HOW TO DEVELOP AND EXECUTE A WINNING JOB SEARCH STRATEGY

By Rodney Apple, in partnership with APICS
INTRODUCTION

With over 10 million Americans currently unemployed in an economy that remains sluggish, competition for the job of your dreams is fiercer than ever. The most important things you can do to increase your chances of landing your dream job are to develop a robust job search strategy and master the art of executing it.

An effective job search strategy should encompass an omni-channel approach, meaning you should leverage every job search channel and tool available to you. “Leave no stone unturned” should be your mantra when it comes to your job search.

The good news is that thanks to the advent of the Internet, search engines and social media, you have more job search channels and tools available to you now than ever before. The bad news is that it’s easy to waste a lot of time on the wrong channels if you’re not careful.

In this article I will explain how to go about developing and executing a winning job search strategy. I’ll include links to valuable job hunting resources and a job search activity template that will help you stay laser-focused and organized on achieving your goals.
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CAREER BRAINSTORMING

It’s very important that you have a good understanding of what you’re looking for in your career before you launch your job search campaign. This doesn’t mean you need to lock yourself into a lifelong career decision. On the contrary, you just need to determine your unique profile; for example, the type of work you enjoy, the cultural environment that best suits your work style, your key strengths, the industries that you have interest in and your geographical preferences. This will help you focus your time and energy on exploring the right companies and jobs to match your interests and aspirations.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself that can help you focus on the right job search criteria. I encourage you to take out a blank sheet of paper and write these questions down. Under each question, write down the answers and rank them in order of best or most important to worst or least important. This information will be very helpful as you begin building out your job search strategy, and will help with formulating your target company list.

- What are your key strengths?
- What industries are you interested in?
- What size company and culture interest you the most?
- What are your geographical preferences?
OPTIMIZE YOUR CAREER MARKETING TOOLS

In today’s job market, your resume and LinkedIn profile are your two most important marketing tools. Cover letters are important too, and often can help separate your application from the pack. Before you kick off any major job search campaign, take the time to optimize these career marketing tools so you can hit the ground running.

Resume Optimization Tips—The number one goal of a resume is to generate a “positive response” from the target audience. This could be a call from a recruiter to ask a few questions, or it could be an invitation to a personal interview. To be most effective, your resume should be designed to help recruiters and hiring managers quickly and easily understand your most important or unique skills, experience, past performance and accomplishments. Here are some of my resume tips that you can use to help improve your resume.

LinkedIn Profile Optimization Tips—Essentially this means completing your profile in a way that maximizes the odds of recruiters and hiring managers discovering you on LinkedIn. You’ll need to utilize some of the techniques search engine optimization (SEO) specialists use to boost results for their website search engine rankings and, ultimately, drive more website traffic. You’ll want to incorporate keywords that are popular for your industry/title/background within various sections of your LinkedIn profile (such as the Headline, Summary, and Job Skills) for each job you’ve held. If you’re in college or fresh out of college, add your internships and part-time jobs.

Here are a couple of great articles that explain the steps you’ll need to take to optimize your LinkedIn profile: one from Social Media Examiner and another by TopRank Online Marketing. By following these steps to optimize your LinkedIn profile, you should become more discoverable, which in turn should lead to more job inquiries and connections on LinkedIn.

Cover Letters—I’ve always been on the fence concerning the use of cover letters, as I rarely read them, but in the spirit of “better to be safe than sorry,” I recommend that you use them. The main reason is that all other things being equal, properly written cover letters can give you an advantage over other job applicants who don’t submit cover letters. In addition, cover letters give you an opportunity to sell, in writing, why you’re uniquely qualified for the job you’re applying to. Here’s some great advice on how to write cover letters by the Harvard Business Review.
DEVELOP YOUR TARGET COMPANY LIST

It’s very important that you take the time to research potential employers via websites such as LinkedIn, Indeed, Hoovers, Chamber of Commerce, Better Business Bureau, Glassdoor and the like. I also recommend that you poll your academic and professional networks, as well as friends and family, to get their suggestions for great companies to work for.

Once you complete your target employer list, share it with your friends, family, and college and business colleagues. Ask each person if he or she happens to have any contacts who work at any of the companies on your target list. If yes, politely ask them if they could facilitate an introduction or at least forward your resume to their contact(s). This step alone can yield tremendous results because referrals are usually the top source of candidates and hires for most employers.

In addition, for each of your target employers, submit your resume via its career site if a means for doing so is provided. This will ensure that your resume can be found when corporate recruiters at your target employers conduct searches within their resume databases.
DEVELOP AND TRACK ALL JOB SEARCH ACTIVITIES
Like anything in life that you’re striving to achieve, you must create and write down your goals, develop corresponding action steps, track your results and adjust your action plan along the way. This is especially important when it comes to your job search.

