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Get online and in tune with the job market

Familiarity with the e-job market is now crucial as more and more firms are recruiting via the internet, reports Sarah Longhurst

In just twelve months there has been a veritable explosion in the recruitment of British graduates via the internet. This is the conclusion of a study carried out by the Institute of Graduate Recruiters (IGR). Their research suggests that nearly 70% of employers seeking to hire graduates make use of the Web. Graduates should take note of this finding. So what should you be doing to ensure the right employer is aware of you and your potential?

The first thing is not to feel daunted or overwhelmed. The internet is a powerful tool but a few minutes spent surfing can make it seem an impossibly complex sea of information in which even the strongest of swimmers can easily drown. Helen Goodison, IGR's Chief Executive Officer, says: "Although one hears a lot about the high level of IT-literacy amongst graduates, in actual fact most of them rarely do much more than scan company websites or email their CV to the companies on the off-chance of a position being available. When their attention is drawn to the fact that larger firms' recruitment is nowadays highly dependent on online activity, many experience mild panic or a feeling of incompetence."

Goodison's advice is not to be afraid, to realise the benefits online recruitment can bring and to invest a little time prior to graduation in sampling the most common forms of graduate recruitment. Essentially there are three main ways to recruit online.

The first of these is the company website. Whether you are applying online or via a more traditional paper application, it is essential that you examine the company's website in detail to familiarise yourself with the firm's background, its self-image and its products or major activities. This will help you to decide whether it is the sort of company for you and, more crucially, it will make you seem informed and interested if and when you get to interview stage and you are confronted with the inevitable question: 'So why do you want to work for us?'

The normal procedure with corporate websites is for the company to list its current vacancies and to invite those interested in the posts to email their CV. If it is interested in pursuing your application, the company will then get back to you with some suggested interview dates.

The second recruitment method for graduates to check out is the Job Site. These come in all shapes and sizes and range from simple listings of vacancies to companies specialising in matching CVs to posts. It is well worth spending some time looking at the major sites here, such as Totaljobs.com which, in return for a registration fee, will provide help in composing a CV and advice on career development. The first step is to register with the company and the site will then ask you to provide a CV and a range of other details over the internet.

However, applicants need to be aware that there are a number of disreputable companies operating in this area. Elliott Wellings, Chief Executive of Recruit Online, warns that some sites advertise jobs at inflated salary levels to make them sound more attractive, while others advertise vacancies that don't exist and in return for a registration fee simply send your CV unsolicited to thousands of companies. The advice of both Wellings and

the IGR is only to use well-established companies that guarantee security and are password controlled.

The third major form of online recruitment is the Database Site, usually run by large online recruiters. The basic idea here is to build up a complete portrait of the applicant and his or her skills via a detailed online questionnaire. These skills are then matched against the needs of employers who have registered with the recruiter. Some firms then email applicants details of appropriate vacancies for them to pursue independently, while others will also arrange interviews with firms and then email details of these directly to applicants. The downside of this type of recruiter is that they are likely to provide you with as many unsuitable as suitable posts and you are likely to have to be patient and do a fair bit of sifting.

Regardless of which type of recruitment you opt for, just registering is not going to get you that dream job. You must first check that you are sending the company what it wants: Is it just a CV or is a letter of application required too? Is there an online application form to fill out? Be sure to get this right, otherwise you may not get past first base with some of the bigger companies. Furthermore, when sending your CV online, observe all the normal rules concerning formality in the way you address the company and be sure to lay out your CV as you would if you were applying via snail mail. Also be sure to send your CV as an attachment, since the body text of emails is likely to distort your neat and time-consuming formatting. Finally, if you are asked to do an online personality test, which some companies now employ to screen a first round of applications, take your time, make sure you answer all the questions and check your answers once you've finished. The simplest mistakes could mean you get no further than the online recruitment screen.

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