

# Finding Work— Job Search Theory and Methods



As the summer approaches, high school and college students alike will be entering the labor force in search of employment. The occupational vacancies pursued, the job seekers' skill-sets and job status preference (full/part-time, temporary/seasonal) will likely differ substantially within and among these student groups. However, in order for any of these new job seekers to find employment, they will need to engage in some type of job search.

Our theoretical understanding of job search holds that information about open jobs requires investment from potential worker to ascertain. Job opportunities are positively associated with worker investment in his/her job search, and the worker will cease job searching when the cost of searching outweighs the benefit. In theory, job seekers will engage in as many job search methods as possible, as long as they realize utility at the margin.

Empirically, we can use information from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS) to study how Utahns conduct their job search. The CPS is a monthly survey, conducted nationally, that yields primary labor force characteristic data. Among many other inquiries, one question that CPS participants are asked is, "What are all of the things you have done to find work during the last four weeks?" Respondents are given 13 answer options and can select up to six. The Department of Workforce Services took CPS respondent data compiled on 394 unemployed individuals in Utah from 2005 to 2009 and aggregated the information to produce a ranking of the

most frequently engaged job search methods. As shown in Figure 1, the most common method of job search among those studied in the 2005–2009 Utah CPS data was to actively 'send out resumes/ fill out applications' followed by 'contacted employer directly/interview' with 'contacted public employment agency' rounding out the top three.

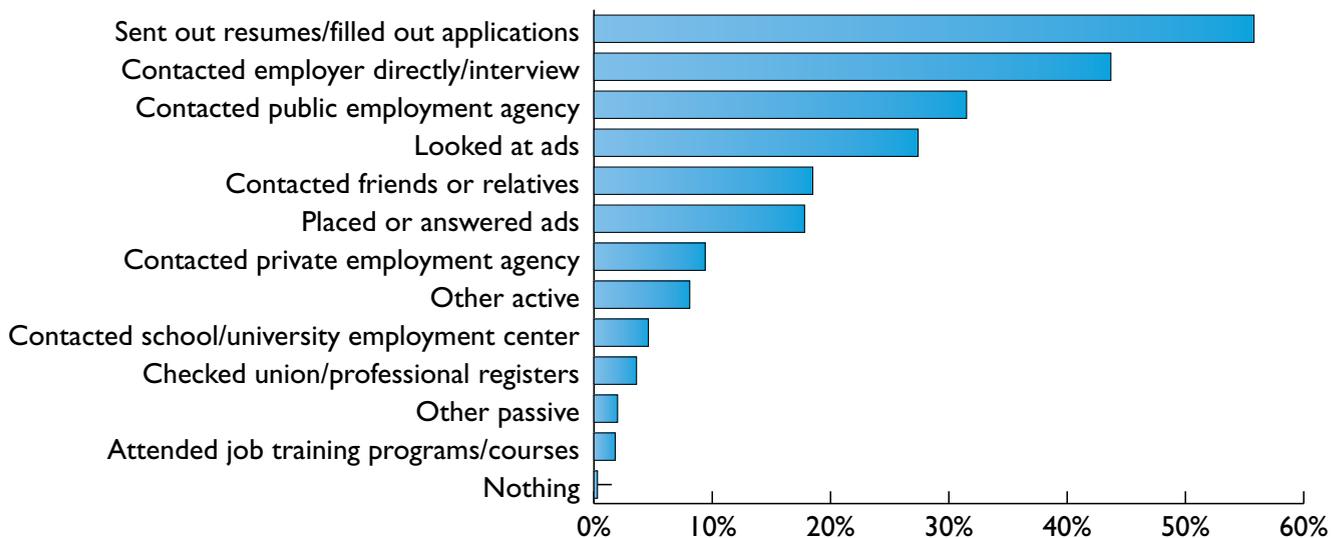
Unfortunately, the most salient aspect of job search is the most elusive; that is, which job search methods are the most successful? A large body of research has tried to answer that question, but mixed conclusions characterize the literature. While some studies suggest that 'friends and networking' is the best method for finding work, others determine that serendipitous job matching occurs by socioeconomic class, where networking through close friends and relatives is less effective. Regardless of which job search method matches the most workers overall, we can speculate that successful job search methods might vary by industry, occupation and geography. And as far as the upcoming influx of student job seekers are concerned, they can maximize their chances of employment by being open to a broad spectrum of job search methods, and by following traditional advice such as having well written resumes and strong interviewing skills.

The Department of Workforce Services is currently undergoing research in an attempt to profile the distribution of job search methods that yield successful employer matches. We look forward to adding our publication to the current body of work on the topic. 

**Be open** to a broad spectrum of job search methods, have a well-written resume and strong interviewing skills.

Figure 1.

Job Search Methods Used  
by the Unemployed in Utah 2005–2009\*



Source: Current Population Survey

\* Public employment agency refers to refers to government operated labor exchange services.