, 28, was at his new desk.

Another way to build new contacts is to volunteer. Robin Palchus lost her job as a senior HR director at a national accounting firm last March, so she started spending more time working with a career-networking support group at her church. One evening she was paired with a man who needed help tweaking his resume and preparing for an interview. She gave him some tips, and within two weeks he sent her an e-mail saying he had a job. He thanked her, then offered to refer her to his new company, Booz Allen Hamilton. A few days later Palchus received a call from a recruiter there, and after 11 interviews she joined the company as a senior associate.

Now a caveat: Nobody has a free hour to hear your sob story. You have to make a compelling case for busy people to clear

time for you. "Just meeting people to network in the industry broadly—no one has time for that now," says Lisa Rutherford, president of tech startup Twofish, which supports transactions in online games and social networks. You're best off coming with a referral and having a very specific request. "For example, if someone said to me, I'm looking at all the different mobile payment gateway providers, and I'd love to understand your perspective on these competitors,¹ obviously I can help with that," explains Rutherford.

One surefire way to grab people's attention is to offer intel on their competitors. David Perry, the headhunter, advises gathering such tidbits whenever you go on an interview. When the hiring manager asks whether you have any questions, Perry recommends saying, "Yes, as a matter of fact I do. I understand your five competitors are such and such. What is it about ABC Company that makes you guys nervous?" Take notes, and when you get to your car, pick up the phone and call those competitors: "I just left an interview at XYZ Corp. Apparently you're doing this and this, and it's keeping them up at

What to Do If You're Still Employed

(BUT GETTING NERVOUS)

1

Update your resume—and your network.

Look back on your work experience and think about the story you can tell about your career. Get in touch with old colleagues and see what they're up to.

2

Help recruiters find you.

If you haven't already, create profiles on LinkedIn and ZoomInfo. Of the thousands of jobsites, these are the two that recruiters say they actually use to find candidates.

3

Get to know headhunters now.

Form relationships while you're still employed. Meet face-to-face. Send great candidates from your network their way. They'll be much more inclined to help you later on.

4

Collect your thoughts.

Think WiMax is doomed? Have a plan to save print? Put your point of view about your industry in writing. If you need it, you'll have something to show employers.

5

Help others.

Reading other people's resumes and cover letters will give you ideas on how to position yourself. Plus, you never know when you might need a favor in return.

night. Do you have time for coffee?"

It's hard to know how aggressive to be these days. Allen Wright and his son were just digging into their pancakes at an IHOP restaurant in Gainesville, Texas—they were coming back from the annual Texas-Oklahoma football game—when Wright spotted Larry Nichols, the CEO of Devon Energy, walking through the door with his wife. Wright was looking for a job after leaving Koch Industries to move to Oklahoma City, and Nichols was on his list of people to contact. Despite being unshaven and wearing a T-shirt and shorts, Wright caught Nichols and set up a meeting for the next week. After several more follow-up phone calls (about one a week), he eventually got the job as director of public affairs and employee engagement at Devon, the country's largest independent natural gas and oil producer. So being a bit of a noode worked for Wright.

But Sara Laschever, co-author of *Women Don't Ask* with Linda C. Babcock, an economics professor at Carnegie Mellon, points out that for women especially, the pushiness required in this job market may be tough to pull off. "When men are being aggressive or being forthright or focused, we think, 'He's very goal-oriented,'" she says. "And when a woman does it, it's 'God, who does she think she is?'" Like it or not, says Laschever, their research shows that "for women to be persuasive, they need to be perceived as likable. Men just need to be perceived as confident."

WILL YOUR RESUME EVEN BE READ?

On a recent morning in Columbus, Ga., 19 Aflac employees were seated around a table in a building next door, discussing some IT positions they needed to fill, Aflac has never had layoffs in its 54-year history and is now in the enviable position of attracting more talent than it has room for.

