

6 Ways To Crack The 'Hidden' Job Market [Nancy Collamer Contributor](#) [Next Avenue](#)

It seems almost a cruel joke being played on people desperate to find work: Most jobs getting filled these days aren't even advertised.

Instead, they're typically part of the hidden job market — those millions of openings that never get formally posted. It now accounts for up to 80% of hires, according to some estimates.

(MORE: [10 Ways the Job Search Has Changed](#))

Given the choice, most employers prefer to fill positions without advertising. It saves money and time. More important, managers who do the hiring often believe the most suitable candidates are people who already work for their firms (or once did) and [referrals from staffers](#).

But how can you get clued in to those hush-hush positions so you can apply for them? The answer: It's all about connections.

6 Ways to Find Hidden Jobs

Here are six smart strategies to help you find out about “hidden jobs” by improving your networking skills, leveraging technology and expanding your reach.

1. Change the way you network If you want to crack the hidden job market, you've got to be smarter about the way you connect with people with inside knowledge about unposted openings.

The three keys:

First, make networking a habit, not something you do only when you need a job. By including this practice in your normal routine, you'll automatically increase your chances of hearing about opportunities. So make a point of staying in regular touch with former colleagues and always [adding new LinkedIn connections](#).

Second, remember the cardinal rule of networking: Give before you get. Forward articles you think could be helpful to people you know and pass on job leads you've heard about. Networking is about building genuine relationships, not asking for favors.

Finally, make it easy for people to help you find a job. When you're talking to contacts who might be valuable for your search, tell them about the kinds of positions you're looking for and the employers or fields that interest you. Then follow up with emails so they'll have handy takeaways summarizing what you discussed.

Bonus Tip: Always end your networking conversations by asking: “Who else should I be talking to?” That question will, in turn, lead to introductions.

2. Join a professional networking group Your fellow job seekers can sometimes be the best resources for learning about employers who are likely to hire. Most are eager to share their knowledge, knowing that others in the same boat will share in return. (The exception: when two people are looking for the same position, at the same level, in the same geographic area.)

I'd recommend joining nationwide or regional job-search support groups. Two with chapters around the country are [Execunet](#), for senior-level professionals, and [The Five O'Clock Club](#), which is open to people at all salary levels.

Bonus Tip: To find a local job-search support organization, check your local paper or the library for a list of upcoming meetings.

3. Contact employers directly I'm continually amazed by how rarely people [reach out to people at places they'd like to work](#) unless they see positions advertised there.

I know it takes effort to craft a compelling request for an interview. But smart managers are always interested in meeting professionals who can help their employers make or save money.

So figure out who the hiring manager is and be bold. Email or call to introduce yourself and explain how your background and experience would be useful there.

This way, even if the place currently has a hiring freeze, you'll be top of mind when positions do open up.

Bonus Tip: Use LinkedIn to get introduced to the decision maker by one of your connections on the social network. You're more likely to get your target's attention if you get referred to him or her.

4. Sign up for Google News Alerts One of the best ways to learn about hidden jobs is to stay up-to-date with prospective employers. This way, you'll be among the first to know when one, say, leases additional office space, signs a big partnership deal or receives a new round of funding — all signs that the firm or nonprofit might soon be hiring.

Google News Alerts make it easy to do this. Just go to the [Google Alerts page](#) and type in which employers, decision makers and fields of interest you want to hear about. Then you'll start receiving emails with the latest news Google has turned up.

Bonus Tip: After you get a Google Alert about a key executive at an employer where you'd like to work, weave the flattering information into your e-mail or phone call when you ask for an interview.

5. Attend a conference [Trade shows and conventions](#) are ideal places to mine the hidden job market. They'll let you make new contacts who can tell you about unposted openings, help you get interviews, provide access to influencers with hiring power and discover employers in growth mode who are likely to be looking for staffers soon.

Admittedly, conferences can be expensive, particularly if you're out of work. But try attending at least one major meeting a year in your chosen field. If you can't swing that financially, make it a point to go to local industry gatherings.

Bonus Tip: You may be able to reduce or even eliminate the cost of attending a conference by offering to work there as a volunteer.

6. Finally, if you like your current employer but not your particular job, snoop around at work There could be a terrific opportunity in another department. Remember: Internal candidates often get preference over outside applicants when positions need filling.

The hidden job of your dreams just might be hiding in plain sight — right down the hallway.

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