 JOB SEARCH STRATEGIES FOR ENGINEERS

It's no secret that the job market for college Engineering graduates has changed dramatically over the past few years. Exactly how is the current job market for engineers? That depends on your flexibility. Engineering is one of the most adaptable degrees you can get, and although people used to assume the engineering field was insulated against the sluggish economy, that is not currently the case. Instead, engineers are often pushed to apply their skills in other arenas and broaden their job search scope. Today you may have someone with a civil engineering degree who finds her way into aviation, water quality control or land development. Or you could have a mechanical engineer working for an electronics company making computers.

A job search is always a difficult task, but everyone has to do it at some time or another. No matter what your impetus to job search right now, you will be able to apply the skills you develop in many situations to future positions, whether you are just beginning your career, or preparing for further advancement.

What we hope to do in this informative job search guide is provide you with effective strategies to conduct a successful job search campaign, regardless of the strength of the employment market. While reading this will not guarantee you success, it is designed to "raise the bar" when it comes to your job search capabilities.

ASSESS YOURSELF

Before conducting an active job search, you must define your personal goals. Answering these questions can help:

- What types of jobs interest me?
- What would be my ideal work environment?
- Geographically, where would I like to be located?
- Which is most important – a high starting salary or financial security?
- How important are “quality of life” issues? For me to achieve work/life balance?
- What would I like the content of my job to consist of?
- How important is it for me to like the people with whom I work?
- Is it critical for my new employer to be ethical? For my new company to be socially responsible?
- How important is long-term job security?
- Where do I envision my career headed in the future?
- Will a graduate or professional degree help me attain my career goals?

At the beginning of your job search, it is not important for you to have completely answered all of these career-related questions. Reviewing these work values, however, will prepare you for the task ahead.

After you have done this, you need to identify what you have to offer an employer, recognizing the value of your abilities and experiences. Ask yourself - what skills and talents do I have? Begin by making a list. The following suggestions may help you identify areas where you have a natural talent, strengths that give you an advantage when applying for a job in your particular field, or weaknesses that may require a little attention in order to increase marketability. Being able to define your strengths and weaknesses in the areas of
your qualifications, experience, skills and knowledge is essential in foreseeing any gaps between you and potential positions. Review the list of skills and characteristics below- put a check next to your strengths and circle your weaknesses.

**SKILLS AND PERSONAL QUALITIES**

- **Teamwork**
  - How well do you work in a team?

- **Interpersonal skills**
  - Are you able to relate to and supervise others?

- **Communication**
  - What are your written, oral and presentation skills like?

- **Creativity**
  - Can you develop solutions to a problem?

- **Accuracy**
  - Do you have an eye for detail?

- **Leadership**
  - Can you influence others to achieve a recognized objective?
  - Can you resolve conflict?

- **Analytical ability**
  - Can you develop appropriate methods of solutions?
  - Can you implement your plans of action effectively?

- **Computer knowledge**
  - How good are you working with computers?

- **Maturity**
  - Do you react calmly to difficult situations?
  - Can you deal sensitively with people's feelings?

- **Enthusiasm**
  - Are you a positive person?
  - Can you keep others motivated?

- **Initiative**
  - Can you develop new ideas and solutions?

- **Self-confidence**
  - Are you an assertive person? Can you make your ideas and thoughts known without becoming aggressive?

- **Adaptability**
  - Do you welcome change?

- **Ambition**
  - Do you set goals and strive to achieve them?

- **Time management**
  - Can you organize your work and prioritize your tasks?

This list can help you focus on skills and expand your job search. At this point, it is useful to get realistic feedback from experts in the field or career consultants to determine if your self-assessment is realistic. A meeting or two with a Career Services (SU 1532) consultant is strongly encouraged to discuss your analysis and decisions. During this or any other part of your job search, plan to use Career Services resources frequently.

**EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS**

The next step in the job search process is to explore the "matches" between your identified skills, interests, and values and the demands of career fields and organizations. Develop a
checklist from the results of your assessment to help evaluate jobs identified during your job research. Compare opportunities to select the best match. During the search you must also position yourself to understand the employer’s need for new hires. To secure the work you want, you must capture the attention of the person doing the hiring and convince them to select you as the best match for their needs.

