

Job hunting requires hard work and smart strategy.  
It always has and always will—Internet or no Internet.

# Job search in the age of Internet:



Current Address  
1016 C...om 312  
College  
453-5...  
Smith@...  
...re.com

Education

Univ...  
Bach...ected 2000  
Minc...  
G.P.A... Society

Related Experience

Public relations using my communication a...  
Media  
Business

Experience

State University  
Campus Run for Charity  
mail, newspaper ads, and campus announcements

Campus  
Office of State University  
Led y...ective students and parents  
Ansy...addressed concerns  
Wro...explaining campus-housing policy  
Sel...ies

Admin... Large State  
Dr...  
Us... Excel to type and edit reports  
Co... attention to detail

Foreign Language Skills

Fluen...

# Six jobseekers in search of employers

by Matthew Mariani

**A** chainsaw is great for cutting firewood. Use the tool the wrong way, however, and you could really hurt yourself. The Internet is like that for jobseekers. It is a power tool. It can aid a job search or prolong joblessness, depending on how it is used.

Before the birth of the Internet, savvy jobseekers commonly did several things in an orderly manner to find employment. They prepared résumés, did research, contacted employers, engaged in networking, arranged interviews, and pursued job leads from many sources. Today's savvy jobseekers still engage in the same activities, but they add online methods to the traditional process.

Regrettably, some of today's less informed jobseekers believe that the Internet has transformed the job search into a nearly effortless process. They hastily update their résumés and post them to several online databases. These jobseekers then sit back and wait for an employer to call. Most of them wait a long, long time—often in vain. Even in the age of Internet, a job search still requires hard work. Having a plan, using multiple search methods, and asking for help all increase the chances of success.

You may learn more from the six fictional jobseekers portrayed in this article. These characters—Tuan, Francesca, Alejandra, Tariq, Aaron, and Kendra—appear throughout to illustrate key job-search concepts. Two of them are recent graduates, and four are more experienced workers in various occupations. Watch them prepare for the hunt. Witness their pursuit of both advertised and unadvertised jobs using a variety of tactics. Find out if their choice of search methods affects their performance in the critical job interview. And see how they use the Internet—sometimes in unexpected ways—as a job-search tool.

Please note that the vignettes you read here do not constitute a complete guide for job searching, nor do any of them provide a full account of a typical job search. But the stories, while only a sampling of possible experiences, are telling. As you read, you might refer to the character summaries on each two-page spread to help you keep track of who's who.

Real-life jobseekers must adapt their efforts to their own individual circumstances. Every job search is unique because every person is unique.

## Preparing for the hunt

You can look for a job in many ways, both online and off, from perusing help-wanted ads and visiting job banks to calling employers and networking. When you choose among job-search techniques, you are making decisions that affect your chances of finding a job.

Just as important as which methods you use, however, is how well you prepare to use them. Before starting your job search, you should consider a few things that will help you plan your strategy. What do you want to do? How do you want to present your qualifications? Where do you want to look—and what will you do if that effort fails?

## Prior planning

Tuan knows enough to look before leaping into a job search. He starts by reflecting on his situation, including his skills, his employment goals, and his strategies for achieving those goals.

Tuan recently earned a bachelor's degree with a major in psychology and a minor in computer science. He might want to pursue graduate study in organizational psychology someday, but, for now, he seeks an entry-level job that relates to his interest in the way people function within organizations. He has set his sights on a job somewhere in his home State of California.

Talking to a counselor at his university's career center gives Tuan some good ideas about how to proceed. He also talks to friends, relatives, and professors about his jobseeking efforts. This yields more advice and some contacts. His plan begins to take shape. It covers the way in which he will communicate his qualifications in a résumé to potential employers, the search methods he will employ, and a list of other people and organizations that might be helpful.

Tuan's plan also includes a personal resolution: he will stop thinking of himself as an unemployed college

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graduate. He will instead be a person with the full-time job of seeking the best full-time job for him. When he finds that prize, he will have his *second* full-time job since college.

## Communicate qualifications

Like all jobseekers, Francesca and Alejandra each have a particular set of knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences that constitute their qualifications for doing particular types of work. They must clearly and accurately describe their qualifications to potential employers. Their job as jobseekers is to show how their qualifications match the requirements of positions that employers are trying to fill. They will approach this task in different ways because their employment goals and histories differ.

Alejandra and Francesca have little in common with respect to their careers. But they're similar as jobseekers. They assess their own talents and consider how to promote themselves as workers by focusing on the needs of employers.

**Identifying skills.** Francesca has worked as a construction laborer for two employers in Buffalo, New York, over the past 5 years. The snowy winters there slow construction activity, and Francesca has often found herself unemployed during the winter months. She decides to seek employment in a warmer climate where construction work is less seasonal. She thinks Florida or Georgia might suit her.

She explores some job-related Web sites and finds information about preparing résumés, but she has never used a résumé herself. The jobs Francesca has applied for have always required her to fill out an employment application instead. Then she reads "Résumés, applications, and cover letters" in the summer 1999 OOQ at [www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/1999/summer/art01.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/1999/summer/art01.pdf). (For a complete list of OOQ articles and other Web resources mentioned in this article, see "Web resources quick start" on page 13.)

As a result, Francesca begins to consider what skills and experience she has and how to describe them to a potential employer. It's not so easy. She's used to just doing her job—not thinking about what skills are involved. Luckily, she lives next door to her former high school career counselor, who offers some advice. He directs Francesca to an online database of occupational information called Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) OnLine at [online.onetcenter.org](http://online.onetcenter.org). Francesca does a search on "construction laborer." She generates a detailed report that includes lists of typical job tasks, work

activities, and skills ranked by importance.

