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Len LaCara Business Editor (585) 258-2416
llacara@democratandchronicle.com
Len LaCara



NAVIGATING THE DIGITAL JOB MARKET

Job seekers are getting caught in an online maze of applications



BENNETT J. LOUDON
STAFF WRITER

To scientists, a black hole is a region in outer space with such a strong gravitational force that nothing can escape, not even light.

To the members of the August Group, a networking organization for professionals seeking new jobs, it's the place where online job applications go.

"We call it the black hole because everything goes in and nothing comes out," said John Adams, a member of the August Group and co-founder of Always Be Connecting Power Networking Group.

Nowadays job seekers are almost always required to apply for jobs by filling out an online form or uploading a résumé, but some say responses are few and far between.

It's partly due to software used to gather applications that filters out applications based on keywords and criteria used to narrow the field of candidates to the most qualified applicants.

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Go Deeper on Digital

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RochesterNext.com for job search tips from 10 local job recruiters.



JAMES WARREN/ GANNETT ILLUSTRATION

Local veteran knew the principle of a shared fate

Last Sunday, my wife and I toured the ZERO art exhibitions at the Guggenheim museum in New York. ZERO was a collaboration of young artists in the 1950s and '60s who felt a need to heal post-World War II Europe and create a positive relationship between countries deeply divided by the war.

Many have attributed this collaboration to rebuilding Europe's esprit de corps and opening up trade between former enemies. It demonstrated the power individuals can have on building communities.

On Veterans Day I attended calling hours for Bill Cowgill, who passed away just three months shy of his 94th birthday. I was reminded again about the influence another World War II hero had on our community.

Lt. Cowgill served front-line duty

Patrick Burke

OUTSIDE INSIGHTS
PCBURKE61@gmail.com



under Patton's 4th Armored Division. Bill was wounded in the Battle of the Bulge by German machine gun fire, shattering his right leg. He lay unattended for 14 hours in the snow in front of the German position, sure that he would freeze to death. Fate took a different path when four German soldiers carried him as a human shield back to the American unit, exchanging Bill for their surrender as prisoners of war. After the war, Bill returned to Rochester and joined Kodak as an engineer.

In 1955, Bill left Kodak and started H&C Tool Supply, one of several companies he and his friend VanBuren Hansford had their hands in around our community. In the early days of H&C he struggled and worked long hours assisting Rochester metalworking companies in lowering their costs of manufacturing and improving their productivity, establishing a reputation as an ambitious, young entrepreneur.

Bill had a passion for his community serving in the 1960s as chair of the individual subscribers division of the Rochester Community Chest Fund Drive, which is now known as the United Way. He embraced his responsibility as a business person to lead in assisting others in our community in need.

He understood the health of a community is grounded in the principle of

shared fate.

Bill didn't limit his businesses expertise to the tooling industry or his community work to United Way. He and his wife, Barbara, converted the old railway station in the village of Pittsford into a fine restaurant known as The Depot. He was also a volunteer fireman and became chairman of the Fire District Officers' Association of Monroe County.

A special Rochester entrepreneur and leading citizen has slipped the loving bonds of his family and his contribution to the betterment of our community should not be forgotten. So let's get to work.

Patrick Burke is managing principal of Burke Group in Brighton. He can be reached at PCBURKE61@gmail.com.



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Applying

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"If the first 10 people that come up on that search are good enough to pursue, and they're good enough to go through the process of a first interview, chances are they're going to take it," said Natalie Washington, owner and president of JWN Recruitment. "People on the other end of this, the job seeker, they feel like they're not being noticed."

And even if an applicant uses the right keywords, sometimes there are just so many applications that recruiters can't look at them all.

Keywords are key

"In the last five to 10 years there has been a massive shift in recruiting, where almost all recruiting is now online. There's almost no other way to get a job," said William Kuchta, who retired as head of human resources at Paychex Inc. three years ago.

The hiring industry now totals about \$120 billion worldwide and is expected to grow by 10 percent to 12 percent annually, according to Bersin by Deloitte, an industry research firm.