I have created a “Job Search Tracking” template (Excel spreadsheet) that you can utilize to document your job search goals and activities. Please edit this spreadsheet to fit your particular needs.

**Action Plan (daily/weekly/monthly job search activities)**
On the first tab of the “Job Search Tracking” template, write down the tasks you desire to complete in your effort to meet your goal of landing a new job. These should include action items such as attending a certain amount of supply chain networking events per month, applying to X amount of jobs per day, connecting with Y amount of new contacts on LinkedIn per week, or taking colleagues from your supply chain network out for coffee or lunch Z times per month.

As for how you’d like to integrate these job search activities into your routine/schedule, use whatever organizational system works best for you. If you’re the type that likes to create calendar events in Outlook, add these activities to your Outlook calendar and set them up on a recurring basis. If you prefer to maintain a to-do list on a sheet of paper, write them out and keep them close to your workspace. I prefer to schedule my activities in Outlook and update my to-do list on a sheet of paper each day that I keep at my desk. This list contains action items that I must complete that day, prioritized from most important to least important.

**Target Company List**—On the second tab, enter the companies on your target company list. I recommend starting with 25 to 50 target companies, which will help you stay focused and maximize your productivity. Listing too many companies makes it easier to lose focus and spin your wheels. By the way, this isn’t your end-all, be-all list. You’ll be making changes to this list frequently as you uncover new companies or discover that certain companies aren’t in hiring mode or aren’t the right fit for you.
Networking Contacts—Use the third tab to keep track of all the contacts you discover who work at the companies on your target company list, along with other helpful contacts such as third-party recruiters, for example. These could be referrals that you receive from your existing network or profiles that you discover through social media sites such as LinkedIn. You should aim to connect with the following types of contacts via email, phone, LinkedIn, Twitter and other well-used social channels:

- Recruiters who support the functional areas or departments you’re targeting
- HR managers who support the functional areas you’re targeting
- Employees who are doing the same type of job you’re interested in doing
- Hiring managers who work within the functional areas you’re targeting
- Department heads who lead the functional areas you’re targeting

Job Applications—Use the fourth tab to track every job you apply to, whether it’s an online job application or a resume submittal. It’s important to track these job application activities so you stay organized, can follow up with the right company at the right time, and are prepared when an employer calls you about a job posting that you recently applied to.

Interviews—Use the fifth tab to track all interviews, including phone interviews, video interviews, face-to-face interviews and follow-up interviews. Track when you’ve sent out thank-you notes and the date you should follow up after interviews have taken place.

Offers—Use the sixth and final tab to track all offers received. If you receive multiple offers (good for you!), this will be a good way to analyze and compare offer packages.

Track Your Progress and Results—As you discover which activities and techniques are driving the best results, adjust your action plan accordingly. I encourage you to track metrics such as the ratio of job applications to interviews and the ratio of interviews to job offers. If you’re not getting enough interviews, you may need to step up your networking efforts. If you’re interviewing a lot but aren’t getting offers, you may need to work on improving your interviewing skills.
BECOME A MASTER NETWORKER

Studies show that most jobs are filled without ever being advertised. This means that most jobs are landed via networking activities rather than job applications—the reason it’s imperative that you learn to master the art of networking.

Alumni Networking—Most universities these days have established websites or portals designed to connect alumni. Many of them have online directories that allow you to search for other alums via keywords, location, company or other filters. Be sure to tap into this valuable networking resource if it’s available at your alma mater. This is exactly how I landed my first job 20 years ago.

In addition, you can easily connect to people who graduated from the same university by conducting a search on LinkedIn. When you complete your profile, be sure to add in the name of your university. From here, go to LinkedIn’s home page, click “Network,” then “Find Alumni.” When you see someone with whom you’d like to connect, simply hit the “Connect” button on their profile, and when LinkedIn prompts you to select how you know the person, select “Classmate.” This is a super-easy way to quickly build contacts with alumni. As you identify alumni contacts who could potentially benefit your job search, add them to the Networking tab in the “Job Search Tracking” template and focus on initiating contact and networking with them.

Supply Chain Associations—There are plenty of supply chain associations you can join based on your particular specialty. Many, including APICS, have local chapters that host networking and educational events on a monthly basis. Try to attend as many association networking events as you can fit into your schedule. These are excellent opportunities to network for job leads and discover more information about potential employers—not to mention that many of the chapter meetings are educational in nature, so while you’re networking you should be able to learn something new as well.