She sees that she has more skills and varied work experiences than she thought. Francesca also notes that the top abilities identified for her occupation involve physical strength. This is no surprise, but it makes her decide to note her weight-training exercise regimen on any job application. She can bench press about 1½ times her own weight, making her stronger than many of her coworkers.

Francesca writes a description of her work experience, skills, abilities, and construction knowledge. After reviewing a copy of her current employer's standard job application, she knows what additional information she will need. It includes things like dates of employment, contact information for references, name and address of her high school, and Social Security number. Francesca records everything on a few sheets of paper for ready reference when filling out employment applications.

**Varied presentations.** Alejandra's attempts to highlight her qualifications take a different track altogether. Alejandra worked as an office manager in a legal clinic that provided free legal services for low-income residents in Fort Worth, Texas, until the clinic closed down for lack of funding. Prior to that job, she had worked as a legal secretary in a local law firm. She desires new employment as an office manager in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. She needs to figure out which employers to target in her search and how to craft her résumé, given her circumstances.

Alejandra turns first to America's Service Locator at [www.servicelocator.org](http://www.servicelocator.org). This Web site helps her to identify the nearest provider of public employment services, a One-Stop Career Center, where she can obtain a variety of employment-related services. If she had not had Internet access, she could have called the toll-free help line, 1 (877) USA-JOBS (872-5627), for assistance. She also could have applied for unemployment benefits online, but she prefers to go in person.

At the center, Alejandra finds a career library containing books about preparing résumés and other employment-related topics. Web sites providing similar information are conveniently bookmarked on publicly accessible computers. Alejandra chooses a résumé tutorial provided by America's CareerInfoNet at [www.acinet.org/acinet/resume/resume\\_intro.asp](http://www.acinet.org/acinet/resume/resume_intro.asp). She later visits the public library, where she checks out résumé writing books. She drafts a few versions of a résumé and asks her husband and two friends to read them and provide feedback. Then she makes an appointment to talk to an employment

counselor at the One-Stop Career Center.

Reading, studying sample résumés, and consulting with the counselor pay off. Alejandra ends up with two well-polished résumés. One is chronological and emphasizes her experience in the legal services industry; she will use it when approaching employers in that industry. The other is functional and focuses on transferable skills; she will use it when targeting other types of organizations.

### Select search methods

Many avenues merit consideration in identifying job openings. Jobseeking involves any or all of several methods. These include using personal contacts, calling employers directly, reviewing both print and online job listings, visiting State workforce agency offices, and tapping the resources of professional organizations and unions. Although there are many methods for seeking jobs, there are only two types of job openings: Advertised and unadvertised. All of the jobseekers in this article—except for Tariq, whom you will meet in a moment—plan to use at least two search methods. And they make sure that the methods they choose target both advertised and unadvertised

positions. They know that this enhances their chances of finding the right position.

Job experts differ in their estimates, but all agree that the number of unadvertised openings exceeds the number of advertised ones. A search that targets only

To find public employment services near you, visit [www.servicelocator.org](http://www.servicelocator.org) or call toll free: 1 (877) 872-5627.

advertised job openings thus likely misses more than half of the available opportunities.

But what about Tariq? He picks a single search method to pursue only unadvertised jobs, but he has his reasons. Tariq is a salesperson, married with four children whom he hopes to send to college. He wants to earn more money and buy a new car, so he devises a plan to shop for a new car and a new job at the same time. Tariq



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understands that the job market is a market like any other. There are buyers, sellers, and a product or service being sold. He devises a strategy for marketing himself—or, rather, his sales skills—as a commodity and commits himself to making his plan work.

## Ask for help

Many job-search activities involve asking someone else for help. Aaron isn't afraid to ask. He figures that asking for help is fine so long as he is polite and appreciative of any aid extended, however small. He finds some people surprisingly helpful. Every one of them was once a jobseeker.

Aaron recently completed an associate degree that has prepared him for a career as a medical assistant. He intends to find the best-paid position available for a

Many job-search activities involve asking someone else for help. Be polite and professional—and express your thanks for any aid received.

beginning medical assistant in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area.

Like Tuan, Aaron seeks counsel, contacts, and leads at his school's career center. He tells everyone he knows of his job quest, including friends, family, friends of his parents, professors, and medical staff he met during the internship he completed.

He gets in touch with his personal physician and asks him if he knows about opportunities in his group practice or elsewhere. He also talks to one of the medical assistants who works in his doctor's practice. It turns out that a lot of people Aaron knows either work in the healthcare industry or know someone who does. Any of them could serve as a source of information on job leads. Aaron could use the help.

## Stick with it

Kendra is a telemarketer in Des Moines, Iowa. She has an engaging, professional-sounding voice and seems conversational even when speaking from a telemarketing script. But it wasn't always so. She developed her pleasing phone manner through practice on the job.

After a few years on the telephones, she has decided she would prefer a position with more varied duties. She seeks a secretarial or administrative assistant position in Des Moines. Reflecting on her past job-hunting experiences, she tries to form a strategy. It took 3 months for her to find her current job, the longest months of her life. Like many job searches, hers involved a seemingly endless stream of rejections.

It was rough. But now she handles rejection better. Her telemarketing work taught her not to take it personally when people won't buy what she is selling. Kendra learned that rejection is part of a salesperson's work. Now she realizes that rejection is part of a jobseeker's work, too. As a telemarketer, she always finds enough customers by the end of the day, despite all the no's and hangups. A job search just takes longer. She resolves to remind herself again and again that the next encounter could result in a new job. She plans to persevere.

## Jobs on parade

When you read the words “advertised job openings,” what comes to mind? Kendra pictures help-wanted ads in her local newspaper. Alejandra thinks of job listings maintained by State workforce agencies. Tuan imagines scrolling through search results in his favorite online job bank. These are all advertised openings—vacant positions that an employer has paraded before the public in one or more venues to attract applicants.

