Developing your search strategy

Do you remember those “Choose Your Own Adventure” books you read in elementary school? Well, developing your strategy is a lot like that. You may start off down one path to find that it’s not working, or that it didn’t pan out the way you wanted. You may end up deciding you want to go off in a new direction. An unexpected opportunity might present itself. The job search is also a very personal process. There is no one job search technique that will work every time for everyone.

Pizza

Job search facts

- **80% of all positions are filled without employer advertising.** Employers like to hire people they know, who have been referred by a trusted source, or who have made contact directly.

- **98% of U.S. employers have fewer than 100 employees** and often do not directly recruit from college campuses.

- **The average bachelor degree holder will have about 12 different jobs over their working years.** Your first job out of college is just the beginning of a lifelong job search process! You’ll need to become skilled at job hunting.

The top line tips

- The Internet should not be your only means of searching for a job.

- **Talking to people**, asking questions, and being about to effectively describe who you are and what you’re looking for may be your best job search method!

- Conduct information interviews (pages 23-25) and don’t be afraid to network (page 57).

- Take advantage of MSU resources like Handshake, career workshops and events, employer events and info sessions, LinkedIn groups like Spartan Links, and student organizations to discover potential employers.
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_define what you’re looking for_

What are your search criteria? Be honest with yourself and the people you talk with about your search (whether it’s a Career Advisor, or professional contacts you’ve made). Common search criteria are:

- Geographic location
- Application of your skills
- Connection to interest/passion
- Fit with work values
- Compatibility with personality

If you find that you’re having a hard time putting parameters around your search, start by going back to the “Explore Your Future” section (pages 14-29) for tips on resources, tools, and methods for getting some clarity. Some people think it’s good to be flexible in your job search, and to some extent it is. However, the more you can narrow down what you’re looking for and where, the more likely you’ll be able to uncover viable possibilities.

The better you can describe the kinds of opportunities you’re aiming for, the easier you can organize your search appropriately. You may have different methods that you use for different kinds of positions, organizations, fields, or geographic areas.

_field-specific research: focus & identify opportunities_

**Focus & identify opportunities.** Research can make all the difference in your search. It’s your job to do the research needed to understand your top employers’ needs and place yourself in situations where you can demonstrate your abilities. *Where do you find the people you want to work with?*

- **Professional organizations.** Nearly every profession you can think of has a professional organization — American Institute of Graphic Arts, American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science, Association of American Publishers, American Sociological Association, Society of Illustrators, American Chemical Society, Association of Music Writers and Photographers — to name just a few.

For links to professional organizations that might be of interest to you, check out “What Can I Do with This Major?” and our online Career Tools at CareerNetwork.msu.edu/search (see page 9). Even a basic Google search with the name of your field of interest and “professional organization” will often yield good results.

- Professional organization websites usually have info on current trends, salary surveys, job listings, directories of accredited graduate/professional programs and more. Check to see if they offer a discounted rate for student members and join while you’re still in school!


- **Job listing and professional resource sites.** Use Career Tools at CareerNetwork.msu.edu to find links to job boards, lists of potential employers, industries, and professional organizations. You can search by geographic location and even find salary information and get info about where recent MSU students landed their first job!

- **Social media.** See more tips on page 59.
geographic research: the right place, the right job

If you’ve got some particular geographic areas in mind, there are resources that can help you uncover employers by location.

▶ Click on Career Tools at CareerNetwork.msu.edu/search (page 9) to find accurate, up-to-date information on potential employers and contacts in a wide range of industries nationally and internationally. Explore the industry (or industries) and geographic area(s) you’re interested in, and find employers located there! You can also research salary information and get valuable insider information on industries, career fields, employers, cities, and countries.

▶ MSU Libraries has databases, subscriptions and other resources offering a wealth of information on specific employers. And unlike a generic Google search, the MSU library provides free employer info that is authoritative, credible, and timely. Email the Gast Business Library for help with employer research: gastbus@bus.msu.edu.

▶ Find and make use of local resources such as newspapers, networking groups, Chambers of Commerce, and regional alumni clubs (check out alumni.msu.edu).

Additional sources include:
- Employer websites
- Annual reports
- Recruiting materials/websites
- Marketing materials
- Media articles and press releases
- And don’t forget social media!

develop your strategy

As you develop your search strategy, you should:

▶ Create a list of 5–10 organizations where you’d like to work. These should get most of your attention. Actively work to meet people in the organizations and learn more.

▶ Create a second list of organizations you have some interest in. Do some basic research to refine the level of your interest and find possible networking or career openings.

▶ Keep a log of research and activities, so you know whom you’ve called, when, and next steps. It’s embarrassing to call someone twice because you forgot that you already called.

if you’re considering graduate school

The MSU website grad.msu.edu offers a variety of resources from how to apply to graduate school to how to fund your graduate education. Other great sources for grad school info:

▶ Search using “Grad School” filter at msuCareerTools.

▶ Check out the Summer Research Opportunities Program, a gateway to graduate education, at grad.msu.edu/SROP.

▶ Petersons.com, allows you to search for programs by type, degree offered, and location, and get info on financing your advanced degree, test preparation, and more.

▶ PhDs.org allows students to run customized rankings from the National Research Council.

▶ GradSchools.com offers articles about graduate education and tips about the graduate admissions process.

▶ DiverseEducation.com/top100 provides rankings of graduate programs in each discipline by minority student participation.

▶ Interfolio.com/dossier is a web-based service that can hold letters, evaluations, and unofficial transcripts for candidates applying to graduate/professional schools or seeking employment in the field of education; documents kept in your file will be sent out upon your request. Note that this is a fee-for-service resource.