"Much of the software out there now is focused on helping employers meet three important needs: finding in-demand candidates and cutting down on time to hire and cost per hire," Mary Lorenz, a communications manager for CareerBuilder owned by Gannett Co. Inc., the parent company of the *Democrat and Chronicle*, said in an email.

"While candidates want a more personal experience, limited time and resources can make it difficult."

Critics claim that qualified applicants can lose out if they don't include the right words and phrases on their résumé or application form, or if there is an issue with the software reading the résumés.

Human resource workers say they need the software to sift through hundreds or thousands of applications, something that would be almost impossible if they had to actually read that many paper documents to find the best applicants.

"If you're getting 100 to 150 paper applications it's very hard to track and keep all those in order," said Kristy Ioele, business services team leader for RochesterWorks.

Washington has experienced the online application system from both sides.

"I've been the person that's been unemployed, out of work for almost a year and applied for 80-something jobs and only yielded two interviews, so I'm coming from a place where I'm completely empathetic and understand the frustration," she said.



Michael Terry of Rochester starts off with a handshake as he interviews with Valerie Bowen, staffing coordinator with Remedy, during a job fair at RochesterWorks on 255 N. Goodman St.

But she now pays \$70 a month for a subscription to software that screens job seekers and maintains a database of potential job candidates.

"It's the best way to manage my business," she said. "I have all my clients in there. I have my contacts in there and I have my candidates in there."

Troy Greene, 31, of Rochester doesn't object to the online application process.

"It's easy for me. The few I did fill out so far I've got replies from. I had a couple interviews. I just didn't get the job," said Greene, who was at RochesterWorks recently looking for work as a security guard.

Valerie Bowen, 58, of Rochester also said she has been able to garner several interviews as a result of filling out online applications.

But she still has concerns about whether the online application systems work properly. Sometimes when she uploads a résumé, the system doesn't read the information properly.

"I have had a few where I've applied and I see that the information isn't there from my résumé. You think it's there, but it's really not," said Bowen, who is looking for work in production planning or supply chain management.

Michael Terry, 39, of Rochester, prefers applying for jobs in person.

"I'm used to pounding the pavement. I'm used to going out and filling out applications. I don't think you get as much call-backs as going into a business and filling out and application," said Terry, who is looking for work as a certified nursing assistant.

Application overload

Kuchta said job seekers shouldn't depend solely on online applications. It's better to get a foot in the door with the

help of a friend or relative who can tip you off to an opening, or even put in a good word for you. And, although it may seem counter intuitive, a letter mailed the old fashioned way to the person doing the hiring, may get you noticed faster.

"Applying online, your odds are so small you might as well buy a lottery ticket," Kuchta said.

Lynn Dessert, an executive career life coach now based in Charlotte, N.C., who moved from Brighton about two months ago, said application software designed to screen applicants can sometimes interfere with finding the best applicant for a job. Job seekers have to be extremely specific about their skills. They have to be careful about the words and acronyms they use because sometimes the people deciding on the keywords used to find job candidates get caught up in their industry jargon.

"The fact of the matter is, if one or two pop to the top of the list they may be satisfied with that because what they really don't want is a list of 50," Dessert said. "That's a lot more work for them to have to go through a list of 50, even though a more qualified person is on that list."

Link to LinkedIn

Besides applying online directly through a company website, LinkedIn is the second best route to being hired, Dessert said.

"Most of the recruiters, both internal recruiters and external recruiters, source through LinkedIn and they use the same process in terms of looking at words and search criteria," Dessert said.

She suggests using keywords four or five times in your LinkedIn page to increase the chances of being found when recruiters are seeking candidates with specific skills.

Tips for applying online

Set up a LinkedIn account, create a complete profile, with a picture, and make sure you use keywords four or five times that indicate your skills and experience.

Study job descriptions, identify the keywords and use them several times in your application.

Make sure you have the matching skills for a job.

After you apply online, send a follow-up email to the hiring manager reminding him or her of your interest and qualifications.

Network with others in your field of interest to find job openings that may or may not be posted.

"You don't want to get to the point of spamming it," Dessert explained. "It has to flow. It's kind of like using the philosophy of (search engine optimization) on websites to using it on your LinkedIn profile."