Advertised job openings also include vacancies posted on the Web sites of individual employers, ads in professional journals, a placard in a restaurant window, and other public announcements. Traditional newspaper ads and online listings often overlap: many newspapers make their employment ads available by electronic means in addition to printing them with ink on paper.

See how our imaginary jobseekers adapt to the special attributes of online job listings, choose particular job banks from the thousands available, and maximize the efficiency of electronic searches.

## Surf and seek: Online listings

Tuan finds a book in the public library that lists thousands of employment-related Web sites. Many of them offer job listings. The number and variety of job-bank sites overwhelm Tuan. One site boasts almost 1 million job listings. Most have far fewer listings—only a handful, in some cases. There are sites offering listings for all types

of jobs and other sites specializing in specific fields, including human resources, healthcare, and hospitality. Some sites list vacancies for only a single occupation.

Professional and trade associations sponsor some sites; Federal, State, and local governments sponsor others; and private firms run many more. America's Job Bank—a project of the U.S. Department of Labor and State workforce agencies—serves jobseekers and employers free of charge. (See [www.ajb.org](http://www.ajb.org).) Other sites offer jobseekers free access to job listings and career information, but they charge employers for posting their vacancies or for placing other online advertisements. Still others charge jobseekers for services.

Web sites that provide job listings typically have a search engine for identifying vacancies based on geographic location, job title, job category, keyword, or other criteria. Tuan notices in his Web travels that several major job banks offer an automated job-search utility and a separate database for posting résumés.

**Job scouts.** Alejandra loves the automated job-search scouts at two of her preferred online job banks. These scouts—sometimes called job-search agents—periodically search job listings based on criteria that Alejandra specifies and notify her by e-mail when matching jobs are posted to the database. Without a scout, she would have to return to the job banks and search repeatedly.

**Résumé banks.** Résumé banks are the flip side of the employment looking glass. Just as jobseekers search job listings posted by employers, employers search résumés posted by jobseekers. The employers search résumé text for keywords that reflect the skills and other qualifications appropriate for filling a certain vacant position. How many jobseekers end up landing a position after an employer finds them in a bank? Nobody knows.

This uncertainty puts doubt in Aaron's mind. Aaron is a go-getter, and posting a résumé to a cyberbank seems like the most passive job-search technique of all. It reminds him of tossing a sock into a laundry basket—who knows if it will ever find its mate? Still, Aaron decides it can't hurt, so he makes his deposit in two résumé banks.

### Bank shopping

Kendra looks at several online job banks and asks herself some questions: Which job banks should I use? How much time should I spend searching for leads among these listings? Should I post my résumé to a résumé bank?

Many of the job banks claim to get the best results for

jobseekers. They can't all be right, Kendra reasons. And none of them backs up claims of effectiveness with data on the number of positions actually filled through the bank. Kendra reads rave reviews from five satisfied users

America's Job Bank serves  
jobseekers and employers free  
of charge. (See [www.ajb.org](http://www.ajb.org).)

of one job bank. She wonders how many of this bank's users had a similar experience.

Kendra decides to experiment with several large, general-interest job banks. She does searches for secretarial and administrative assistant jobs. She then compares the results to see which job banks return the most relevant listings. This helps her settle on America's Job Bank and two other privately run banks. For each site, she creates multiple job scouts, based on different search criteria. She also searches a fourth bank specializing in office and administrative support jobs.

Francesca does a similar experiment, but she finds very few listings for construction laborers. Her experiment reveals an important truth about job banks: Not all types of jobs are well represented in them. Francesca decides that online searches will play a very small role in her plan. Nevertheless, she defines job scouts at a few online banks; the return may be small in terms of the number of job leads found, but using the scouts keeps the time and effort expended to a minimum, too.

Alejandra likes to start her day with a newspaper and a cup of coffee. So, while she sips her morning coffee, she scans the employment ads in her local newspapers, even though she could access these same listings online. In addition, she culls leads from two job banks.

Alejandra and Kendra both limit the amount of time they spend pursuing advertised openings. They budget at least 70 percent of their time for chasing down unadvertised leads. Hunting for unadvertised leads consumes more time than searching for advertised ones. Both women strive to tap all sources of leads in the proper measure.

They also share concerns about résumé banks. What will a résumé bank do with information they submit? Will a site sell their contact information to telemarketers, for example? Kendra and Alejandra address these concerns by reading the privacy policy of job-related Web

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sites prior to submitting any identifying information. They note that America's Job Bank screens employers and enforces strict controls over personal information submitted by individuals.

Kendra and Alejandra will not post a résumé to a site unless they can request employer contacts via e-mail and be assured that the release of their phone numbers and street addresses remains under their control. Kendra goes a step further. She sets up a free e-mail account for exclusive use in her jobseeking endeavors. In this way, she shields her main e-mail address from unnecessary exposure.

Both jobseekers exercise similar caution in responding to job listings. Alejandra finds an online listing for a high-paying job with a company she has never heard of. The application instructions request that candidates furnish their Social Security numbers together with a résumé. Alejandra hears warning sirens. At this stage of the process, the employer should have no need for this information. Dishonest "companies" sometimes post fake job listings in a scam to obtain personal information for illegal purposes, such as identity theft. Alejandra follows up elsewhere.

## Searchcraft

Experimenting with different keyword combinations helps Kendra to identify the most effective search terms when probing the listings of a particular job bank. Before Kendra does her preliminary searches to compare banks, she reads the search tips for each. Although similar, the search engines for job banks are not all the same.

Most of the search engines allow the use of logical operators, such as AND, OR, or NOT, as well as quotation marks, which specify an exact phrase as a search term. The search engine at one bank offers an asterisk as a wildcard character to target different words that have the same root. For example, Kendra uses the term "secretar\*" in one search. It returns listings that include the words "secretary," "secretaries," and "secretarial." Another site's search engine uses a thesaurus to locate listings containing words similar in meaning to the user-entered keywords.