The recruiters are doing a status check



Get Your Foot in the Door

USE THE INTERVIEW TO SHOW WHAT YOU'LL DELIVER IN THE FIRST 30, 60, AND 90 DAYS. COMPANIES DON'T HAVE TIME FOR YOU TO GROW INTO A JOB.

on several open positions. An IT manager, Octavio Herrera, who's wearing a yellow tie with white Aflac ducks, says he's found some candidates on LinkedIn for a systems security administration position. For another opening, LaShena Smith, the senior technical recruiter at Aflac, reports that she interviewed someone whose manner she found too aggressive for the position. The candidate was dinged. As Herrera later notes, "Technology can always be taught. [I want] great communication skills and someone who works well with others."

Like many large companies, Aflac keeps a huge database of job applicants it can search for certain key words like "supervised staff" if the company wants someone with management experience. Anyone who applies online is tunneled through this system.

Typically a recruiter will present four or five candidates to the manager, so perfect-

ing your resume is critical. "The reality is we have a 'no' pile and a 'maybe' pile, and it takes four seconds to know where it winds up," says Glenn Fox, AOL's former head of recruiting and the CEO of BusinessElite, an invitation-only website for senior executives and those who hire them.

Always include metrics that describe your work: How many direct reports did you have? What was your budget? And be sure to mirror your resume to the description of the job you want. If the position is "product marketer" and you've done that kind of work before, actually use the words "product marketing" to describe your experience.

As for cover letters, recruiters and managers are split on how much weight they carry. Some advocate writing only a few compelling sentences, because no one has time to read a drawn-out letter. Others still recommend the traditional format of three or four paragraphs to show off your writing prowess. Kevin Donlin, president of Guaranteed Resumes, advises clients to add a PS note at the bottom of a cover letter with a punchy sentence on why you'd be great for the job. People tend to read those out of curiosity.

Clever packaging can only take you so far, though. Peter Cappelli, a professor of management at the Wharton School, argues that since the 1980s there's been a fundamental shift in the way companies hire. As with just-in-time manufacturing, in which companies lower inventory to reduce carrying costs, Cappelli says employers are adjusting to changing markets by plugging in perfectly suited workers from the outside when they're needed, then dropping them when they're done. He calls it the "just-in-time workforce."

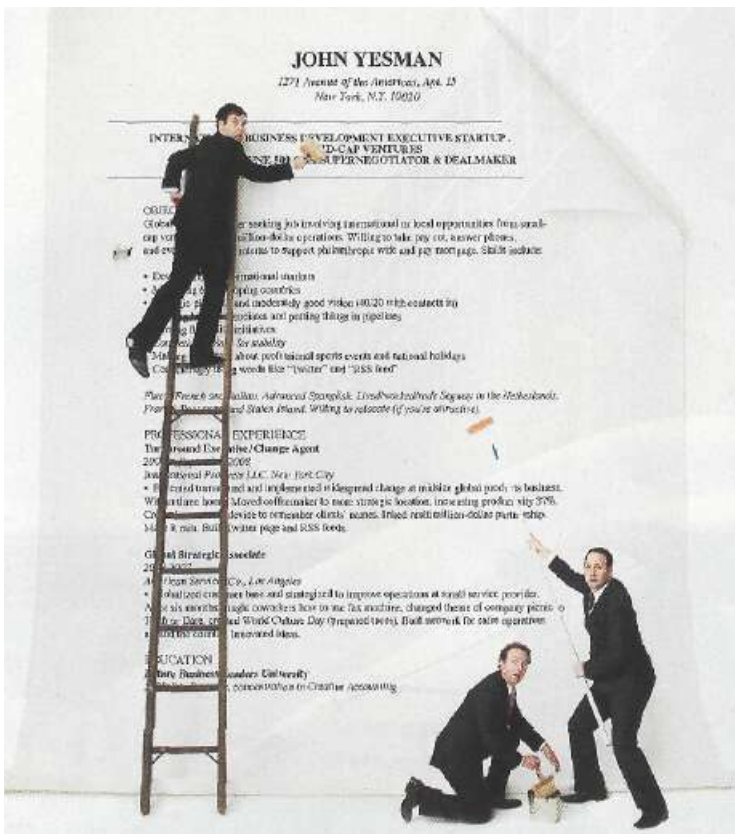
That is bad news for job seekers who are hoping to reinvent themselves in this recession. "You're not going to change your



Pat Bennett, 52

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE, U.S. CAPITAL MARKETS, SAS, NEW YORK CITY

When I went in, the hiring manager said, "I have no reason to hire you." He explained that I didn't have the right profile to be selling software. I told him that I spent 10 years working with lawyers, so I knew how to build relationships. I specifically talked about what made me successful, and I did a presentation on how I would approach the business in the first 30 days.