Some of these associations have online membership directories where you can search and connect with other members. This could be a great tool for building contacts within your target company list. If you do reach out to someone through an online membership directory, mention that you’re a fellow member of the association and are looking to network for career opportunities. As a member of APICS, you can utilize its online community, Supply Chain Channel, to connect with other professionals.
If you are currently out of work and/or don’t have a business card, I highly recommend that you order some business cards that have your basic information, including title, phone and email. Vistaprint.com is a great service that allows you to create business cards online via numerous templates; their prices are pretty good, too.

Engage Recruiters—Not all recruiters are created equal. Some specialize by geography, function and/or level, which is why it’s important to conduct some research to identify recruiters who match your particular needs. I also recommend asking members of your supply chain network for recruiter recommendations. Below are some links I put together that will lead you to a plethora of supply chain recruiters:

- Google Supply Chain Recruiter Search
- LinkedIn Supply Chain Recruiter Search
- Twitter Supply Chain Recruiter Search
- CSCMP Supply Chain Recruiter Directory

Once you identify a few recruiters who focus in the areas you’re targeting, send them your resume and cover letter plus a short message that summarizes your job search preferences (e.g., type of position, location preferences, level, industry, company size). I also recommend connecting with them on their primary social media sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter and Google+ because today more and more recruiters are turning to social media to source candidates. You should check in with these recruiters every once in a while by email or phone to see if they have any new or upcoming opportunities to consider you for. Remember, your goal here is to simply stay on their “radar screen”; don’t overdo the calling and emailing, as this can send the wrong signal.
MAKE YOURSELF EASY TO FIND ON THE INTERNET

Online Profiles
Identify the top keywords that associate with your skill set, qualifications and experience and incorporate them into all of your online profiles. Don’t overdo it by “keyword stuffing” your profile. Be sure the keywords flow naturally so it appears that you’re writing for a human being, not a search engine.

LinkedIn—in addition to creating and optimizing your LinkedIn profile, you need to be an active participator on LinkedIn. Don’t make the same mistake that many LinkedIn newbies make, which is to complete a profile then sit back and wait for things to happen. I encourage you to join the maximum allowed number of “Groups” on LinkedIn—currently 50. For example, here are several of the more popular LinkedIn Supply Chain Groups, in which you can post and respond to supply chain discussion topics with people from other companies. Be sure to monitor the Jobs Discussion section in each group as well; recruiters and other group members post jobs within this section of the Group on a routine basis.

I also recommend following each company on your target company list so you can stay abreast of their new job postings, news releases and pertinent company information. You should also follow supply chain associations on LinkedIn, such as APICS, and join their LinkedIn Groups as well. The more you participate on LinkedIn, the more exposure you’ll gain to potential employers and recruiters, and the faster you’ll expand your professional network.

Facebook—if you’re on Facebook, complete the Work and Education sections on your profile so recruiters will be able to find you. Search for groups to join that are related to the functional areas you’re pursuing for employment—supply chain, manufacturing, procurement and related professions. In addition, you should “Like” the business pages for all employers on your target company list, as well as Facebook pages for supply chain associations like APICS.

Twitter—Complete a Twitter profile and tweet about topics, news articles or blog posts within the functional areas you desire to work in. Be sure to incorporate hashtags when appropriate (no more than three hashtags per tweet) such as #supplychain, #logistics, #procurement and #manufacturing, as users search by these hashtags constantly. Follow all companies on your target company list. If they have a separate Twitter handle for tweeting their jobs, definitely follow those pages to stay abreast of new job listings. You should also follow supply chain-related blogs and supply chain associations such as APICS. The easiest way to keep track of the Twitter profiles you want to closely monitor is to create and save lists within your Twitter account.
Google+ — Complete a Google+ profile and start adding contacts, target companies and supply chain associations like APICS to your circles. Also, join and participate in Google+ Communities that are relevant to the functional areas you’re targeting for employment (Communities are similar to LinkedIn Groups).

About.Me—Create an About.me profile as well. If you’re not familiar with it, here’s the link to my profile to give you an idea of what this service looks like. This is just another way that recruiters can find you and contact you.

Website/Blog—I recommend that you set up a blog site on WordPress. WordPress is very easy to use and has a lot of great plug-ins that can help optimize your blog site. At a minimum, you could post your resume to further enhance the chances of being discovered by potential employers when they’re conducting Internet searches for candidates. If you enjoy writing/blogging, this is a great outlet for publishing your thoughts on topics related to the areas you’re targeting for employment.

Personal Branding Tips

- Have a professional photo taken of yourself (preferably in business attire) and use it across all your online profiles. This promotes brand consistency.