Some types of jobs are harder than others to target with search terms. According to America's Job Bank, "Useful keywords can include a job title, specific skills needed in that job, or the name of an industry or company." True enough. However, a phlebotomist will have an easier time searching online job listings than will an office manager like Alejandra. Her job title contains common words, so her search results may contain a lot of irrelevant listings. Worse yet, searching for the phrase

"office manager" alone might cause her to miss good prospects because office managers may go by other titles in a listing.

Like Kendra, Alejandra gives some thought to keywords. First, she visits the O\*NET code connector at [www.onetcodeconnector.org](http://www.onetcodeconnector.org). A search on the phrase "office manager" turns up the title "Administrative Services Manager." Armed with this additional title, Alejandra begins searching job listings. When she finds vacancies that interest her, she makes a note of them. Then she examines the job descriptions for words or phrases that might serve as additional search terms. Finding the job she seeks may depend on knowing another title for it.

## Jobs in hiding

Employers fill the majority of job openings without advertising them. These unadvertised openings are called "the hidden job market." Our jobseekers invest significant



time and energy seeking leads in this hidden market because of the large number of opportunities it offers. Pursuing unadvertised job vacancies might also entail less competition, and it gives jobseekers a chance to demonstrate initiative.

Hunting for jobs in the hidden market takes pluck. It requires initiative, communication skills, resourcefulness, time management, perseverance, and research skills. It thus requires many of the qualities that employers look for in new employees. Alejandra realizes this. In her job search, she conducts herself the way she thinks an employer would want its employees to act. Employers know that good jobseekers make good employees.

Alejandra imagines two employers having vacant positions for an office manager. One employer advertises in a major metropolitan newspaper and in online job banks. One hundred candidates send in cover letters and résumés to apply. Half of them are well-qualified for the job. The second employer has not yet advertised its opening. The only people who know about it are other employees in the organization.

Alejandra likes her chances of getting hired for the unadvertised position. She has the needed qualifications, and she has the ability to save the potential employer a lot of work. By hiring her, the employer will avoid having to assess 100 or more résumés and to interview numerous candidates. The employer would also fill the job faster and avoid the cost of advertising the position.

But selling an employer on her fitness for a position is not Alejandra's immediate concern. The first challenge for Alejandra—or for any jobseeker—is finding the hidden gem. Seeking out jobs in hiding often involves three things: Employment-related research, cold calling for job leads, and networking.

## Research for work

Jobseekers do employment-related research to identify and evaluate potential employers and to locate other useful job-market information. Francesca likes the idea of evaluating employers. It makes job hunting a two-way street: employers judge the merits of job applicants, but jobseekers can judge employers, too.

**Identifying employers.** Jobseekers use various online and offline techniques to identify companies and other organizations apt to hire workers like them. Once identified, potential employers can be queried about available jobs.

Francesca, Kendra, and Aaron each start compiling a

list of potential employers. They initially draw on different resources. Francesca first refers to several business directories in the public library to identify major construction employers in Florida and Georgia. Among the business directories that jobseekers may use are publications such as Dun & Bradstreet's *Million Dollar Directory*,

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Standard and Poor's *Register of Corporations*, and *Ward's Business Directory*. The librarian also helps Francesca find contact information for local Chambers of Commerce in Florida and Georgia, which she calls to request information on construction companies.

Kendra reaches for her phonebook and prepares to start calling local businesses. She deems the Des Moines *Yellow Pages* as good a source as any for her local job search. Many kinds of companies employ secretaries and administrative assistants. Kendra will keep a written record of all of the calls she makes and note the results, so that she can follow up if appropriate and stay organized.

Aaron first seeks employers online. He knows that most medical assistants work either in hospitals or in doctors' offices, and he wants to work in one of these settings. He wonders how much time to devote to exploring one work setting versus the other. Before trying to identify specific employers, Aaron visits the Industry–Occupation Employment Matrix page on the Bureau of Labor Statistics Web site: [data.bls.gov/oep/niuem/empiohm.jsp](http://data.bls.gov/oep/niuem/empiohm.jsp). His search yields a list of employment data for medical assistants by industry. The list reveals that about 60 percent of medical assistants work in offices of physicians and about 14 percent work in hospitals.

Aaron considers these percentages when he apportions his time pursuing job leads. For Aaron, hospitals are large employers, and doctors' offices are small employers. Aaron's segment of the labor market thus resembles the labor market at large. Large employers have more jobs than do small employers, but small employers employ more workers in total than large ones do.



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Next, Aaron uses the employer locator at America's CareerInfoNet at [www.acinet.org/acinet/emp\\_start.asp](http://www.acinet.org/acinet/emp_start.asp). He identifies listings for 38 general medical and surgical hospitals and 1,458 listings for offices and clinics of medical doctors in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. Each listing provides the name, address, and telephone number of the establishment. These listings represent only potential employers: there could be many small doctors' offices that do not employ any medical assistants. And most offices that do employ medical assistants will not currently have any openings. Nevertheless, Aaron plans to call 50 doctors' offices each day to inquire about vacancies for medical assistants.

**Evaluating employers.** Jobseekers may do different types of research for different reasons at various points in the job-search process. Many types of research that are appropriate regarding unadvertised positions are appropriate for advertised ones, too. Jobseekers generally will find that the larger the employer, the more information available.

Sometimes, jobseekers have to rely on informal methods of gathering information, such as making personal contact. Aaron, Francesca, and Tuan serve as examples.

Aaron has reasons for researching employers beyond identifying employment prospects. First, he wants to know which prospects are most likely to be hiring. Second, he wants to work for an employer that has a good reputation. Do the employees of the organization hold it in high esteem? Does the company enjoy good financial health? How do other firms in the industry view this competitor? Aaron wants to know. Third, he would like to walk into any job interview knowing something about the organization. Learning about the employer will better prepare him for an interview and give him confidence. Demonstrating knowledge about the organization will show his interest and will impress the employer.

