

A Survey of Marketers Tells What Works*

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As part of the New Hampshire Supported Employment Systems Change Project, a telephone survey was conducted with nearly all state job developers. Each successful placement during the previous six months was described and analyzed. Some results and their implications follow.

Get to Know Prospective Employees Personally

Job developers evenly split their job-seeking strategies in three ways. They considered a specific occupational goal; they looked for jobs with a particular environmental feature, social atmosphere, location, or work hours; or they looked for “any job” for a person. The more time a job developer had spent getting to know the individual, the more specific the goal tended to be. A small percentage relied on written information provided by the referral source, and no one used data from a commercial evaluation system.

Use Personal Connections and Social Marketing

About half of the jobs were obtained through “warm” contacts based on some personal connection or information. This included:

- previous or present employer
- other member of the agency
- the prospective employee and his or her family
- “inside” knowledge about a company.

Some job developers were active members of their community and incorporated what one called “social marketing” into their personal lives. Others used a brainstorming session to obtain information about a job seeker’s social network and developed job leads through these networks. The remaining contracts were “cold calls” to an employer in person, by phone or, in a small number of cases, responses to employer want ads. It took an average of just over seven-and-a-half contacts to develop each job, with a range of between 1 and 53 contacts. The majority (64%) of jobs were developed after three or fewer contacts.

Duplication of Contacts from Different Agencies

About two-thirds of job developers experienced some overlap with other agencies in their contacts. 30% experienced overlap on more than half. “Warm” contacts were less likely to overlap than “cold” contacts. Contacts based on more individualized job goals also tended to overlap less often with those of another job developer. Duplication was not always seen as negative. Some job developers felt it provided an opportunity to explain their agency’s unique features and services.

Efficient Marketing Techniques: Experience Pays

Helping prospective employees to avoid the need for hour constraints(e.g., a job for a person who can only work from 8:00 to 11:30 a.m.) enhances job potential and the job development effort. Placements made with hour restrictions consistently required high numbers of contacts.

Amount of experience developing jobs was another critical factor. Individuals with two to four years of experience virtually never required more than 15 contacts to develop a job, and all of the placements made by job developers with more than four years of experience required 10 or fewer contacts.

Experienced job developers

- had developed relationships with a network of employers who were more likely to be receptive or contact the job developer when a position opened up.
- more often were focused on meeting the needs of the employer. For example, they might ask for a tour of the company or for a description of various positions. Subsequent discussions were related directly to that employer’s needs.
- believed that with experience came the ability to establish fairly quickly the receptivity of the potential employer. For example, several reported paying careful attention to an employer’s handshake, eye contact or body language to gauge what their chance of success was likely to be.

Initial Meetings: Function Statement and a Request

All job developers used a brief opening, either in person or over the phone, designed to interest the employer and obtain an appointment. After stating their name and agency, most job developers gave a brief identifying statement. For example, some stated that they were in the personnel business. Some said that they represented a supported employment service.

Most job developers added a function statement describing what the agency did or what they were calling about. Some stated that they were helping a specific individual, or an individual with an interest or skills related to a particular line of work, to find a job. Others stated their function more

generally, as working with people, or people with disabilities or special needs, to find employment.

Most job developers ended their opening with a request for:

- set up a meeting
- discuss the services of the agency
- know whether there were any job openings
- take a tour of the company
- discuss a specific job applicant further

Experienced job developers more often included both a function statement and a request. This may account in part for the fact that experienced job developers averaged fewer contacts per placement.

Company-Centered Negotiations Are Most Effective

After the initial contact, one or more meetings or negotiating sessions were usually required. Job developers used three distinct strategies in these negotiations. Every job developer used elements from all three strategies but emphasized one over the others.

- The agency-centered strategy emphasized the services and/or incentives of the agency, such as employee training, supervision, guaranteed productivity, no-obligation tryouts and/or long-term support.
- The employee-centered strategy focused on the abilities and interests of a particular job applicant, to interest the employer in that individual.
- The company-centered strategy stressed the needs of the company, getting as much information as possible about the work at the company and the employer's plans. A tour of the company was usually central to this approach.

All jobs were developed through agency-centered, employee-centered and company-centered negotiations, in order of frequency. But job developers with more experience used company-centered negotiations far more often than inexperienced developers.

The company-centered strategy was especially effective in getting employers to create jobs when no position was officially open. An employer might identify an overload of work that could require a new position. Almost one-third of all the jobs were created in this way, and the majority were the result of company-centered negotiations.

Company-centered negotiations also resulted far more often in employees being trained and supported by their co-workers, with agency assistance, rather than by the agency as in the traditional job coach or enclave models. This strategy may be more likely to empower the employer.

Arrange for Interviews and Use Resumes

About two-thirds of the time an interview took place between the applicant and the employer, sometimes with the job developer providing assistance. Some of these were not traditional interviews, but informal meetings in which the employer and job seeker had coffee together or the employer showed the job to the applicant.

In those cases where no interview of any kind took place, the job required full supervision by the agency (as in an enclave) or job coach training 80% of the time. But when an interview was held, full agency supervision or job coaching was provided only one-third of the time. Since in virtually all of these cases the employer did meet with the job developer, this strongly suggests that some employers were in effect “hiring” the support agency.

Applications used resumes less than 15% of the time, yet this tool was considered useful and enhancing both by job developers and employers.

Be Flexible and Adapt Strategies to Individual Circumstances

In the opinion of most job developers, two things are critical in successful job developing:

- presenting a businesslike approach to employers and
- establishing open and personal communication. This includes maintaining supportive contact and establishing clearly defined mutual expectations of the employment process.

A small number of job developers stated that the most important aspect of successful job developing was the ability to sport employer receptivity; interestingly, these job developers were the most experienced.