

Monster of a Problem

Applying for a job, any job, is as easy as clicking a mouse these days, and that is precisely the reason that a new Web job board thinks it can make waves with a different model.

By Jon Surmacz

January 29, 2000 — This piece of Monster.com marketing material says it all: Spending more than you'd like on newspaper and other traditional methods of advertising – and reaching a limited audience? Post your job board opportunities on Monster. It's more cost-effective and you'll reach millions of candidates!

Reaching millions of candidates might well find your company an outstanding individual, but using such a popular job board as Monster.com, which attracted 13.9 million unique visitors in November 2002 according to comScore Media Metrix, also has some drawbacks. Timothy Dittrich, senior vice president for business development for Monster.com, says the site's No. 1 complaint is that it generates too many responses.

And that problem is not limited to Monster.com users. For instance, it's not uncommon for the Gillette Company (which is not a Monster.com client) to receive hundreds of resumes within hours of a posting on its corporate website, www.gillette.com. And, in this economy, the problem is hitting just about everyone looking to hire. A Boston-based regional sports magazine recently advertised an opening in its editorial department on a journalism job board and received 200 resumes in just four days (nearly all were submitted via e-mail).

And that, argues Naray Viswanathan, is why companies may prefer an online alternative where applicants weed themselves out of the pool, thereby reducing the number of applicants and helping to ensure that the most qualified applicants don't get lost in the resume morass.

Viswanathan is CEO of Shrewsbury, Mass.-based AdamsHand Inc., creators of the Interview Exchange, an experiment in online job hunting and recruiting that adds a few hurdles to the process that the Web helped to eliminate. The goal is to reduce the number of resumes a company must evaluate. The Interview Exchange does this in a few ways.

Before job seekers reply to an ad, they must answer a set of questions provided by the prospective employer. If job seekers meet the initial requirements they may reply to an ad, where they will submit an anonymous public profile, which will list their skills, job history and so on. This profile will be on display (minus any personal information) to other job candidates. The hope, Viswanathan says, is that job seekers will have incentive to only apply for positions for which they are most qualified because they will be able to assess their chances against the pool of applicants.

The next step is to make an interview offer, which is a small monetary bid that candidates place on themselves (usually no more than \$100) in an effort to increase their chances for an interview. Employers agree to interview three of the top five bidders as well as other qualified candidates. Viswanathan says the interview offer whittles the field even further, because candidates back up their application with a monetary investment. (Candidates who bid and aren't interviewed do not have to pay.)

Ted Kolota, vice president of marketing at AdamsHand, says serious job seekers won't be turned off by having to pay to increase their chances of getting an interview. He says job seekers spend \$3.4 billion annually on career counseling, networking groups, mailings and so on. "We're all spending money in any case when we're looking for a job," Kolota says. "We're not accustomed to spending it trying to get an interview."

Interview Exchange makes its money on listings (\$250 per ad) and the interview offers. By the end of 2003, the company hopes to acquire 1 percent market share in an estimated \$26 billion industry. At this point, it is hardly a Monster.com competitor. There are about a dozen jobs on the Interview Exchange, all in the Boston-metro area. Monster.com, by comparison, has about 750,000 job listings nationwide.

"Monster is built on circulation and reach into the marketplace," Viswanathan says. "We will make money by providing a service."

What's refreshing about the Interview Exchange is that it has the potential to be more than just another job board or service. Giving job seekers a little insight into the process could only be a dotcom idea. The employers set the rules, but it's up to the job seekers to play the game and take advantage of this newfound insight. It's an interesting experiment, but from a business sense it is an idea that could easily flame out for two reasons.

First, well-known companies are turning to their own corporate brands, not job boards, as the primary method attract candidates. Elizabeth McFarlan, manager of talent acquisition for Gillette says that although the company has relationships with HotJobs and CareerBuilder, most job candidates come through the corporate site (which was launched in November 2001).

"Gillette is such a strong brand name. We have our own presence on the Web and we can leverage it pretty well," McFarlan says. "The Web has taken us light years ahead of what we used to be with paper resumes. We don't see ourselves going back to that."

Second, resume filtering tools developed by Monster.com and other large companies, like San Francisco-based application service provider Recruitsoft, which claims 125 Fortune 1000 clients including Gillette, are already focusing on the resume glut that Interview Exchange wants to eliminate. "The end goal is not to get a body on board," says Diane Pardee, vice president of marketing for Recruitsoft. "The end goal is to get a higher quality candidate in the company and up to speed, fast."

Where the Interview Exchange might gain some traction is in the small- and medium-sized business market, where the major job boards are beginning to focus their attention. "Over the next few years, as we head into a labor shortage," says Monster.com's Dittrich, "\"almost all companies will utilize online recruitment efforts as one of their mainstays."

Another thing going for the Interview Exchange is the human element. While there's something imperfect about job candidates sorting themselves out online, I think I'm more comfortable with that than I am a piece of software parsing the text of my resume.

Are you feeling the pain of layoffs? Are you job looking? How far are you willing to go to beat the crowd to the job opening door?