- Use the same name, or handle, across all social media profiles so when someone searches for your name, the odds of finding you significantly increase. For example, I use “SCMtalent” as my handle across all my online profiles. If you go to Google and search “SCMtalent,” you’ll see that most of my online profiles appear on page one of Google. When you search “Rodney Apple,” my profiles also pop up on page one of Google. Landing on page one of Google should be your ultimate goal for your full name.
JOBS SEARCH AUTOMATION TIPS AND TOOLS

Surfing job boards can be a huge drain on your time, not to mention a mind-numbing chore. Instead of wasting valuable time checking various job boards for new job postings each day, you should enable the jobs to come to you.

Most of the big job boards like Monster and CareerBuilder allow you to set up email job alerts that come into your email inbox on a daily basis, based on search criteria you specify when you set up the job alerts. My favorite by far is Indeed.com. With Indeed, you can create as many email job alerts as you like and specify criteria such as location, job title, keywords and company name. If you need advice on how to set them up, I encourage you to review Indeed’s Job Alerts Tutorial.

While Indeed captures most job postings from other career sites and job boards, it doesn’t capture everything. I also recommend setting up email alerts that are much broader in scope through Google Alerts (here is a great tutorial for setting up Job Searches in Google Alerts) and/or Talkwalker. These tools crawl newly indexed blogs, job postings, news and web pages in real time, and will email you the results based on the time intervals you select (e.g., instantly, daily, weekly).

The key to setting up “accurate” email alerts is to learn how to use advanced Internet search engine techniques such as Boolean logic. An outstanding source is the Googling for Jobs tutorial, by Jim Stroud, that explains how to utilize advanced/Boolean search logic to search the Internet for jobs. As you receive job alerts via email, be sure to document each and every position you apply to within the Job Applications section of your “Job Search Tracking” template.
Applying online to positions can be a very frustrating and time-consuming process, and often doesn’t yield the best results. This is why it’s important to find a way to go through the “back door” after you’ve applied online.

While some of these tactics may seem a bit intimidating, I can assure you that the job seekers who go the “extra mile” significantly increase their odds of landing a job faster than those who employ only the standard “post and pray” method.

After you apply online to a position, go to LinkedIn’s Advanced Search Page, type the company name into the Company field and hit the Search button. Do you see anyone you’re connected to at that company? If yes, try to make contact and politely ask if there’s anything he or she could do to help get your job application or resume noticed, such as forwarding your resume along to the hiring manager, for example. If no, consider typing a few job-related keywords into the Title and/or Keywords field in an effort to try to identify the hiring manager, the recruiter or perhaps a leader within the department with whom you can connect.

Once you identify the name and title of a potential decision maker, or someone who might be able to help send you in the right direction, send this person a customized invitation request. LinkedIn requires that you have something in common with the person or that you know the person’s email address in order for you to send a LinkedIn invitation. If you don’t know the email address or can’t figure it out (see “How to find almost anyone’s email address” under “Job Search Tools, Hacks and Tips” below), identify which LinkedIn Groups the person belongs to and join one of the same groups. Once you belong to one of the same groups, you can then send an invite to the person.

After you connect with the person on LinkedIn, go to his or her main profile page and click “Contact Info.” In this section, you will at least be able to retrieve the person’s email address. Sometimes people provide other means of connecting, such as their phone number(s), Twitter address or link to their blog. You’ll want to grab their contact information and type it into the Networking tab on your job tracker spreadsheet.
Now that you have the individual’s email address, I recommend crafting and sending a personalized follow-up email and attaching your resume to this email. Begin the email by thanking the person for accepting your LinkedIn invitation. Next, inform the person why you’re writing. I recommend letting him or her know that you applied to a certain job (reference the job title and job ID#) and are extremely interested in pursuing employment at their company. You should ask if the person has any advice in regard to successfully gaining employment or if he or she would be open to a five-minute introductory call to learn more about the position and the company. Keep the email short and sweet, no more than five sentences, and be sure to leave your contact information, email and phone number.

If you really want to go the extra mile, I recommend sending the aforementioned email and calling the person afterward to follow up. While this tactic may seem a bit intimidating, it can significantly increase your chances of getting a job. But before you pick up the phone to cold call someone, you’d better know exactly what you’re going to say—you will likely have only 30 to 60 seconds to get your point across. This is why I strongly recommend that you spend time developing your elevator pitch and rehearsing it in front of a friend or family member.

For each call, keep a goal in mind; for example, it could be obtaining a referral or the name of the hiring manager or recruiter. As a reminder, be sure to keep your job search template handy as you make these follow-up calls so you can document the results for each call, write down contact information for referrals you receive, or make note of any other important information about the call.