After Francesca identifies some potential employers, she does preliminary research to determine which are the best prospects. She has compiled a list of 20 large

construction companies in her target area. Before contacting them, she uses a search engine to locate company Web sites. These sites let her see how the employers describe themselves.

She also searches online archives of newspaper articles in major metropolitan areas where companies are headquartered. She reads in one article that the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration has repeatedly cited one of the corporations for worker safety violations. Francesca removes this company from her list. She finds an article about another company that plans to start building a new suburban housing development in 8 weeks. She reasons that it will likely be hiring, so she moves this prospect to the top of her list.

Like Francesca, Aaron does initial research on potential employers in his target area. He skims through the hospital Web sites and reads recent newspaper articles about local hospitals. He finds less information about individual medical practices because they are smaller employers. Next, he makes some telephone calls. He has two friends from his medical assistant program who graduated a year ahead of him. They work in local hospitals.

Having contacts inside an organization often yields useful information. Aaron finds out that a vacancy for a medical assistant opened up just 3 days ago at one hospital. He also finds out that a second friend is looking for a new job because she does not like her current employer. Due to financial difficulties, this employer has not granted its employees cost-of-living pay increases for the past 2 years. Aaron's friend also says that her hospital does not have a first-rate reputation within the medical community. Aaron calls the first hospital to inquire about the vacancy and moves the second one to the bottom of his list of hospital prospects.

Tuan wants to work either in the human resources department of a large corporation or for an employment services firm. Ideally, he would like to assist industrial and organizational psychologists with their work in one of these settings. He's not sure what kind of job that might entail, but he knows informational interviews will help him find out more.

An informational interview involves career exploration—it's not an effort to find a specific job. See "Informational interviewing: Get the inside scoop on careers" in the summer 2002 issue of *OOQ*, available online at [www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2002/summer/art03.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2002/summer/art03.pdf). Besides being an avenue for exploring careers, an informational interview is also a form of labor-market

and employer research. Tuan wants to find out what kinds of jobs relating to organizational psychology he could qualify for within certain types of organizations.

Tuan has contact information for two local psychologists. One of Tuan's former psychology professors provided one of the contacts; his school's career center provided the other. Tuan calls both of his contacts, explains his situation, and asks for a brief informational

Besides being an avenue for exploring careers, informational interviews are also a form of labor-market and employer research.

interview. Both oblige. They are glad to spend a few minutes helping someone who has an interest in the work they do.

Tuan prepares by researching the employers of the people he will interview. Large, corporate entities that have shareholders must file certain information with the Securities and Exchange Commission. Tuan searches the commission's electronic data gathering, analysis, and retrieval (EDGAR) database at [www.sec.gov/edgar/searchedgar/webusers.htm](http://www.sec.gov/edgar/searchedgar/webusers.htm) for the most recent annual reports for the two companies. Each report tells about the company, its business model, its products and services, current conditions in its industry, organizational changes, subsidiary companies, and various other information. Later, Tuan returns to the EDGAR database when researching other employers.

The interviews prove fruitful. Tuan obtains two more contacts for informational interviews, learns about the kinds of support positions that exist in his area of interest, and receives tips about other employers that might be good prospects. He also gets a job lead. One of his interviewees has a colleague who conducts research and is employed by a university in a nearby city. The colleague needs a research assistant. Tuan follows up on this lead and adds the new prospective employers to his list

### **Cold calling**

For jobseekers, cold calling usually means making telephone calls to potential employers to ask about the existence of job vacancies. But cold calling has other

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variations. Some jobseekers may show up in person at an organization to inquire about job opportunities. Less active—and less effective—methods include mass mailing unsolicited résumés with cover letters and hiring an electronic résumé disseminating service. Cold calling targets unadvertised jobs in particular, but cold callers may also stumble upon advertised vacancies about which they previously were unaware.

Aaron has a lot of cold calls to make to medical offices. Before he picks up the telephone, he crafts an opening pitch that describes who he is and what he seeks:

Hello, my name is Aaron Adams. I recently graduated with honors from a 2-year program in medical assisting, and I am looking for an entry-level position as a medical assistant. Do you have any openings?

Often, the person who answers the phone will redirect his call to someone else in the office, so he repeats his pitch. If there are no current openings, Aaron inquires about the likelihood of there being openings in the next 4 months. He also asks how many medical assistants work in the office. Finally, he asks the person if he or she knows of any other medical offices that are hiring. He never forgets to convey his appreciation for the time taken to answer his questions. He records all the information in a log, along with the employer's name, address, and contact information and the date.

One day and 50 phone calls later, Aaron has yet to contact a medical office with an opening for a medical assistant. He plods onward. On the second day, he adopts tactics to sustain his enthusiasm and his friendly but professional telephone demeanor throughout the day. Making multiple telephone calls will tire anyone, but Aaron wants to make a good impression on every call. He tries standing up during his calls and watching himself in a mirror as he talks. If he makes himself look energetic and engaged, he will sound that way, too.

On call 22 of the second day, he uncovers an opening in a doctor's office. He sends a résumé and a cover letter, making sure that he uses the correct spelling of the addressee's name. Then he makes a note in his log to call and arrange an interview if he does not hear back in a few days. Meanwhile, he continues cold calling for more leads.

Some experts recommend that jobseekers contact the official within an organization who actually has hiring authority and try to arrange an interview even if there is no vacancy. But bypassing the personnel office or some other administrative person to target the hiring official is not always possible. This tactic sometimes works when

other approaches fail, but it takes nerve.