It is probable that no single career will have the potential to utilize all your skills, allow you to develop all your interests, and incorporate a value system completely compatible with yours. Therefore, try to target a career field that will satisfy some of your high-priority needs. Other important skills and interests can perhaps be satisfied in your leisure time activities and through volunteer involvement.

After thoroughly researching possible careers/jobs, several field options will emerge as the most realistic and attractive. These options should become your career or job search goals. Good research on employers will not only give you the competitive edge, but also help you decide which employers you want to contact and which strategies you will use to contact them.

**JOB SEARCH RESOURCES**

The job market is constantly changing. During one period of time job opportunities may be scarce, during another period they may be plentiful. Regardless of job market conditions, there is always strong competition for the most attractive jobs. Successful candidates are those who use up-to-date job search techniques.

Experts agree that today the vast majority (80% or more) of job openings are not advertised. Most employment opportunities are hidden. A primary reason is simply that most employers do not need to advertise; they have enough applicants without advertising. Another reason is that employers prefer to hire in direct response to a referral from someone they trust.

There are a variety of strategies that increase the chances of identifying job openings and breaking into the "hidden job market." Great job searching resources include: networking, the Career Information Center, informational interviewing, direct employer contact, the Internet and employment services.

**Networking**

Experience has shown that networking is a very rich source of job leads and information about unpublished job opportunities. Job search networking is a targeted effort to talk to people about your job search. It should not be limited to casual conversations with people you meet. It should be a strategic campaign to contact people for ideas, suggestions and information. Networking is not new; it is simply sharing information and resources with others. Everyone carries with them a wealth of information and insight and when we share information, we tap into this wealth of knowledge and open the doors of opportunity. This exchange is often informal and not planned. Networking, as a job search strategy, is more formal and calculated. Use the Networking Record on the last page of this guide to track your contacts and conversations.

Your personal contacts should include:

- Career center counselors and staff
- Faculty, especially those in your major

Career Services
http://www.student-services.utoledo.edu/career/
The University of Toledo
- Classmates, especially those who have interned or worked for the organization
- Alumni, specially the career services career contact and alumni network, accessible on CareerTrak
- Friends
- Family and relatives
- Previous and current employers

**Remember:**

You are not interviewing for a job when you are making contacts!

You are networking with knowledgeable people for information and leads.

Never forget to thank all your sources.

A simple thank you note is especially appropriate.

**Informational Interviewing**

The informational interview is a networking effort targeted toward potential employers and professionals within a specific industry. This technique is used to gather information regarding skills, training and experience needed for an occupation. It is also a method to learn about a specific company or industry. One possible approach is to send a letter requesting a brief informational interview (clearly indicating the purpose of the meeting, and communicating the fact that there is no job expectation). Follow this up with a phone call to schedule an appointment. Or, initiate a contact by making cold calls and set up an appointment. The best way to obtain an informational interview is by being referred from one professional to another, a process that becomes easier as your network expands.

Prepare for your informational interviews just as you would for an actual job interview: polish your presentation and listening skills, and conduct preliminary research on the organization. You should outline an agenda that includes well-thought-out questions. Make the interview a benefit for you and your career.

**Direct Employer Contact**

Direct contact is essential for the serious jobseeker. Since we know that all opportunities are not posted, you will need to identify employers on your own to contact directly. But direct contact takes planning and preparation. It is not enough to just walk in and ask "Are you hiring?" A successful job search is a sales campaign and your challenge is to sell your qualifications.

The first step is to list potential employers. As your job search progresses, you may add to this list or change it as necessary. The Career Information Center is a good resource in this effort, including employer information and up-to-date job postings. The CIC is an excellent place to identify potential employers and prepare your job search strategy. Specific publications to review include the phone book, Chamber of Commerce listings, employer profiles, industry guides and newspapers. Also, check Carlson or your local public library for these resources and others.

Once you have your list, plan a strategy to approach each employer. There are many approaches available and you will want to vary them depending upon the circumstances and your preferences. You can fill out an application, send a resume, call the employer directly or arrange for an informational interview. Persistence and follow-up are the keys to a successful job search. If you are serious about employment, plan your follow-up.

