

How to Successfully Leverage Job Boards

As career professionals, our clients come to us seeking information on how to secure their next job. There's no argument that searching for a job has changed tremendously over the past years. It's still an ever-changing environment and often leaving our clients scratching their heads in confusion about the best way to go about their job search.

The typical approach for clients, left to their own devices, is to hit the Internet, find job postings online, click the "Apply Now" button, and wait for the phone to ring. As resume writers and career coaches, we may balk at this approach – but should we?

So, we gathered client input on this important topic by asking these questions:

What are your thoughts and tips on using job boards in the job search?

Specifically:

- Love them or hate them – why?
- Recommend them – which one(s)?
- Favorite strategies to be successful with job boards?

Job Boards – Love Them or Hate Them?

Before we jump into how to best utilize job boards for job search and/or job research strategy, let's see what our experts have to say about these online tools. While some of our client's "hate" job boards, many can see the value in them; if not for conducting a job search, then for researching and creating resume strategy for their clients.

Dislike Job Boards: Client Feedback

- "I despise job boards because they have become the standard for job search although they are largely ineffective time wasters."
- "If a client wants to post his/her resume on a job board, I highly discourage it—it's very passive and doesn't often garner any results. Talk about a non-targeted job search!"
- "While job boards are commonly known for reaching thousands of employers and recruiters, often jobseekers' applications get quickly skimmed over or lost in a portal as they are competing among thousands of jobseekers locally and abroad."
- "Job postings on job boards may be outdated or already taken (via internal hiring process) even though they are still posted. Some jobs may not even exist."
- "According to CareerXroads, a recruiting site, only 12% of all hires can be attributed to job boards; other studies place the figure even lower."
- "I don't recommend clients ever spend a lot of time on them."
- "They offer a reactive approach to job search."
- "Job boards aren't inherently bad, but the concern we see with many of our clients is that they rely solely on them as their gateway to employment."
- "I really discourage my executive clients to rely heavily on job boards as I believe they should focus more on their professional network to find their next position."

Like Boards for Job Search: Client Feedback

- "I like that clients can set alerts for jobs of interest as it cuts down on 'trolling' time."
- "All-in-all, job boards are not a one-stop shop, but when cleverly combined with networking, cold contacting, building a strong presence on LinkedIn, and other creative methods, they can help to open doors to your client's success."
- "I love that some job boards aggregate jobs from the internet and allow candidates to set up searches where they received an email each time a new job match appeared."
- "I've recently seen a slew of clients rapidly land interviews with multiple companies when using Indeed as an aggregator to notify them of matching opportunities. In each case they only applied to jobs that were a close match for them, taking the time to tailor the resume to the company and position, and also uploading a reference page and custom cover letter. While they were coached to track down the leads via LinkedIn and the Internet for networking, in most cases there were interviews before that could be completed."
- "While job boards are a less modern form of applying to jobs; they at the least, put resumes in the applicant pool."
- "It's critical that job seekers are taught to use job boards as a springboard and not the whole breadth of their job search strategy."

Like Them for Research: Client Feedback

- "I think job boards can be a useful tool to research what companies are looking for in their prime candidates."
- "Job boards can be utilized in the job search as not only a resourceful job application tool, but for researching, forecasting, and strategic planning."
- "Job boards represent a great way for finding alternative titles and positions that match a candidate's skill, broadening what they knew they qualified for (since some companies use very specific, niche, and unusual titles). Indeed.com (Indeed) does a very good job of finding similar opportunities and emailing those leads."
- "The job board can be used as an aggregator. This helps the resume writer to effectively keyword-optimize and tailor the client's resume."
- "Some job boards have come a long way, especially Indeed and LinkedIn's Jobs tab, and may actually change our notion of what's useful to candidates on sites doing 'published' job postings."

Regardless of your love / hate relationship with online job boards, be sure to be open to their possibilities. In fact, one respondent was proved wrong about her belief of online job boards!

"I used to believe that employers were too overwhelmed by the quantity of resumes received from these postings, however, directly assisting a family member in their job search last Fall proved me wrong. It was an easy way to find jobs that matched his skills, learn about what companies to research more and look into networking further with, and quickly apply. With an outstanding resume, custom cover letter, and list of references, this individual was able to land about a 33- 50% interview rate on jobs applied and had landed a position within 60 days."

As you can see, there is a wide range of opinions on how to best utilize job boards with your clients. Let's dive deeper into how to use these tools for research, resume writing strategy, and job search. Then we'll go into recommended job boards and alternatives to online job hunting.

Job Boards for Research and Strategy

Whether or not our members liked job boards for a client's search, there is an overwhelming consensus that they are useful for job research and resume writing strategy. The research can help both jobseekers and resume writers to formulate how best to approach creating the client's documents.

Research for Jobseekers

Conducting research online can fuel the career planning and decision-making process for jobseekers.

Your clients can identify companies that are hiring in certain sectors and locations, find the top recommended employers via reviews, discover in-demand jobs and skills, identify different titles that match their skills, and explore growing industries.