Fine-Tune Your Resume

THE MAJORITY OF LARGE COMPANIES USE SOFTWARE SCANNING SERVICES TO SIFT THROUGH RESUMES, SO MIMIC THE JOB REQUIREMENT LANGUAGE EXACTLY. IF THEY WANT A MARKETING MANAGER, THOSE WORDS SHOULD APPEAR ON YOUR RESUME.

career in this downturn," he says. "Nobody's going to hire you and say, 'I know you were in finance, but we're going to retrain you to be in marketing.'" Adds Neil Davies, a Microsoft staffing manager. "If we need five things, in the current market we're not really moving forward on people who have four out of the five."

Sometimes, though, even when you're not perfect on paper, you can make a great case for yourself.

GETTING TO YES

"I have no reason to hire you," said the hiring manager at SAS, the software company, when Pat Bennett walked in for an interview. Bennett, 52, had no background selling technology software. But she pitched herself as a perfect fit in a unit targeting financial services clients. Her last job had been at LexisNexis, handling high-strung attorneys every day. Surely she could deal with hedge fund managers

too. In her second-round interview, Bennett gave a presentation showing how she'd approach the business in her first 30 days. She got the job.

In this environment, companies simply can't afford to hope you'll be able to do the job. You need to demonstrate it. "Gone is the time when you could have the first year to prove yourself," says Juliet Flint, a partner at Kleiner Perkins Caufield Byers who advises the firm's portfolio companies on talent and recruiting. "You need to have immediate impact in the first 30 days."

Well before you're hired, there are ways to show off your strengths. The CEO of tech startup AdaptiveBlue said the company just hired an engineer who found three problems in the software he'd be testing *before* he even came in for an interview.

Michael J.A. Ehrlich, laid off from his job in research equity sales at Oppenheimer, found another clever way to show prospective employers he would bring in

new business. He persuaded one former client, a hedge fund, to let him use its office to conduct his job search. The boutique research shop JNK Securities Corp. was so impressed that it hired him less than three weeks later.

If you dazzle a company enough, it might even create a position to make use of your talents. After Chris DeBrusk sold his consulting firm, he started kicking around an idea for a product to help financial services catch any ethical lapses by doing surveillance on their own trading activity. He took his idea to half-a-dozen companies, including Sapient in Boston, where he had worked eight years earlier. His presentations laid out the business opportunity, what kind of revenue upside it could bring, and when. Sapient brought him on in February. "In my experience, most firms have open requirements," says DeBrusk, "It's about building the relationship first and then rinding the job."

So when you're following up on an interview, don't just send a pat thank-you note. Think about what you learned from the interview and show how it sparked some new ideas about the job. If you're reading an article that seems relevant, send it along with some commentary. "Every so often I would send an article to a vice president to let him know I was thinking about the market," says Sparno. "I'd write, 'Hey, John, interesting article on market dynamics,' just to show him this is a guy who's thinking not just about a job—I'm someone who can think strategically."

Even though the market is brutal right now, the worst thing you can do for your career is to take a job that doesn't fit you. Not only will you not do your best work, but when the recession ends (and it will), you'll be moving in the wrong direction.

"I didn't want any job just to have a job," says Jonathan Kooker, the law school grad, "because then, when people start hiring again in two years, I'd be stuck with experience I didn't want." Sure, he's only 31. He doesn't have kids or a mortgage. But he does have something 12.5 million people desperately want: an employer. ■

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