**Follow-up and Record Keeping**

Maintaining careful records of all interviews, correspondence, referrals made and follow-up action is essential for success. Failure to know your present status as an applicant with
prospective employers can lead to loss of valuable contacts and credibility. You can use networking contact log sheet, available at the end of the document, to keep your records.

**The Career Information Center**
The Career Information Center (CIC) located in SU 1532, is the only centralized and up-to-date on-campus location for career related information. The CIC offers a wide variety of information on jobs and careers. Print materials provide information on how to utilize other resources such as the Internet, trade journals and business directories.

**The Internet**
The Internet is a global electronic community -- a network of networks. Nearly everything found in a real community can be found in cyberspace. There are businesses, social organizations, government agencies, educational institutions and individual residences. Every idea, ideology and interest is represented. For every major job search strategy there is a cyberspace counterpart. The Internet is a virtual gold mine of employment resources that will only get better in the future.

The Internet is a tool, and like all tools is only as good as the skill of the user. Besides job listings, there are free tools such as fax services and email accounts, networking opportunities, and free Web space to accommodate your online resume. You just have to know where to look. Learning to use the Internet productively takes time and effort. Many new users become overwhelmed. One frustration is that the Internet is huge and there is no single manual or help desk. Another is that it is constantly changing. What’s there today may be gone, moved, or changed tomorrow.

There are many ways to use the Internet as a Job Search tool. These include:

- Searching job sites for positions fitting your qualifications
- Researching companies and professional associations
- Submitting your resume on-line to employers or resume database sites
- Completing on-line application forms
- Conducting information interviews via chat groups
- Applying for interstate or overseas jobs
- Visiting cities and companies via virtual tours.

**Employment Services**
There are hundreds of businesses specializing in providing employment services. Some are merely advertisements, but many provide services directly online. These services include career counseling, resume writing, placement assistance and job matching. Some sites match jobseekers with employers directly online.

Career Services, however, strongly encourages you to stay away from employment services or headhunters that charges a fee for finding you a job. A successful job search should not be a financial burden. Many of the same services can be utilized for free - check with a UT Career Services professional before paying for any job searching services.

**PREPARE JOB SEARCH MATERIALS AND DEVELOP JOB SEARCH SKILLS**

Once you have decided on your job search goals, your resumes and application letters can be tailored to reflect your qualifications as they relate to the interests of prospective
employers. Guidelines for developing these job search materials start with designing your resume. A resume is a self-marketing tool, designed with the purpose of obtaining a job interview. It needs to show prospective employers that you are the person that they are looking for. It needs to demonstrate your personal strengths, capabilities and the type of person you are. If you are looking for resume assistance, refer to the Engineering Resume Guide available at Career Service’s website.

While most job applicants are well aware of the need for well-prepared resumes and cover letters, many do not realize they need to spend an equal amount of time mastering job search skills necessary to be effective in today’s market. Learning which job search strategies are productive, how to interview effectively and how to market yourself, as well as how to handle job offer are a few of the topics covered by regularly scheduled workshops offered by your Career Services office (SU 1532). Go to Career Service’s website or call 419.530.4341 for more information.

**CONSIDER OFFER AND CONTINUE TO DEVELOP YOUR CAREER ACTION PLAN**

Evaluate each interview you complete: how you were treated, how you answered the questions, and your level of interest in the position. Make sure you have all the information you need before you decide. Pay attention to your feelings and gut reaction to the organization and the position. Accept or decline job offers verbally and in writing.

Congratulations! Your job search campaign has been successful if you have been offered a position you wish to accept. Send a thank you note to all the people who helped you relaying the good news. Making the right choices while transitioning will ensure success in your position and the continued growth of your career. Remember to continue to use all above explained steps to assist you in your career progression or job change.

*Complied by Gaurav Sachdeva, 2004*
# Networking Contact Record

Use the form below to keep important notes about all of your contacts

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<th>Name of Contact</th>
<th>Company/ Affiliation</th>
<th>Phone Number and Email</th>
<th>Result / Notes</th>
<th>Follow-up</th>
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