

10 Things Recruiters Won't Tell You

By Will Swarts

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1. "There are better ways to find a job."

A recruiter or agency is one part of a job search, but it shouldn't be your primary source – and maybe not your secondary one, either. Referrals – that is, a connection made by someone you know – remain your best bet. CareerXRoads' annual survey of more than 200 employers shows that the percentage of hires made through referrals has remained remarkably consistent over the last five years. Nearly 27% of respondents said referrals were the biggest factor in external hires in 2009, practically unchanged from its 27.1% figure in 2005. Third-party agencies, meanwhile, accounted for only 2.3% of external hires last year, compared to a 5.2% success rate in 2005.

2. "We don't work for you."

Christy Ezelle, a media advertising executive in New York, was in her first job out of college when she got a call from a headhunter working for a major advertising agency. It was a good experience, until she tried to negotiate her salary – the company wouldn't budge. Why? They had already shelled out for the headhunter that tracked her down – a fee that was eating into the amount they were willing to pay Ezelle.

Recruiters work for the hiring company, and that's where their allegiance lies – not with the job-seeker. That means headhunters will always be more interested in making their client happy than in finding a candidate the best possible package, says Carolyn Dougherty, an executive search consultant in Villanova, Penn. "There's a belief that the recruiter is working on the candidate's behalf and that's not the case," she says. "They're working for the client – that's where the fee is coming from." And because most recruiters don't get paid until the position gets filled, they care more about sealing the deal than about getting you another \$10,000.



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3. "Until a year ago, I was a car salesman."

There are no laws or rules that govern what constitutes an "employment agency" or who can call himself a recruiter, and setting up shop is pretty easy: A year's worth of advertising, office space, travel and communications equipment is just \$50,000 for an experienced recruiter like Eleanor Sweet, who runs the Remington Group in Barrington, Ill., an hour outside of Chicago; a rookie could put out a shingle for far less. Anyone can do it, she says, "It's pretty much like getting a real estate license."

That means job seekers have to vet a recruiter with the same diligence they'd investigate a potential employer. Ask how long the recruiter's been in the business, and where they've placed candidates in the past – and then call those companies and confirm, experts advise. Also, though a certification isn't required to be a recruiter, there are a handful of designations a pro can earn. Getting certified as a Temporary Staffing Specialist, a Personnel Consultant, or a Professional in Human Resources don't require any coursework, but all require previous experience and the passage of an exam – legitimate hoops for a dedicated professional to jump through. One strategy to avoid at all costs: firms that charge for job search services or call themselves "fee-based counselors" raise red flags with experienced recruiters, because "It's expected that the company pays the fee," says Dougherty. (see No. 2, above).

[See the rest of the 10 Things Recruiters Won't Tell You at SmartMoney.com.](https://www.smartmoney.com)

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(Continued from SmartMoney.com archive)

4. “The job we advertised may not exist.”

Recruiters often advertise appealing jobs that aren't vacant, just to build up a stable of candidates, says Nick Corcodilos, who heads the executive search firm North Bridge Group and runs www.asktheheadhunter.com in Lebanon, N.J. From a staffing firm or recruiter's perspective, this is a practical way to do business, because many assignments offer a bonus for filling a key job fast. But for the job hunter, it's misleading, raising false hopes at an already anxious time.

That doesn't mean an applicant's efforts are useless. Just because there's no job now doesn't mean there won't be one in a few months. Jeremy Dixon, general manager at A-1 Temps in Tampa, says client companies will ask him for 50 people qualified for customer service positions “in a couple of weeks.” If he has a sufficient pool of established applicants, he can place them in a hurry.

For the best odds of success, job-seekers should identify companies and positions they're specifically interested in and seek out recruiters who work with them. (This is particularly true for anyone seeking an upper management job, for which companies typically rely on an established relationship with a recruiter or recruiting firm.)

5. “We already know quite a bit about you.”

As soon as you sign up with a recruiter or search firm, they check you out – your background, your credit history, even legal records. That's why they have applicants sign all those disclosures. If you want to work with them, you have to submit. That's fairly standard in the job market these days, whether or not you work with a recruiter, but unlike a recruiter, a prospective employer usually doesn't do the background check until after he's met you. That gives a candidate the opportunity to impress on his merits, and explain anything that might be dodgy in his history. Working through a recruiter, a job seeker might never get that chance.