Wegmans officials declined to discuss whether they use software to screen applicants. Xerox Corp. officials were asked about the company's use of talent acquisition software, but provided no comment.

Wegmans spokesperson Jeanne Colleluori said, "This just isn't a topic that we would want to comment on. We don't publicly share details about our hiring process and that's primarily for competitive reasons."

The University of Rochester is notorious for its "black hole" application system, Adams said.

"The way you get around the UR is you apply online and then you try to figure out who the hiring manager is and send them an email directly. The hiring manager is more likely to see it from the direct email than from the black hole system," Adams said.

The University of Rochester, the region's largest employer, with about 24,000 workers, uses an online system to post jobs and accept applications, but the system does no screening, said Jeff Stevens, chief human resources officer for the Medical Center.

"You look at the University of Rochester and you try to understand what makes it difficult for external applicants to be found," Stevens said. "It's because we're not using a system like this. We're using a system where everybody is just dumping their résumé and it's so voluminous that people aren't being screened out. They're just getting lost in the volume of applicants."

The lack of any filters is "a tremendous burden on the part of managers," Stevens said. "In all honesty, I think we will want a smarter system."

BLOUDON@DemocratandChronicle.com
Twitter.com/BennettLoudon

Nextpert

By Betty Richardson

Minimum wage is going up

This is not an article about the pros or cons of raising the minimum wage in New York state. The fact is the minimum wage is going up later this year and again at the end of 2015.

The current minimum wage is \$8 per hour, up from \$7.25 in 2013. As of Dec. 31, 2014, minimum wage will increase to \$8.75, with another increase to \$9 per hour on Dec. 31, 2015. Employers must be in compliance with these rates as of the effective dates (not on January 1, but as of December 31).

This represents a 24 percent increase in just a few years. The magnitude of increases in pay for lower level positions may cause "compression" in pay with your mid- and higher-level positions.

This means that employees who used to be paid more than others with less experience are suddenly paid the same or similar wages.

It is beneficial for employers to review this situation to determine if they have equity in their pay system. Having said this, it is recognized that budgets are tight, and it is difficult to increase wages since those

THIS WEEK'S NEXTPERT

Betty Richardson is president of Rewarding Solutions LLC. Interested in being a Nextpert? Email: RocNext@DemocratandChronicle.com.



costs continue year after year.

In addition to raising the minimum hourly wage, New York state has also increased the weekly salary threshold for employees to be considered an exempt employee or an employee not required to receive overtime pay. The federal Fair Labor Standards Act, otherwise known as FLSA, defines categories of exemptions (executive, administrative, professional, etc.) and related duties that must be met for an exemption to be considered. Additionally, there is a minimum weekly salary that must be paid for the exemption to be considered. The state has higher thresholds than the federal FLSA, which is currently under review and will likely increase, too. These state thresholds are increasing that same 24 percent.

Employers in New York state must comply with both federal and state regulations. Human Resource professionals can provide assistance in ensuring compliance. If you don't have a dedicated HR person, there are a number of organizations in the Rochester area that can provide HR assistance, including the Rochester Business Alliance and Arthur J. Gallagher & Company.



Small businesses must comply with state and federal changes in overtime and the minimum wage.