Kendra feels up to the challenge. Many of the employers Kendra has on her list are small, so she can often identify the hiring official simply by asking the name of the manager. In larger organizations, Kendra has a tougher time determining whom to call. In the case of one large firm, she learns the name of a mid-level manager from an article she reads as part of her research. Like Aaron, Kendra prepares opening lines:

Hello Ms. Carville, my name is Kendra Jones. I've heard and read quite a bit about your company's plans to expand. I have strong communication and computer skills, in addition to being a very organized and detail-oriented person. I'd really appreciate a few minutes of your time to discuss how my experience would enable me to contribute to your company as an administrative assistant. When would be a good time?

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As an experienced telemarketer, Kendra also scripts some responses to objections she might encounter:

Objection: I don't have any openings right now.

Kendra: I understand, but I know you are moving to new facilities, and I'm sure I could provide the extra administrative support that you'll need to ease the move and prevent a major break in operations. Maybe I could send you a résumé in case an opportunity arises.

Objection: I don't have time to meet with you. My calendar is booked solid.

Kendra: I know how busy you must be. Is next week or the week after a possibility? I'm flexible on times.

Objection: You'll have to go through human resources.

Kendra: I see. Whom should I contact in the human resources office?

Kendra used an example from the New York State Department of Labor Web site at [www.labor.state.ny.us/working\\_ny/finding\\_a\\_job/jssearch/conduct.htm](http://www.labor.state.ny.us/working_ny/finding_a_job/jssearch/conduct.htm) to help her write a script. As it turned out, Kendra did

# Web resources quick start

The World Wide Web offers an overwhelming array of resources for jobseekers. Some seekers get lost as a result. They click from one interesting site to the next and allow whatever pops up to determine the course of their job search. They have no plan, so the hours they spend in front of a computer monitor produce few job leads and no interviews. This is job-search death.

To avoid this fate, use offline resources at least as much as online ones. Create a plan for your job search and allow your plan to determine which resources to use when, and for what purposes. Developing a sound plan requires an understanding of basic techniques for crafting résumés and cover letters, cultivating job leads, networking, and researching employers. If you are not well versed in these areas, do some offline reading before you fire up your Web browser.

Maybe you're an experienced jobseeker who's never used Web resources for a job search. If so, the best way to start learning about online resources might be offline. Before launching into cyberspace, find a book about the types of Web resources available.

If you insist on starting your job search online, look first at the Career Resource Library of America's CareerInfoNet at [www.acinet.org/acinet/library.asp](http://www.acinet.org/acinet/library.asp). This site is one of many possible starting points for exploration online. The links under the sections called "Job and Résumé Banks" and "Job Search Aids" exemplify some of the most significant types of online resources for jobseekers. These include the following:

**Gateway, portal, or metaguide sites.** The Career Resource Library itself belongs to this category. These sites provide general information about job hunting or collections of links to different types of employment-related resources. The general information provided by these sites may help you form an effective search strategy.

**Job banks.** The job banks host listings of available jobs. Some list all types of jobs, while others specialize in specific occupations or industries or in entry-level opportunities. Sites may be national, statewide, or local in scope. Résumé banks often are associated with job banks. Jobseekers can post electronic versions of their résumé into a database that employers search when they have vacancies to fill. The larger job banks also provide other information, such as that described in the remaining categories.

**Employer research tools.** To identify potential employers and learn more about them, jobseekers may use online business directories, business rankings, nonprofit directories, stock market and financial reports, and other research resources. You'll find much helpful information about

employers online, but don't miss out on the traditional print directories at your local library.

**Résumés and cover letters.** Many sites provide guidance on formatting and content of different types of résumés and cover letters. Some provide instructive samples.

**Networking and interviewing.** Online articles and advice on these vital interpersonal aspects of jobseeking may prove useful. In the age of Internet, individual e-mail and subject-specific e-mail lists offer another venue for networking that supplements the traditional telephone and face-to-face methods. For some jobseekers, interviews via teleconference may become an option.

\* \* \*

All online resources cited within the article are noted again here for convenience.

## Articles online

"Résumés, applications, and cover letters":

[www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/1999/summer/art01.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/1999/summer/art01.pdf)

"Informational interviewing: Get the inside scoop on careers": [www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2002/summer/art03.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2002/summer/art03.pdf)

"Employment interviewing: Seizing the opportunity and the job": [www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2000/summer/art02.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2000/summer/art02.pdf)

## Job-search and reference sites

America's CareerInfoNet: [www.acinet.org/acinet/default.asp](http://www.acinet.org/acinet/default.asp)

Career resource library: [www.acinet.org/acinet/library.asp](http://www.acinet.org/acinet/library.asp)

Earnings data: [www.acinet.org/acinet/select\\_occupation.asp?stfips=&next=occ\\_rep](http://www.acinet.org/acinet/select_occupation.asp?stfips=&next=occ_rep)

Employer locator: [www.acinet.org/acinet/emp\\_start.asp](http://www.acinet.org/acinet/emp_start.asp)

Résumé tutorial: [www.acinet.org/acinet/resume/resume\\_intro.asp](http://www.acinet.org/acinet/resume/resume_intro.asp)

America's Job Bank: [www.ajb.org](http://www.ajb.org)

America's Service Locator: [www.servicelocator.org](http://www.servicelocator.org)

BLS Industry-Occupation Matrix site: [data.bls.gov/oep/nioem/empiohm.jsp](http://data.bls.gov/oep/nioem/empiohm.jsp)

O\*NET occupations database: [online.onetcenter.org](http://online.onetcenter.org)

O\*NET code connector:

[www.onetcodeconnector.org](http://www.onetcodeconnector.org)

SEC's EDGAR: [www.sec.gov/edgar/searchedgar/webusers.htm](http://www.sec.gov/edgar/searchedgar/webusers.htm)

Job Search Guide sample: [www.labor.state.ny.us/working\\_ny/finding\\_a\\_job/jssearch/conduct.htm](http://www.labor.state.ny.us/working_ny/finding_a_job/jssearch/conduct.htm)

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not have to respond to any objections because Ms. Carville had none. She granted Kendra an interview.

