



The Right (And Wrong) Ways To Use Job Boards

Employment sites can be a terrible waste of time for job seekers -- unless you know how to get the most out of them

Things are looking up for anyone searching for work: Job growth hasn't been this strong since 2006 and economists expect the unemployment rate to drop in 2013, [The Wall Street Journal](#) reports. But if you're hunting for a job, odds are you're making one giant mistake: Relying too much on online job boards to find and apply for openings.

A striking 87 percent of [boomers choose job boards as their first resource](#), according to a recent study by Millennial Branding, a Gen Y consulting firm, and [Beyond.com](#), a career resources site. From my experience coaching job seekers over 50, I've found that many of them use job boards exclusively when foraging for a new position. Not smart.

The Allure of Job Boards

Of course, it's easy to see why they're so popular: Job boards offer the promise of fast access to listings, let prospects show a potential employer they're comfortable using the Web and leverage the Internet's cloak of anonymity as a shield against personal rejection.

But the reality is that job boards are actually one of the *least* effective routes to getting hired. (Below, I have a few suggestions about who should use them, and how.)

The research is undeniable: When it comes to delivering hires, job boards just don't cut it.

According to [CareerXroads](#), a recruiting site, just 12 percent of all hires can be attributed to job boards; other studies place the figure even lower. In a recent article for [CMO.com](#), a digital marketing site, contributing writer Nick Corcodilos argued that [job boards deliver less than 10 percent of hires](#) annually -- "a lot less," he says.

From my experience with clients, the reality is even grimmer.

Why Not to Rely on Job Boards

I frequently caution clients that applying for a position online will give them no more than a 2 percent chance of getting an interview, let alone walking away with an offer. Here's why:

For one thing, it's a matter of sheer numbers. If I post an opening at my firm on a well-known job board, I'll typically get 75 to 100 applicants a day, sometimes far more. Larger firms can easily net more than 400 responses per day, [The Wall Street Journal](#) says.

But the bigger problem with a board-centric approach is that it violates the cardinal truth about getting hired: It's all about making personal connections.

This is why almost 65 percent of openings these days are either filled by internal movement



(applicants who already work there) or by referrals, according to CareerXroads.

My experience as a career-management adviser has been that the percentage is even higher. I'd estimate that referrals or internal movement are the primary sources around 75 to 80 percent of the time.

Aggregators and Niche Boards

Does this mean that job boards are useless? No, not at all.

The trick is knowing how to use them and understanding their limitations. It's important to realize, though, that all job boards are not created equal.

Instead of using a giant, broad-based site for all industries, like [Monster.com](#), I recommend you try a job board aggregator, like [Indeed.com](#), [Simplyhired.com](#) or [Careerjet.com](#).

Aggregators are one-stop destinations that cull and display postings from hundreds of job boards across the Internet. You put in the position and location you want and the aggregator pumps out all the openings that match.

Aggregators tend to have stringent guidelines on which postings they'll display, resulting in a search that generally won't be cluttered with bogus listings, advertising and bait from career-coaching companies looking to sell you their services.

But be wary: If an employer posts an opening on more than one job board, there's a good chance it'll show up multiple times on an aggregator's list. You won't be doing yourself a favor by applying for the same job on different sites. That will just make you look inattentive and unfocused, and more often than not kill your chances of snagging an interview. **Sign Up for Niche Job Boards** Another route to explore is a **niche job board**, which specializes in particular job functions and industries. They often list positions that don't appear on some of the larger, general boards, so they can offer access to openings with smaller applicant pools. Applying for a job through a niche board can also give you a leg up over someone using a broad-based site because it identifies you as more of an industry insider. In my experience, these are some of the best niche job boards for particular fields:

- **Accounting:** [Accountingjobstoday.com](#)
- **Biotech/Pharmaceuticals:** [Medzilla.com](#)
- **Communications/Public Relations:** [Prsa.org/jobcenter](#)
- **Construction:** [Constructionjobs.com](#)
- **Engineering:** [Engineerjobs.com](#)
- **Finance:** [Fins.com/finance](#)
- **Government:** [Usajobs.gov](#)
- **Higher Education:** [Higheredjobs.com](#)
- **Human Resources:** [Jobs.shrm.org](#)
- **Marketing:** [Talentzoo.com](#)
- **Nonprofits:** [Idealist.org](#)
- **Science:** [Naturejobs.com](#)



- **Sports:** Workinsports.com
- **Technology:** Dice.com
- **The Arts:** Artjob.org

Even if you restrict your activity to the boards with the best opportunities, you should still focus on building personal connections. **The 10-20-70 Approach for Job Hunters**

I recommend devoting only about 10 percent of the time you spend looking for a job responding to online ads and job boards; 20 percent interacting with recruiters and 70 percent to in-person, phone and online networking.

This approach will put the emphasis of your hunt on cultivating relationships, differentiating your candidacy in ways that are unique and memorable.

So rather than using job boards as a one-stop method to find work, think of them as research tools to get a sense of the skills and experience that are in demand, as well as to help you refine your search and nuance your personal pitch.

Then [network like mad](#). You may not know anyone who works for the company where you're hoping to get hired, but one of your contacts may or they might know someone in the industry who'd be willing to speak with you. Do a [LinkedIn](#) search to check out your contacts' connections and start asking for introductions.

Job Boards and Recruiters

If you're interested in a posting that's being handled by a recruiting firm, don't apply for the position through the board. Instead, email a direct pitch to one of the partners at the recruiter, explaining why you think a 15- to 30-minute conversation would be mutually beneficial. Don't reference the job board in your pitch, but do craft your approach using the requirements mentioned in the posting.

Remember, in these discussions, as well as networking phone calls or coffees, you're not asking for a job -- you're forging personal connections.

Try to offer something of value to every person you speak with, whether alerting them to an article or piece of research that might be useful in their work or picking up the tab at breakfast.

Persistence Pays Off

Keep in mind that it takes more informational interviews to land a job today than 25 years ago. Back then, I could confidently tell clients that if they had 45 to 60 informational interviews, they'd probably end up with six to eight formal interviews, leading to two decent job offers. Today, you'll probably need to have 65 to 90 networking conversations for those returns.

That's a lot of coffee. But those meetings will increase your odds of success as opposed to hiding out in your bunker and just clicking a job board's "send" button.

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