

July 19, 2009

THE SEARCH

Where, Oh Where, Has My Application Gone?

By PHYLLIS KORRKI

GETTING a rejection letter is a painful part of job hunting, but at least it means you've been noticed. These days, I've been hearing about more job hunters who respond to online job postings, only to hear nothing back from the company. Ever.

Was the position filled? Is the company just taking a long time to fill it? Did the hiring manager even see the application? You may never know.

Many recruiters and hiring managers do let applicants know where their online applications stand. (At a minimum, companies should set up an automated response system.) But before you get too angry at companies that ignore you, consider what they are up against.

First, the Internet has made it absurdly easy to apply for jobs. This means that unqualified people are clogging the system with their wing-and-a-prayer applications.

Then add rising numbers of unemployed people. More job seekers — qualified, unqualified and desperate — are hitting the send button. Acknowledgments are going by the wayside as recruiters confront hundreds of applications for a single job.

In fact, organizations received 75 percent more applications, on average, in the first half of 2009, compared with the same period in 2008, according to a survey by the Corporate Executive Board, a network of executives and a research company. Todd Safferstone, managing director of the company's Recruiting Roundtable, said that one business advertised for a lawyer and received responses from 1,000 applicants — half of whom did not even have law degrees.

In this environment, it's easy to see how a stellar application can become lost in the shuffle. But how do you make your highly qualified presence known without looking like a pest?

The best job seekers "take control of their application's destiny," said Kelly Renz, vice president for client services and human resources at Pinstripe, a recruitment outsourcing firm.

That means working hard to find a contact at the company who can be your advocate — or at least a conduit to the hiring manager. If you know someone at the company personally, ask him or her to forward your application to the right person.

If you don't know anyone at the company, ask your friends and relatives if they do. If you have a [Facebook](#) page, post a polite plea there.

Sometimes, despite your best efforts, the hiring manager's name is not readily available. Often that is a corporate ploy — a way to prevent an avalanche of follow-up inquiries about online job postings.

But do some research. Look on the company's Web site or do an Internet search for a name. Call the human resources department and ask the receptionist if he or she knows who is in charge of hiring.

Ms. Renz suggested another way to get a name: Go on LinkedIn and look for someone who works in the same department as the posted job. Contact that person: ask whether he or she knows who is hiring, and how that individual can be reached. You might also ask for more information about the job, Ms. Renz said.

Don't ask new contacts to vouch for you; that's not fair. Just make use of the information they can give you. If it's the e-mail address of a hiring manager, resend your application and state that you remain very interested in the position and briefly reiterate your qualifications.

Obtaining an employee referral is a good move, as far as it goes. There is just one problem: Nowadays "the referral channel is jammed in the same way that other channels are jammed," Mr. Safferstone said.

To break through, you may need to leave the online world behind and make an old-fashioned direct phone call to whomever is doing the hiring. But wield this call wisely.

Some managers may be annoyed if you call them, though others will see it as a sign of initiative. Daryl Pigat, manager of the Manhattan branch of OfficeTeam, the administrative division of [Robert Half International](#), says that when he receives a phone call, it often causes him to pluck the person's résumé out of the multitudes, because it's a sign of a serious applicant. But wait at least a few days to give the company time to review applications, Mr. Pigat said.

When you do call, ask if you can take any further steps. But after that conversation, don't call back unless you are told to do so. That would be venturing into pest territory.

DESPITE your best efforts, you may still not hear anything further. That's because you are up against the inherent limits of online job postings.

"If I was looking for a job, I would be much more focused on my personal network than getting into this black hole of the job boards," said Tony Morosini, head of the Morosini Group, an executive recruiting firm.

Many people still find out about jobs through someone they know, and not through advertisements. The more you act to expand your world of professional contacts, the better off you are.

And don't pin your hopes on just one job, said Barbara Pachter, an author and workplace expert. Work full-time on a multifaceted approach that includes networking, job boards, associations and many applications, she said, adding, "Don't stop a full-court press until the first paycheck is clear."