Finally, and I can’t stress this point enough, by focusing on becoming consistently persistent with your follow-up emails/calls and baking this routine into your job search strategy, you will separate yourself from the majority of other job seekers that are vying for the same positions you’re targeting.
JOB SEARCH TOOLS, HACKS AND TIPS

Email and Voice
Signal—You will be sending out a lot of emails during your job search campaign. Wouldn’t it be nice to know both “if” and “when” someone opens up your email? Signal does just that! It’s a free Chrome extension that works with Outlook, Gmail and iOS.

Job Search Email Address—Create and use a unique email address for your job search efforts instead of using your main personal email address (never use your work address!). This makes it super-easy to keep your job search correspondence separated from everything else going on in your life. I recommend Gmail.

Google Voice—Similar to my advice for using a separate email address for job searching, I also recommend having a separate phone number for your job searching efforts. Google Voice is free, allows you to select your own phone number and area code, and comes with a ton of cool features such as forwarding voice mails to your email, call screening, click-to-dial and call forwarding.

Email Signature—Be sure to use an email signature that incorporates your name, phone number, email address and a link to your LinkedIn profile (add Twitter too if you’re active on the site) for all outbound correspondence.

Rapportive—This Gmail extension shows you everything about your contacts right inside your inbox. You can immediately see what people look like, where they’re based and what they do. You can establish rapport by mentioning shared interests. You can grow your network by connecting on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and other social channels. And you can record thoughts for later by leaving notes.

How to find almost anyone’s email address:
- Booleanblackbelt.com
- Salesforhackers.com
- Sourcecon.com
- Fordyceletter.com
Stay on Top of Industry News and Constantly Seek Out New Career Advice and Tips

Feedly.com—I blog and read a lot of blogs and news articles within the supply chain and recruiting sectors. Feedly is a popular RSS reader (free Chrome extension) that allows you to easily research, segment and keep track of blogs and news articles related to supply chain, manufacturing and any other topic you’re interested in—such as career advice, for example. I also use it to discover job leads and client prospects for my business. If you use Twitter, this is fantastic source for curating content to share with others via your social media sites.

Additional Twitter Tips

How to find people on Twitter—Glen Cathey

How to find a job on Twitter—Jim Stroud
Part 1, Part 2, Part 3, Part 4

Know Your Worth

Compensation Research Sites
- Salary.com
- Payscale.com

Additional Sites for Researching Companies
- GlassDoor
- LinkedIn Advance Search
- Chamber of Commerce
- Hoovers
- Better Business Bureau

Store Your Job Search Files in the Cloud

Google Drive—Free cloud storage. I highly recommend keeping all your job search-related documents here (or Dropbox if you prefer) so you can easily access your files from any computer or mobile phone anywhere in the world. Create a free account and upload your resume, cover letter, “Job Search Tracking” template and any other tools or correspondence related to your job search.
CLOSING

Last but not least, I strongly encourage you to keep track of the time you spend each week on each job search activity so you can determine which activities are producing the best results and which activities are sucking away your time. Your job search strategy should be a moving target that requires constant tweaking in an effort to maximize productivity and achieve desired results.

If you’re unsure of how to prioritize your time across your job search activities, remember that networking is rated as the best way to find a new job. Likewise, referrals are typically an employer’s top source of new hires. Seeing that networking and referrals go hand in hand, networking is clearly the area where you need to spend the majority of your time.

Thanks, and happy hunting!

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Rodney Apple is the founder and president of SCM Talent Group, LLC—a national supply chain recruiting and executive search firm that recruits across the end-to-end supply chain discipline. Spanning almost 10 years, Rodney worked at the corporate headquarters for The Coca-Cola Company and The Home Depot, where he led professional and executive recruiting for their global supply chain organizations. To date, Rodney has successfully filled over 1,000 professional- to executive-level supply chain positions for clients ranging from Fortune 15 to start-up. Rodney also authors “The Supply Chain Talent Blog,” where he shares advice on job search strategy, resume optimization, interviewing tips, career development, hiring and more. For more information, please visit scmtalent.com.
ABOUT APICS

APICS is the leading professional association for supply chain and operations management and the premier provider of research, education and certification programs that elevate supply chain excellence, innovation and resilience. APICS Certified in Production and Inventory Management (CPIM) and APICS Certified Supply Chain Professional (CSCP) designations set the industry standard. With over 37,000 members and more than 250 international partners, APICS is transforming the way people do business, drive growth and reach global customers. For more information, visit apics.org, join the APICS Linkedin group at apics.org/linkedin and follow APICS on Twitter at twitter.com/APICS.