MAKE THE FIRST MOVE WITH SPECULATIVE APPLICATIONS

OPTIMISE YOUR JOB HUNTING BY TAPPING INTO THE HIDDEN JOB MARKET. IT CAN INCREASE YOUR CHANCES OF GETTING THE VACANCY YOU WANT BY CONTACTING EMPLOYERS DIRECTLY.

If you only wait until you see a job vacancy advertised before you apply, it’s likely that the huge number of opportunities that are unadvertised will pass you by unnoticed.

Making speculative applications involves sending your CV and covering letter to a company, even though a vacancy hasn’t been advertised, to see if they have any opportunities for you to work for them. Whilst this might not be the quickest method of job hunting, done carefully it can certainly deliver positive results particularly with smaller organisations and in industries such as the arts, media and charities. For employers this is a quicker and cheaper way to recruit, plus – as the candidate has come to them – it proves their drive, initiative and willingness to go the extra mile.

Take time to get it right
Remember any communication you have with an employer will define their first impression of you. Take time to find out about the organisation, so you can clearly state what you know about them and why you are particularly interested in working for them. Targeting your CV and cover letter is vital. Although there is no person specification to tailor your application to, think about the skills and qualities this organisation is likely to need, and demonstrate how you match them and could therefore be exactly what they are looking for.

Increase your chances of making an impact by sending your application directly to a person who you have already made a connection with. This could be someone you met at a careers event, have previously worked with, or contacted on LinkedIn or Twitter for example.

Although it is easier said than done, don’t be disheartened if you don’t get a response. Follow up your application with a phone call a couple of weeks later to check whether they have received your application and gauge the likelihood of any opportunities. This approach won’t work every time, but with persistence you never know when you might find yourself in ‘the right place at the right time’.

A speculative approach
‘I managed to get my PR work experience placement by sending a speculative CV and letter. After long hours of browsing the internet, I discovered www.prweekjobs.co.uk and saw an interesting profile for a PR agency, so I decided to apply. A little time later, I received a call from a member of the staff asking me when I was available for an informal interview and they offered me the placement.’

Irini Gora, MA English Literature, Queen Mary University of London

See our articles on how to write an effective CV and covering letter PAGES 30–33

• Idea!
If you are interested in working in the arts or media, another way of identifying potential employers is to list your favourite arts venues, museums or the production companies that produce your favourite programmes, for example. Use this as a starting point to then search their websites and follow the steps explained in this article.

• Idea!
Are there organisations you could contact which are working in the same area as your dissertation or final project? Check their website for details of any open days or careers events where you can meet them in person and find out how they recruit and what they look for in potential candidates. This information will be valuable when making your own application. Search for the company or an employee from the department you are interested in on social media and message them with some well-prepared questions. This is an opportunity to develop rapport and build your understanding of their business. For help with showing your commercial awareness, see page 28.