## Working the network

Alejandra knows a lot of people. Each of them, in turn, knows a lot of other people. This is Alejandra's network. Alejandra uses her network to discover job leads and other information. This is networking.

Alejandra's outgoing personality makes her a natural at networking. Her supervisory and administrative experience also give her an edge. She has cultivated her interpersonal skills over the years. She can call an acquaintance, briefly but gracefully catch up on recent developments in both of their lives, and slip in a request for information, making it seem like an afterthought.

In contrast, Francesca tends toward shyness. She acts with more reserve and does not have the same experience that Alejandra has. So for her, networking requires more effort. But every jobseeker can network, and networking may take different forms in different situations.

Anyone gearing up for a job search might benefit from reading up on networking. It has certain rules of

etiquette; it is both a skill and a social grace. It also has a practical aspect: creating and maintaining a list of contacts. However, much of the method involved in networking boils down to exercising common courtesy in asking a few questions and saying thank you.

**In practice.** Alejandra, Francesca, and Aaron all put their networks to work. Alejandra knows many lawyers from her prior position at the legal clinic. Her job as office manager was to supervise the clerical and paralegal staff who supported the lawyers. The clinic had 25 attorneys who each volunteered a few hours a week. Most of them work in local law firms. The former full-time director of the clinic also is also a lawyer.

Part of Alejandra's strategy involves identifying contacts within law firms. She calls the former volunteers to inquire about possible opportunities in their firms and for contacts at other firms. The attorneys all know first-hand that Alejandra is a very competent office manager. Her assistance helped to make their volunteer work at the clinic go smoothly.

Alejandra also asks the former director of the clinic for help. He attended law school locally, and some of his



former classmates work in town. He provides contact information. When Alejandra calls these attorneys, it helps to be able to say that a friend suggested that she call. Alejandra also contacts a legal secretary, a paralegal, and an attorney from the firm where she worked prior to her working at the clinic. These connections alone provide Alejandra with two leads resulting in job interviews.

Francesca tells her colleagues about her job-searching efforts and asks whether they have any sources of information about construction jobs in Florida or Georgia. One of her coworkers grew up near Atlanta and used to work for a construction firm there. He gives Francesca the name of his previous foreman. A union steward knows another union steward in Jacksonville. Francesca thus gains two contacts to follow up on.

Aaron turns to professional associations to expand his network. He learns that one association has local chapters with informal monthly meetings. The meetings provide the chance to network with other medical assistants in the area. Aaron talks with several people at the first meeting he attends and receives useful insights into the job market for medical assistants, as well as some specific job leads.

Some workers cultivate their networks all the time, regardless of whether they are currently seeking a job. Exchanging business cards or otherwise keeping track of people may aid some future job-hunting effort. Sometimes, networking can cause a better job to come hunting for you. Someone in your network might learn of a position, think you're perfect for the job, and give you a call.

**An inventive method.** Tariq adopts an unconventional networking strategy to obtain a higher paying sales position. He is well-established in sales at a men's clothing store. But now, instead of selling clothing, Tariq wants to sell cars—big-ticket items that could increase his earning potential. As it happens, he also plans to buy a new car in the next 6 to 12 months.

Tariq uses the phonebook to identify 20 car dealerships within a 25-mile radius of his home in a Chicago suburb. Each week on his day off, he visits one or two of the dealerships on his list. He introduces himself to a salesperson. He explains his timeline for buying a car and says that he's not sure how much car he can afford. He prefers top-of-the-line, but he realizes he might have to compromise and buy a less expensive model. He wants to take the time to shop around.

The salesperson shows him cars. Tariq pays careful attention, not just to the features of the product but also to the salesperson's approach to selling. Tariq takes the car

he likes best for a test drive. He chats with the salesperson some more and asks for a business card.

After 3 months, Tariq returns to the first dealership he visited. He asks for the person he spoke to previously, and they look at the model that he test drove. Tariq begins to talk price. A bit of back-and-forth bargaining occurs.

Every jobseeker can network, and networking may take different forms in different situations.

Then Tariq politely explains that he would like to get the manager's perspective on this model.

Tariq asks the manager two questions and then starts thinking out loud. He recites facts that he has previously researched in regard to the car. He sounds like he is trying to sell the car to the manager. After a few minutes, Tariq comes to the point. "I would love to buy this car," he says, "but to tell the truth, I don't think I can afford this model without the substantial discount I imagine you offer to your sales staff. I have sold men's clothing for 10 years. I am an excellent salesperson, and I believe I can sell automobiles as well as anyone on your staff. Can we do business?"

Tariq receives a job offer from the 10th dealership he revisits. Although this method worked for a fictional character, be wary about using such unconventional methods yourself. But do remember: Research, cold calling, and contacts matter in a job search. And a little ingenuity, if channeled properly, might enhance your efforts.

## Interviews and thank-yous

Mastering the techniques for finding job leads in the advertised and unadvertised markets furthers a job search because it helps jobseekers to obtain employment interviews. Interviews are the final and decisive hurdle that the jobseeker must clear. That's why interviews arouse anxiety among even the most qualified candidates. Successful jobseekers befriend this anxiety and make it work in their favor.

Kendra likens jobseeking to her years of playing on the high school volleyball team. She always felt nervous before a game, but the right amount of anxiety helped her to perform her best. She kept her pregame anxiety to

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a moderate level by practicing hard between games, knowing the rules, and following them. By doing these things, she readied herself to compete.

Now, as a jobseeker, she competes for a job—and the interview is the game. She studies the rules of interviewing and follows them. She and her fictional jobseeking cohorts also prepare for interviews in more subtle ways. Some of their preparation relates to their tactics in pursuing job leads, especially unadvertised ones. Research, interviewing experience, cold calling, and making contacts benefit interviewees. These activities allow jobseekers to interact with employers, gain experience describing their own qualifications, and build confidence for interviewing situations.

