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Finding a Job in a New City

If you can manage the logistics, searching nationally can land you in a better spot than you thought possible.

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By Kevin Fogarty

Since the recession officially started in December 2007, the unemployment rate has doubled, and the average time it takes to find a new job has increased 37 percent.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics' Oct. 2 unemployment report doesn't include a way to measure desperation. But with 15.1 million out of work and the average time it takes to find a new job up to 26.2 weeks, it's certainly a factor in many searches.

Recruiters say the number of job seekers taking their searches national is increasing and that employers are as happy to consider candidates from out of town as down the street.

Nevertheless, they're also less willing to roll out the red carpet to accommodate remote candidates; landing jobs in a new geography requires more personal initiative than it did in years gone by.

"When I was looking for a job last time, early in 2008, the problem was sifting through the offers," according to Stephen Bhadran, a TechnologyLadder member who moved from Los Angeles to Sarasota, Fla., to take a choice job offer, then back to Los Angeles this year after he was laid off. "This year, the problem was there were so few jobs."

Who pays?

A couple of years ago, it wasn't unusual for recruiters to spend a lot of time trying to pry candidates out of cushy jobs and fly them across the country for interviews, according to Edward McGlynn of Financial Recruiters LLC in New York.

That still happens, but only when local options are scarce.

"They're cherry picking," McGlynn said of employers. "Pressure is growing on hiring authorities to hire, (but) they're still cognizant of their expenses; so if there's no reason to go beyond local candidates, they won't. They're looking for the best fit, and I haven't seen any hesitation about flying someone in (for an interview). They don't go out of their way to do it, but it happens."

Bhadran wasn't reluctant to relocate in 2008, when he landed a job with a 10 percent raise and a total of about \$15,000 in moving expenses — or in 2009, when he landed a 9-month contract gig for flat money and no travel money even for the interview.

"That's why I proposed to the employer they do the interview on Skype," he said. "I had to be really careful about it because I would be paying for the travel and it would take a lot of time, and I would have to pay to move my family back."

The job market is so tight in some specialties, it's essential to consider jobs elsewhere in the country or even internationally, according to a senior-level computer-industry electrical engineer who asked that his name not be used.

The engineer, laid off when the recession gutted the business at his East Coast hardware-manufacturing company, is looking for jobs in the Far East. Better to catch a rising wave of IT hardware design and manufacturing in Taiwan, Shanghai and elsewhere in China.

Focus is the key

Shanghai might be too far afield for most people. Nevertheless, taking your job search national — methodically searching for positions for which you'd have to relocate rather than commute — is a good way to expand your number of potential targets and, ultimately, your employability. That's the opinion of Sally Haver, senior vice president of business

development with [The Ayers Group/Career Partners International](#), a recruiting company that specializes in career transitions and outplacement.

It only works, however, if you focus on specific geographic regions; skill sets; or better yet, individual companies, she said.

"You're not going to be successful blasting out your resume to every company in the world," she said. "You have to pick your targets and your geographies."

Searching with a specific skill set in mind

In 2008, Bhadran, a programmer who specializes in the Java computer language that fuels many advanced Web sites, focused on companies that were doing cutting-edge technology online. The job in Florida, at startup World Avenue, lasted less than a year, but got him skills and credibility for having worked on the kind of Java servers that run the highest-traffic sites.

After the layoff, his goal was to keep from taking a step back in salary, never mind how cutting edge the work was. In the end, however, it was the advanced skill set (not the title or salary) that landed him his next job with a nine-month contract at UCLA for which he moved back to Los Angeles .

And it was the broader technology industry in the Los Angeles area and contacts he had already made there that made LA a more target-rich environment, he said.

A few months into the consulting job at UCLA, some friends referred him to other friends at Napster, the music-sharing service that is now owned by Best Buy. His Florida experience also helped land him the software architect job – a top-level programming position in which he helps design how all the software of a complex Internet service should work together.

"I wasn't planning to go back to LA, but it has worked out so far," he said.

Proactive versus desperate

Being willing to move is one advantage, but getting physically in front of the hiring manager is a much bigger one because it turns you into partner in a relationship rather than a voice on the phone, McGlynn said.

Choosing to travel on your own dime is risky, not only because of the money and time involved. There's also the chance, if you let hiring managers know you're coming just to see them, that you'll seem desperate. That's death, McGlynn said.

"If you call someone up and say you'll take anything, you'll fly out to see them, whatever they want, you sound desperate and they're going to back off," McGlynn said. "It's a lot easier to call someone and say, 'Hey, I'm going to be meeting someone to talk about a position right down the street from you; I'd like to stop in and shake your hand,' you get in right under the radar. If you call and say you'd like a meeting, they'll think, 'I've got a lot to do; I'm too busy.' If you just say you want to come shake someone's hand, who can say no to that?"