Searching for jobs online can sometimes lead a jobseeker to uncover more career-related ideas, possibilities, and identify a broader range of opportunities where they can apply their unique combination of skills and experience to solve problems in an organization. A jobseeker can then gather data to strategize their job hunt; e.g, building up a network, using social media, researching company websites, or seeking other means such as volunteerism, committee work, or referrals to get their foot in the door.

They can also find salary reviews for certain roles to see pay scales, which can help in the negotiation process.

Research for Career Professionals

Job boards aren't just for jobseekers. For most resume writers, a non-negotiable for clients is that they send you sample job descriptions. In asking this question, you're bound to get links from LinkedIn, Indeed, or other industry job boards. We know the importance of using these job descriptions to write targeted career documents for our clients.

Some job boards, like Indeed, are excellent aggregators in that they collect job postings from all over the Internet bringing them together in one place. They help you to effectively keyword-optimize and tailor the client's resume and/or brand marketing collateral in alignment with the career focus, offerings, and employer's requirements. This also helps the resume get through the ATS.

Many of the respondents suggest their clients use job boards to identify the jobs they want. This helps you in writing their resumes, narrowing focus of questions to ensure their accomplishments, knowledge, and skills are relevant to the career they want.

Encouraging your clients to perform their job research online through tools like LinkedIn, Google, and Indeed can be a helpful way for you to target their documents for the roles they will ultimately be applying for.

Further, some resume writers use job boards to perform targeted research before starting the resume content collection process with their clients. If a client is in an unknown position or is seeking a promotion above their experience level, such research can help to identify questions to ask or even gaps not covered in their current resume that could be selling them short. CDI President, Laura DeCarlo, suggests presenting it as part of the service ROI by presenting it in the consultation as, "I perform research to do my due diligence and make sure that critical key words and expertise aren't left out because one of us takes it for granted or thinks it will be assumed. It's so easy when you do something all the time or write about it to think everyone will just expect it. This covers our bases."

Further, she shares that when you do identify gaps in a current resume, it presents a perfect opportunity in the resume content collection interview to say, "Based on other clients I've worked with in this position, there are a few areas of expertise you haven't mentioned and I didn't see on the resume you sent me. Let's go over them now to see if they are applicable and need to be delved into further." If your client wasn't convinced you were an expert to trust before, they will now!

Job Boards for Job Search

As you can see from the responses above, not all respondents are thrilled with jobseekers applying to positions through online job portals. However, how a client goes about their job search is ultimately up to them. If you coach away from job boards, there is still a chance your client will hit the "Apply Now" button once in a while. Regardless of your thoughts, there are some effective strategy tips for conducting an online job search.

Format Correctly

As career professionals, we're called upon to set our clients up for success – even if they're using job boards. If your client isn't sure if they'll use job boards or not, it's important to create an ATS-formatted resume and coach them on how to tailor the document for each and every job for which they're applying.

Resumes posted to jobs on job boards, or uploaded to job boards, must pass through ATS screening. The first test is the format. Most resume templates use text boxes and tables that cannot be read by ATS. Professionally written, ATS-friendly resumes are formatted properly and use keywords that ATS screens for, so that they will have a higher chance of being read by a human being.

The second test is content. It's important for candidates to be a good fit for the position and to customize the resume and cover letter to each position because each company and department uses different criteria and keywords, even if the job title is the same.

Despite having the option to use the resume that is already on file, encourage your clients to customize each application for every position they are applying to. They will be prompted to 'use existing resume' or 'upload a new resume' and we all know the importance of including the right keywords and tailoring the achievements to support the targeted role.

To beef up the relevant keywords, one respondent experimented with adding a 'Snapshot of skills applied' within each position the client has held with a brief list of the primary hard skills that were important for the role. This has been done in lieu of a 'core competencies' or 'areas of expertise' section that normally gets included at the top of the first page.

Set Up Alerts

Job boards are not as effortless as they appear to be; however, many job boards do give clients the option to set up alerts if relevant opportunities are posted and can set them up to be an early applicant.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that without establishing a clear set of parameters their inboxes will be flooded with useless notifications. Search criteria should include job titles, industry, geographical radius, and salary range, so they may need to tweak these until the algorithm is aligned with their target roles.

It is becoming more apparent that text messaging is playing an ever-increasing role in the modern job search. Encourage your clients to make it as easy as possible for recruiters to contact them, which may include via text.

Stay Organized

If your client would like to use a job board, tell them to be systematic about it. They must track their movements online in order to stay organized. By keeping a simple spreadsheet, they can stay on top of their applications and progress. Here are some components to track to avoid confusion and frustration:

- Company Name
- Title / Reference Number
- Job Description (copied into individual cell or linked tab or document)
- Job Board Used
- Application Date / Closing Date / Hiring Date
- Name of Resume / Cover Letter Used
- Point of Contact with Contact Information (if known)
- Date of Contact / Phone Interviews / In-Person Interviews

The hiring process can move at a snail's pace, and when your client gets called for an interview a month after they applied, they'll have all the information they need to adequately prepare.

