

(Plan Your Career) Applying online: How to navigate around the internet's black holes

Written by Julie Desmond

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Jayden has been struggling with the world of online applications and how to follow-up appropriately. He has applied for three positions, but has not made it past the online screening. Should he e-mail a copy of his resume with a cover letter in addition to applying on Monster or any other proprietary application program?

Considering all the social networking options available today, Jayden might also ask if he should twitter, Link-in or send a Facebook message to follow-up on his Monster application. And the answer is... yes... and no.

Applying for work now means navigating multiple communication avenues. Just as you follow a list of MapQuest directions to get around town, conduct your application process in a specific order so you can network efficiently and effectively toward your next position.

Say you've found an extraordinary opportunity on Monster. First, read through the job description suspiciously. Is this truthfully a job you can walk into and hit the ground running? So many experts are looking for work now, hiring managers know they can get experienced people in the door. If this is a job you "could learn" skip it and move on to something closer to the role you left behind. Later, you can move around within a company, but until the economy improves, just find a job.

If this position is perfect for you, excellent. Do not apply yet. Not to pick on Monster (much), but your experience applying for work through that platform has not given you much in the way of results. HR people typically search internal corporate websites for applicants before turning to Monster.

Therefore, you search the company's web site. Is the job you want posted there? Apply online if it is. You may be directed back to Monster, so follow that route if you must. Some companies streamline their application process by funneling everything through one application site.

Next, proceed to LinkedIn and Facebook. Search the company name and find out who you know, in any department, within that company. Send these contacts a message (don't call) asking if they know about the position, why it is open, was anyone in it before. Ask them if they know who you should talk to for more information about the position or about the company. Most people with even a marginal connection will provide you a name.

Using LinkedIn or Facebook, reach out to their person, being respectful of the connection and grateful. People want to be helpful, but they do not want to be dragged down by your search. Send a very brief note to your new contact asking one question about either the company or the position or the industry. Continue to develop this new relationship professionally, regardless of which platform you use and consider asking for an informational interview if the position you want is already filled.

There is no need to follow up with additional application materials unless asked to do so. Inform people that you have already applied online and this will help them find your application in a format the company prefers.

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