STOCKS OF LOCAL INTEREST

COMPANY	TICKER	LOW	HIGH	FRIDAY CLOSE	\$CHG 1WK	%CHG 1WK	1MO	1QTR	%CHG YTD	%RTN 1YR	RANK 1YR	%RTN 5YRS*	PE	Yld
Ametek Inc	AME	45.12	54.50	51.70	-0.31	-0.6	▲	▲	-1.8	+5.9	■	26.7	22	0.7
Bank of America	BAC	14.20	18.03	17.14	-0.22	-1.3	▲	▲	10.1	+16.4	■	1.7	16	1.2
CIBER Inc	CBR	2.84	5.09	3.17	-0.18	-5.4	▼	▼	-23.4	-6.2	■	-0.1	...	...
CmtyBS	CBU	32.84	40.64	38.22	-0.03	-0.1	▲	▲	-3.7	+7.1	■	19.3	17	3.1
Constellation Br A	STZ	66.28	95.09	92.88	-0.68	-0.7	▲	▲	32.0	+36.5	■	22.8	23	...
Cooper	COO	116.95	167.59	161.73	-3.27	-2.0	▲	▲	30.6	+27.4	■	38.8	27	...
Corning Inc	GLW	16.46	22.37	20.41	-0.04	-0.2	▲	▲	14.5	+23.9	■	5.7	20	2.0
Document Sec Sys	DSS	0.40	2.46	.76	0.28	59.0	—	▼	-63.3	-36.7	■	-18.9	...	...
Dr Pepper Snapple	DPS	46.88	71.50	70.10	0.15	0.2	▲	▲	43.9	+47.1	■	22.8	19	2.3
Eastman Chem	EMN	70.38	90.55	84.18	1.71	2.1	▲	▲	4.3	+8.0	■	25.0	13	1.7
Eastman Kodak	KODK	17.40	37.73	22.50	-0.48	-2.1	▲	▲	-35.2	-9.1	■	...	...	...
Ecobal Inc	ECL	97.65	118.46	112.41	-0.07	-0.1	▲	—	7.8	+6.1	■	20.5	30	1.0
EnPro	NPO	53.39	80.00	66.62	0.79	1.2	▲	▲	15.6	+17.6	■	22.8	57	...
Exelis Inc	XLS	15.30	21.44	17.71	-0.10	-0.6	▲	▲	-0.4	+12.3	■	25.8a	13	2.3
Exelon Corp	EXC	26.45	37.90	35.41	-2.05	-5.5	▲	▲	29.3	+31.4	■	-1.0	15	3.5
ExxonMobil	XOM	86.91	104.76	95.09	-1.50	-1.6	▲	▼	-6.0	+4.9	■	7.9	12	2.9
Financial Inst.	FISI	19.72	26.62	24.87	0.24	1.0	▲	▲	0.6	+10.6	■	22.2	13	3.1
First Niagara Fin Gr	FNFG	7.00	11.34	8.08	0.64	8.5	▼	▼	-24.0	-25.0	■	-5.0	...	4.0
Ford Motor	F	13.26	18.12	15.14	0.97	6.8	▲	▼	-1.9	-8.5	■	14.1	10	3.3
Frontier Comm	FTR	4.39	7.24	6.81	0.37	5.7	▲	▲	46.5	+49.6	■	6.1	32	5.9
Gannett	GCI	24.68	35.70	31.05	0.74	2.4	▲	▼	5.0	+16.4	■	25.6	15	2.6
General Electric	GE	23.69	28.09	26.46	0.05	0.2	▲	▲	-5.6	+1.3	■	13.7	19	3.3
General Motors Co	GM	28.82	41.85	31.79	0.20	0.6	▲	▼	-22.2	-15.1	■	12.5a	21	3.8
GenWyo	GWR	83.42	106.02	99.43	1.32	1.3	▲	▲	3.5	+2.7	■	25.1	24	...
Graham Corp	GHM	26.20	38.08	34.22	0.53	1.6	▲	▲	-5.7	-6.0	■	15.7	34	0.5
HSBC Holdings	HSBC	48.80	56.47	50.27	0.18	0.4	▲	▲	-8.8	-4.5	■	-0.3	...	4.9
Harris	HRS	60.78	79.32	70.62	-0.18	-0.3	▲	▲	1.2	+12.4	■	11.7	14	2.7
Home Properties	HME	52.16	66.74	62.73	-0.54	-0.9	▲	▼	17.0	+18.4	■	11.5	30	4.7
IEC Electronics	IEC	3.65	5.30	5.25	0.08	1.5	▲	▲	23.5	+21.3	■	1.3	...	...