In that case, all you can do is make sure that the information they have is accurate, says Corcodilos. Almost 80 percent of credit reports contain errors, and 25 percent have what's considered to be a “serious error” such as false delinquencies or accounts that did not belong to the consumer, according to a 2004 study from U.S. PIRG. To ensure you'll be judged on your own merits, check your credit report for errors and take steps to fix what you find.

6. “Our jobs aren't so hot either.”

Because most agencies don't get paid unless they place candidates at jobs, the weak labor market has taken its toll. In Orange County, Calif., for example, the 20 largest employment firms saw revenue drop almost 20% in 2009, prompting many to lay off employees, according to an Orange County Business Journal survey. A lot of experienced people have left the field, says Darrel Gurney, an independent career consultant who runs the CareerGuy.com web site, leaving “empty desks and brand spanking new people who have never done this before.” That means you often don't get the best help in your job search, particularly working with smaller firms, he says.

Bigger, national and international firms are doing better. Revenue at Switzerland's Adecco, the world's largest staffing company, rose 16% in July and August. Meanwhile, revenues at domestic search firms Manpower (MAN: 55.30, -1.16, -2.05%) and Robert Half International (RHI: 27.40, -0.04, -0.14%) are up 15% and 6% respectively in the last three months, in part a result of an increase in revenue-producing job placements.

7. “You’re at the mercy of a computer, just like online job board users.”

The rise of online job sites like Monster (MWW: 14.46, +0.09, +0.62%) and Careerbuilder has changed the way many staffing professionals work. The sites use computer programs to scan applications for particular keywords – and now, so do recruiters. Even if you submit your resume on fancy stationery, it gets scanned by the recruiter or staffing agency. Especially for entry or mid-level jobs, cover letters don't get read, Gurney says: It's this digital process that drives the professional match-making.

To get through the computer gatekeeper, applicants need to make sure the relevant, searchable words are on their resumes. For example, he says, if you want to work in the entertainment industry, listing a past job at Sony Pictures on your resume isn't enough; the word “entertainment” must be there too. Candidates who aren't sure what the magic keywords are should look at the description of the job they're applying for, says Jessica Mazor, an account manager for the accounting and finance business at Kforce Professional Staffing (KFRC: 15.40, -0.22, -1.40%) in New York. The “must have” criteria in the description are particularly important.

8. “The ‘temp-to-perm’ carrot is rotten.”

Many staffing agencies hold out the promise of permanent jobs after success in a temporary position, but that trend isn't holding in this recovery. Since temporary employment trends hit bottom in September 2009, the U.S. Department of Labor says the service and professional sectors have added 392,000 temporary jobs. But the CareerXroads survey showed that positions explicitly advertised as temp-to-perm accounted for just 1.6% of all hiring in 2009 – and even in better times, that rate was only around 3%. “Temp-to-perm is basically a marketing ploy,” says Corcodilos, who says it's really more of a fantasy: “It's what recruiters would like to see happen.”

9. “If you have a job, I could get you fired.”

Not all recruiters are careful, and the last thing you want is to have your resume land on the desk of your current boss. This is a very real risk, says Sweet, president of the Remington Group, so job seekers need to make sure they know exactly what recruiters are doing on their behalf. “Put every recruiter you work with on notice,” she says. “Say, ‘You do not have permission to release my paperwork without my permission.’”

And then there are the aggressive recruiters who pull resumes off LinkedIn profiles and job

boards and circulate them without getting the candidates permission – or even letting him know. That’s what happened to Michael Segel, an information consultant in Chicago, who was interviewing with several different companies when one prospective employer asked him why he’d received his resume twice. An overzealous recruiter whom Segal had never met had sent it. Now Segal only posts his resume as an un-alterable PDF, and he keeps careful track of where he and any recruiters he’s working with send it. He says it can’t stop the practice of unauthorized circulation, but if he’s contacted by a recruiter he doesn’t know, he can quickly figure out what’s happened. “I usually cut off contact right there,” he says.

10. “If I’m in Virginia, I probably won’t help you find a job in Nebraska.”

If you’re willing to relocate, don’t rely on your contact in your home city to help you find work outside the area — even if you’re working with a national search firm. Recruiters at big firms have little incentive to spread your resume around to other locations; they’ll have to split a commission with the colleague that helps you land a job. Instead, send your resume to the branch offices in the places you would like to go. As soon as that office has you on file, “they take ownership of your search,” says Sweet. Smaller, more local firms agree – and may even refer you to someone else. “We have alliances with other staffing companies,” says Diana Wall, a senior account manager at Accel Financial Staffing in Oklahoma City. “There’s no commission – it’s all friendly referrals.”