

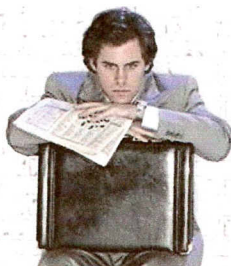
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Better Job Searching in a Recession

By Kate Lorenz, CareerBuilder.com Editor



Ryan Saale was in a bind. He was planning to move back to St. Louis from Santiago, Chile, earlier this year but, with the job market taking a downturn, it wasn't an ideal time to start a job search -- much less from 5,000 miles away.

In preparation for the big change, he started doing freelance public relations for a large arts organization in St. Louis, while still in Chile. "Taking on the extra work was challenging, but freelancing for three months before moving helped get me revved up for job searching, building contacts and networking," Saale says. By trying a different approach to job hunting, Saale ended up finding a permanent position after a colleague on the freelance project recommended him.

"During a recession it is best to move forward with force, while your competition is moving slowly. It is easy to use the economy as an excuse," says Roberta Chinsky Matuson, president of Northampton, Mass.-based Human Resource

Solutions. "Successful job seekers know that even in tough economic times, there are opportunities. You just have to dig a bit deeper."

If you are getting ready for a job search during troubled times, here are some tips from the experts.

1. Take a closer look at industry data

Research industries and job sectors that are experiencing worker shortages or still experiencing job growth. These are the areas where you may want to focus your search.

CareerBuilder.com produces a quarterly job forecast that indicates hiring manager trends for the next few months, both regionally and across major sectors. The Bureau of Labor Statistics releases updated figures every month on occupational job growth. For example, by looking at the BLS data, you will learn that [health care](#), [education](#), [government](#), [food services](#) and [drinking places](#), and IT categories have all gained jobs this year.

2. Freshen up your skills

"Don't give an employer a reason to pass you over because you don't know the basics," states Diane Morgan, director of career services at London Business School. Morgan says everyone should know basic office skills like [Microsoft PowerPoint](#) and [Excel](#). "Since these are skills you can teach yourself from the Internet or a library book, there are no excuses for not having them."

Another alternative is CBInstitute.com, which offers easy-to-use online courses at all levels, including business etiquette, project management, foreign languages and typing. You can take courses at times that are convenient for you, so no matter how little time you have to invest, you can make it work. At the same time, the courses are affordable.

Morgan also suggests brushing up your [sales skills](#) (persuasion, negotiating and influencing) even if you aren't in the sales industry. You need to sell your best product, which is you, so make sure your personal pitch is relevant, timely and effective, she asserts.

3. Try part-time or freelance work.

"Rather than one 'job,' think in terms of multiple positions. Breaking in [to a new job] may be easier if you aim for part-time work within a company," advises Katy Piotrowski, career counselor and author of "The Career Coward's Guides." "Line up multiple part-time positions and you'll benefit from more job security; if one position evaporates, you have the others to fall back on." Moreover, it will pad your résumé and your wallet.

Rachel Weingarten, author of "Career and Corporate Cool," recommends job sharing or taking over for someone on maternity leave or during the holiday crunch. "A lot of people don't want to commit full-time skills to a [part-time](#) or [temporary](#) gig. In this economy though, it can allow you to not only try on a job for size, but to also improve your skills, impress a potential long-term employer and network like crazy with people in your chosen industry," she says. "Instead of nervously waiting for the right full-time career, you can potentially make something better happen in the short term."

4. Rev up your social networking

Gone are the days of peddling your résumé at anonymous networking events with watered-down drinks and goofy nametags. Now you can have countless opportunities with a few keystrokes and a couple of mouse clicks. Sure you've received those requests to join LinkedIn and BrightFuse, and you certainly use Facebook daily. (Scrabble anyone?) But now is the time to really take advantage of the network you've probably casually built over the years.

Networking is easier than in years past because of the easy access to your network and those of your friends and colleagues, Matuson declares. "Now you can go onto [social networking] sites and see who in your network knows someone at a company that you might be interested in working for. You can then ask them to make an introduction on your behalf."

5. Think in terms of results

"In today's recessionary environment, the single most important thing that a job seeker can do to advance his or her career is to demonstrate how they can build value for a company," says Wendy Enelow, author, trainer and career consultant.

"As we all know, past behavior is indicative of future behavior, so if you've been successful in growing sales, slashing overhead costs, improving profit margins on specific products, capturing new clients, etc., then clearly and prominently position those achievements within your résumé and other job

search communications," Enelow suggests.

6. Role play

Practice your answers to interview questions -- especially the one that explains why you aren't working, recommends J.T. O'Donnell, a nationally syndicated workplace columnist. "If you were fired, or part of a layoff, you most likely are struggling to deal with this adversity. Role play with someone so you can get comfortable with your answer," she proposes.

"Confidence is key. You'll need to be able to explain the situation in a way that is authentic and sincere without sounding bitter or defeated. Try to stay positive and share what you've learned from the experience -- employers hire folks with good attitudes and the ability to handle adversity."

7. Polish your brand and market it

"How you choose to market yourself will directly impact how long it will take to find a new job," O'Donnell declares. "Identify your strengths and put together the best possible personal brand." You can do this with a flawless résumé, customized and compelling cover letters, and articulate and engaging networking.

"Searching for a job is the same in any type of market. You should be prepared, professional and do the work for the interviewer," Morgan says. "Don't make them guess or imagine how you could fit in -- that is your job ... If you can't make yourself relevant, your résumé will quickly be on the bottom of the pile."

8. Find opportunity in your current position

"New skills can come from a small part of your job that you most enjoy doing," Morgan declares. Ask your current employer to send you to a conference, pay membership dues or join an association.

You can also leverage dreaded tasks by seeking out ones that match a future interest, Morgan adds. "If you dream of running a nonprofit but are an operations manager, volunteer to run the community day for your company. A former law colleague is now the head of PR for a botanic garden because she leveraged her hobby. "

9. Be realistic

"Get real about the time it will take to find a new job," O'Donnell asserts. "In this current job market, I tell clients to expect it to take at least three months to find a job that pays \$40,000. Add one month for every \$10,000 more you want in salary. In other words, if you are looking for \$80,000 a year, expect it to take at least seven months to find a new job."

Kate Lorenz is editor and career adviser for CareerBuilder.com. She researches and writes about job search strategy, career management, hiring trends and workplace issues.

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