Encourage your clients to track down the hiring manager and contact them directly. This will often require some investigative work, but through a combination of Googling, reviewing company websites, and running filtered LinkedIn searches you can usually pinpoint the person with hiring authority.

One respondent recommends finding your targeted contact's email with a free email hacking tool. After your client has applied, they can send an email to the manager to let them know how interested and excited they are about the position. Mentioning one or two of their most notable accomplishments is a great way to entice them, and course, if they share any common ground or mutual connections this can be mentioned to establish familiarity. If the hiring manager is impressed, they can have HR flag the resume for an interview or line a meeting up directly.

Avoid the Time Suck

Clients are surprised to learn that only 2% to 3% of jobs are filled through job boards. Candidates are competing with hundreds of people. Some advertised jobs are already filled but the organization is required to advertise, and some employers are simply doing market research about the candidate pool.

Don't let clients get sucked down the job board black hole. Job boards shouldn't take up more than 25- 30% of a professional's job search. Blue collar candidates may find sites like Indeed to be the easiest way, however. But again, it still shouldn't exceed more than 40% of time spent job searching.

Recommended Job Boards

Whether for research or for application, some job boards rise above the rest for ease of use, reputation, and information shared.

LinkedIn.com

LinkedIn came to the top for most of our respondents because of what they now share with applicants on the site's Jobs tab. As of this writing, some features are:

Seeing who at the company has posted the job (with a link to their LinkedIn page!)
Viewing the top 10 skills the job poster says are needed for the job, and how your skills (in your profile under Skills & Endorsements) compare. This is huge!
LinkedIn is always on that list because of its global reach.

Indeed.com

As an aggregator, Indeed collects descriptions from many other sources. The upside of this approach is that it provides a lot of jobs in one place and offers email notifications when the client profile matches a job description.

- It also excels because:
- It keeps track of client searches, so they can look at them again.
- It gives relatively realistic estimates of salary levels; until American companies list salaries in their job postings like many European companies do, this may be the best available.
- It gives reviews of the company by current and former employees.
- It links to company sites.

Professional Association Boards / Niche Boards

Another way to increase your clients' chances of selection is to apply to jobs posted on professional association job boards. National and local chapter job boards list positions only for their members, which means less competition.

Jobseekers can also access niche job boards in their area of interest to further streamline the job search process. For example, DICE.com (Technology), Constructionjobs.com (construction jobs), idealist.org or charityvillage.com (non-profits), or Workhoppers (Freelancers).

If your client has a specific career goal in mind, try an industry-focused job board. Employers and recruiters rely on such platforms to find qualified candidates who know what they are looking for in a career. For example, www.careersinfood.com lists all kinds of jobs for professionals in the food and beverage industry. It offers a variety of great tools for job seekers to find the right company or the right opportunity. iHire also has 56 industry-specific talent communities—from iHireDental to iHireConstruction and beyond—that connect job seekers with employers more efficiently.

For college seniors or recent grads, encourage them to check their college's job board if they have one (check the Career Center page). They'll likely learn the recruiter's name. In both cases, they'll have much less competition than you see on the "big" boards and may even have more network connections.

Alternatives to Online Job Boards

The old adage is still true—it's not what you know, it's who you know.

Train your clients to network. A job application through a web site is not enough, even with your genius resume! They still must find contacts in the company they are applying with and cultivate relationships to support their application. Because of the short timelines in many application processes, this strategy is less effective when used with an application than when used without an application, before a job is listed.

Association job boards also have another advantage over advertised job listings. You can use member directories to find members of the organization in order to research their challenges, goals, and culture

before you apply and interview. In the process, you may also find positions that are not advertised. These "hidden" jobs comprise about 75% of the job openings and are your best bet for locating great positions with little or no competition.

It's also recommended for clients to apply to jobs using the company websites rather than job boards. When a jobseeker applies through a job board, he/she needs to establish a connection with the employer or key decision-maker beforehand through LinkedIn, in person, follow-up, or via referrals.

Networking serves as a key piece in job search along with showcasing compelling brand marketing collateral. Through networking, jobseekers can learn about leads that haven't been published and may result in job-seeking clients to get nominated by company insiders for those jobs.

Conclusion

The objective for this tip sheet wasn't to put you on either side of a job board love / hate spectrum, but rather encourage you to see the angles at which you—and your clients—can approach these online portals with some hope of return on investment. Remember, ultimately, the goal as a career professional is to coach your clients in a way that fits their needs while sharing job search best practices that will set them up for success.

Ruling job boards out altogether may or may not be the solution for your clients. Just as a resume needs to be targeted to each job description, your approach to job boards should be targeted towards each client. Whether you avoid job boards, use them for research, or encourage your clients to utilize them, being educated in the pros and cons of the resources available will help you provide the best possible service to each and every one of your clients.