IDEX Corp	IEX	65.91	81.82	76.23	1.24	1.7	▲	▼	3.2	+9.1	■	21.4	22	1.5
IBM	IBM	160.05	199.21	164.16	2.09	1.3	▼	▼	-12.5	-7.6	■	7.3	13	2.7
JPMorgCh	JPM	52.97	61.93	60.28	-1.19	-1.9	▲	▲	3.8	+13.7	■	8.8	11	2.7
J & J	JNJ	86.09	109.49	108.16	-0.04	0.0	▲	▲	18.1	+18.1	■	14.3	18	2.6
Keycorp	KEY	11.55	14.70	13.35	-0.04	-0.3	▲	▲	-0.5	+4.9	■	20.3	13	1.9
L-3 Communications	LLL	99.33	127.27	119.28	-1.76	-1.5	▲	▲	11.6	+19.3	■	11.6	15	2.0
Level 3 Commun	LVL	28.58	49.22	49.04	3.19	7.0	▲	▲	47.8	+63.5	■	22.0	45	...
M&T Bank	MTB	109.16	128.69	124.94	0.40	0.3	▲	▲	7.3	+13.5	■	17.3	17	2.2
Manning & Napier	MN	14.40	18.87	15.33	-0.29	-1.9	▼	▼	-13.1	-6.8	■	...	...	999 4.2
Mondelez Intl	MDLZ	31.83	39.54	38.16	0.40	1.1	▲	▲	8.1	+13.4	■	18.7	19	1.6
Monro Muffler	MNRO	46.64	62.11	52.68	-1.04	-1.9	▲	▲	-6.5	+10.1	■	22.1	28	1.0
Parker Hanif	PH	99.82	130.44	128.44	-0.06	0.0	▲	▲	-0.2	+11.7	■	20.0	18	2.0
Paychex	PAYX	39.79	48.20	47.23	-0.10	-0.2	▲	▲	3.7	+12.9	■	11.7	27	3.2
SLM Corp	SLM	7.53	10.06	9.86	-0.05	-0.5	▲	▲	5.0	+6.2	■	23.3	7	...
SPX Corp	SPW	80.50	111.47	91.93	-0.93	-1.0	▲	▼	-7.7	-2.2	■	11.6	18	1.6
Seneca Foods	SENEB	27.91	35.99	30.50	-0.90	-2.9	▼	▼	-3.4	+2.5	■	6.9	66	...
Stantec	STN	57.37	69.50	61.62	0.13	0.2	▼	▼	-0.6	-3.1	■	20.2	...	...
Stewart Info	STC	27.02	37.55	35.15	0.00	0.0	▲	▲	8.9	+20.7	■	27.3	25	0.3
Sysco Corp	SY	32.84	43.40	38.58	0.44	1.2	▲	▲	6.9	+18.4	■	10.2	24	3.0
Thermo Fisher Sci	TMO	96.88	127.63	118.75	2.15	1.8	▲	▼	6.6	+19.1	■	22.0	29	0.5
Thomson Corp (The)	TRI	33.21	38.73	38.43	0.79	2.1	▲	▲	1.6	+3.2	■	7.2	55	3.4
Time Warner Cable	TWC	116.98	155.32	140.01	-3.59	-2.5	▲	▼	3.3	+18.3	■	29.0	20	2.1
Tompkins Financial	TMP	43.51	51.98	51.02	1.24	2.5	▲	▲	-0.7	+9.7	■	9.4	14	3.3
Transcat	TRNS	7.24	10.90	10.39	0.14	1.4	▲	▲	30.0	+29.1	■	11.1	20	...
UltraLife	ULBI	2.89	4.74	3.09	0.01	0.3	▲	▼	-13.0	-14.4	■	-4.7	...	...
Valeant Pharm	VRX	103.51	153.10	134.21	8.10	6.4	▲	▲	14.3	+26.8	■	57.6	91	...
Verizon Comm	VZ	45.45	53.66	51.50	0.64	1.3	▲	▲	4.8	+6.7	■	16.9	11	4.3
VirtualScopics Inc	VSCP	2.93	5.85	3.84	-0.28	-6.8	▼	▼	11.0	+6.7	■	-20.1	...	...
Windstream Cp	WIN	7.18	13.30	9.73	0.18	1.9	▼	▼	21.9	+29.9	■	8.2	26	10.3
Xerox	XR	10.20	14.15	13.43	-0.02	-0.1	▲	▲	10.4	+24.0	■	12.9	14	1.9