**Rules.** To prepare for her interview with Ms. Carville, Kendra reads articles about interviewing “do’s and don’ts.” She finds “Employment interviewing: Seizing the opportunity and the job,” from the summer 2000 issue of *OOQ*, online at [www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2000/summer/art02.pdf](http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2000/summer/art02.pdf). She also reviews other online resources relating to employment interviews. Having already researched the employer, Kendra mulls different ways to answer a list of common interview questions. She jots down some notes for potential responses and then thinks about past experiences and accomplishments that might support her answers. With a friend playing the role of interviewer, Kendra practices answering questions without looking at her notes.

For the interview, Kendra dresses professionally and brings copies of her résumé and references along with a pad and a pen to take notes. She arrives a few minutes early. When she meets Ms. Carville, she makes eye contact, smiles, and offers a firm handshake. Ms. Carville tells Kendra that she expects to hire an administrative assistant in a month or two. They discuss Kendra’s qualifications for the job, and then Kendra asks a few questions that reflect her knowledge of the company and focus on Ms. Carville’s needs as a manager. Kendra asks, for example, how the expansion of the firm might affect the job duties of Ms. Carville’s support staff and her priorities for their work. She also asks about advancement potential within the company to show her ambition.

After the interview, Kendra goes straight home and writes a letter thanking Ms. Carville for her time. Kendra briefly restates how her experience and skills would allow her to contribute to the company’s operations. She crafts the letter after reviewing published examples of interview

thank-you letters. Four weeks later, Kendra receives a call from Ms. Carville, who offers her an interview for a specific opening for an administrative assistant. Kendra is the only candidate interviewed, and she wins the position.

**Research.** Aaron obtains four job interviews during the first 2 months of his search. These interviews come about as a result of leads he uncovered by cold calling. He receives three job offers and politely declines them all because the salaries offered are low for entry-level medical assistant positions in Washington. Aaron knows this because he has done his homework.

He first researched wage data for Medical Assistants in Washington, DC, through CareerInfoNet at [www.acinet.org/acinet/select\\_occupation.asp?stfips=&next=occ\\_rep](http://www.acinet.org/acinet/select_occupation.asp?stfips=&next=occ_rep). Next, he made inquiries with classmates who recently found similar employment and with local medical assistants he met by networking via their professional association. He realized that the word-of-mouth information he obtained

Successful jobseekers befriend the normal anxiety that accompanies a job interview and make it work in their favor.

was probably a better gauge of entry-level salaries. The survey data he had located through CareerInfoNet reflected average earnings of all medical assistants in the area, regardless of their level of experience. Aaron expected entry-level salaries for less experienced workers to be lower than the average.

Ten weeks into his search, Aaron identifies an online listing for a position at a group medical practice. Aaron crafts a cover letter and submits it by mail, as instructed. He follows up by telephone 5 days later to schedule an interview. To prepare, Aaron finds the employer’s Web site and reads carefully. He learns about the type of practice, its philosophy of patient care, and the doctors’ specialties and professional backgrounds. Having this information gives Aaron confidence. During his interview, Aaron describes the approach to patient care he learned through his internship in a way that fits the group’s philosophy of care.

Afterward, Aaron e-mails each of the three doctors

with whom he spoke, thanking them for the interview, and also sends a nicely formatted version of the letter by regular mail. He gets a second interview and is offered a job at a higher than average starting salary. He takes it.

**Interview experience.** Tuan does four informational interviews with organizational psychologists. Each one helps him practice describing his work skills, academic accomplishments, and career goals, in addition to exploring career options. By the time he starts getting job interviews, he already feels comfortable talking about his qualifications. The first and second job interviews go well, and the third goes even better. Just when Tuan begins enjoying the process, he receives an offer for the job he had hoped to find. Later, Tuan learns that the contest was a tossup between him and another candidate. Tuan was chosen because he sent a thank-you letter after his

interview, and the other candidate did not.

**Cold calling.** Francesca's cold calling does more than turn up job leads. It also polishes her telephone manner and raises her comfort level for speaking to distant employers. This readies her for the telephone interview that ultimately gets her the job she wants.

**Contacts.** Alejandra has a longer path to follow. She identifies several job prospects over a 6-month period, but nothing clicks. Either the job requires more varied experience or education than she has, the work environment isn't right, or the competition beats her.

She decides to retrace her steps. She calls back all of the attorney contacts she spoke with previously and inquires about openings. One lawyer with whom Alejandra used to work has the prize. His firm's office manager just gave 2 weeks' notice. The attorney knows Alejandra's capabilities firsthand. Alejandra knows she has the job cold, but she puts in her best performance at the interview, anyway. And she immediately sends a thank-you letter, which arrives after she receives—and accepts—the job offer.

### **The morals of the story**

All six characters eventually found suitable employment. Jobseekers should expect rejection but plan to persevere. Tariq, Kendra, Alejandra, Tuan, and Francesca secured employment via varying combinations of employer research, cold calling, and networking. These methods work.

Only Aaron got a job as a direct result of an employment advertisement. Pursuing unadvertised jobs often pays. Although Aaron filled an advertised vacancy, his use of employer research and the experience he gained from interviews resulting from cold calling prepared him to succeed in his final job interview.

Using multiple job-search techniques confers many advantages. Most of the jobseekers used both online resources and offline resources; Tariq did not use the Internet at all. An effective job-search strategy relies on any collection of tools that makes sense for the individual's unique circumstances.

The labor market may seem like a job-hunting wilderness. Not to worry. Plan your route well, and choose the right tools for the territory and the task at hand. And if you fail to reach your destination, consult your compass and try a different direction.

