

NETWORKING

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THE LADDER

By COTTEN TIMBERLAKE

Job Seekers Switch Formats to Adapt To Web Recruiting

PARIS — With more companies recruiting directly through their own career sites on the Web, job seekers are going to have to get with the program.

And no, high-ranking execs aren't exempt. Although employers are mostly pulling in entry- and middle-level recruits via this route, this does go all the way to the top.

"It's a different scene and job seekers will have to adapt to this," says Yves Lermusiaux, president of iLogos Research, an Internet consulting company.

Sure, it's a pain, reworking the information on your CV to fit a potential employer's sometimes long and laborious electronic format. And so is learning how, in the current highly competitive environment, to capture an employer's attention with a snappy, e-mailed self-introduction and the right key words.

But this trend also offers benefits to the job seeker, including speed and efficiency. As well as discretion, which counts in the boardroom. Add to that the opportunity to target specific companies.

Fortunately, companies are fast improving their sites to make them easier for you to use because they benefit from this trend — yeah, it's cheaper — too. The improvements include easier-to-fill-out forms, better job descriptions, multiple languages, "job agents" and more. All of Europe's top 500 companies will have career sites, post jobs and accept applications on the corporate Web by 2004, predicts iLogos, which recently released a study on the subject.

Already, 76% of the top 500 now have careers sections: 55% post job openings while 52% post openings and accept applications on their sites.

Direct comparisons aren't available but in 1998, only 29% of the world's biggest 500 companies used such sites. Now 88% do.

"We are really pushing people to apply with us online," says Wim Demessemaekers, senior human-resources marketing officer for PricewaterhouseCoopers in Belgium. Even when this Pricewaterhouse unit runs a newspaper ad, he says, it refers interested parties to the Web site.

Companies are taking this route to begin to cut out more expensive intermediaries such as newspapers and headhunters, says Mr. Lermusiaux. The corporate cost of a single recruitment is indeed much cheaper: about €1,000 on the Internet compared with €2,000 for a campus-recruited candidate; €5,000 through a newspaper ad; and €12,500 by way of an executive search firm, which might charge, for example, 30% of a candidate's first year salary.

Now if you're, say, a director, and you're thinking this cost-cutting trend really won't apply to your job search, you're probably kidding yourself.

Just consider these numbers: Out of some 1,500 job-seeking respondents to a separate iLogos study, 28% turned to corporate career sites in search of an entry level position, 29% a staff position, 18% team leader and 25% manager, executive or director.

But just think: You'll enjoy the kind of anonymity that ever-mingling executive recruiters can't always guarantee. "The higher up you are, the most unwilling you are to reveal who you are," Mr. Lermusiaux says.

And tell yourself that the online application process is getting easier all the time.

Shortening the time for filling in a form is among the things Cisco Systems is doing, says Xavier Petre, a Brussels carrier-services group manager for Cisco. "Sometimes it is very, very difficult for people to fill a full form. A lot of them are doing this while at work. And we are dealing with human people," Mr. Petre says.

Last year, Pricewaterhouse upgraded its site by reworking its job categories to better match candidates and also by making it trilingual, Mr. Demessemaekers says. Other companies provide direct links from their home pages to their career sections as well as one-click-to-apply facilities. Taking their cue from Internet job sites like Monster.com, more companies are offering those so-called job agents, which allow you to register your CV for a period with the employers. The companies then contact you by e-mail when something appropriate opens up.

Coming down the pipeline are, among other things, the ability to tag the most urgent hiring needs; online feedback on the status of one's application; and online interview scheduling.

When you do apply, avoid the temptation to go casual just because you're communicating via e-mail. "Introduce yourself properly," Mr. Petre says. "Do it in a professional manner, with a brief e-mailed letter and a brief description of yourself."

Be precise and stress the real qualifications you have that are relevant to the function, he adds.

Mr. Lermusiaux advises you to fill out the Web site's standardized applications fully. The more customized information you provide, he says, the more attention you will get.

Many employers still use key-word searches to sort incoming CVs, so Mr. Petre urges you to provide the relevant ones, such as those that describe specific computer skills, to get yourself onto the short list. And don't, Mr. Lermusiaux says, make the mistake of applying by snail mail for a job you spotted online.

"We've all been taught to use nice paper, a nice handwritten signature, to get noticed," Mr. Lermusiaux says. "But that's not necessarily the best way anymore."

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