

Why You Can't Get a Job ... Recruiting Explained By the Numbers

by , [Mr. John Sullivan](#), May 20, 2013, 5:03 am ET, published by permission of Mr. Sullivan

Is your “six seconds of fame” enough to land you a job?

As a professor and a corporate recruiting strategist, I can tell you that very few applicants truly understand the corporate recruiting process. Most people looking for a job approach it with little factual knowledge. That is a huge mistake. A superior approach is to instead analyze it carefully, because data can help you understand why so many applicants simply can't land a job. If you can bear with me for a few quick minutes, I can show you using numbers where the job-search “roadblocks” are and how that data-supported insight can help you easily double your chances of landing an interview and a job.

Your Resume Will Face a Lot of Competition

Although it varies with the company and the job, on average **250** resumes are received for each corporate job opening. Finding a position opening late can't help your chances because the first resume is received within **200** seconds after a position is posted. If you post your resume online on a major job site like Monster so that a recruiter can find it, you are facing stiff competition because **427,000** other resumes are posted on Monster alone each and every week (BeHiring).

Understanding the Hiring “Funnel” can Help You Gauge Your Chances

In recruiting, we have what is known as a “hiring funnel” or yield model for every job which helps recruiting leaders understand how many total applications they need to generate in order to get a single hire. As an applicant, this funnel reveals your chances of success at each step of the hiring process. For the specific case of an online job posting, on average, **1,000** individuals will see a job post, **200** will begin the application process, **100** will complete the application, **75** of those 100 resumes will be screened out by either the ATS or a recruiter, **25** resumes will be seen by the hiring manager, **4 to 6** will be invited for an interview, **1 to 3** of them will be invited back for final interview, **1** will be offered that job and **80 percent** of those receiving an offer will accept it (Talent Function Group LLC).

Six Seconds of Resume Review Means Recruiters Will See Very Little

When you ask individual recruiters directly, they report that they spend up to **5** minutes reviewing each individual resume. However, [a recent research study from TheLadders](#) that included the direct observation of the actions of corporate recruiters demonstrated that the boast of this extended review time is a huge exaggeration. You may be shocked to know that the average recruiter spends a mere **6 seconds** reviewing a resume.

A similar study found the review time to be **5 - 7** seconds (BeHiring). Obviously six seconds only allows a recruiter to quickly scan (but not to read) a resume. We also know from observation that nearly **4 seconds** of that 6-second scan is spent looking exclusively at four job areas, which are: 1) job titles, 2) companies you worked at, 3) start/end dates and 4) education. Like it or not, that narrow focus means that unless you make these four areas extremely easy for them to find within approximately four seconds, the odds are high that you will be instantly passed over. And finally be aware that whatever else that you have on your resume, the recruiter will have only the remaining approximately **2 seconds** to find and be impressed with it. And finally, if you think the information in your cover letter will provide added support for

your qualifications, you might be interested to know that a mere **17 percent** of recruiters bother to read cover letters (BeHiring).

A Single Resume Error Can Instantly Disqualify You

A single resume error may prevent your resume from moving on. That is because **61 percent** of recruiters will automatically dismiss a resume because it contains typos (Careerbuilder). In a similar light, **43 percent** of hiring managers will disqualify a candidate from consideration because of spelling errors (Adecco). The use of an unprofessional email address will get a resume rejected **76 percent** of the time (BeHiring). You should also be aware that prominently displaying dates that show that you are not currently employed may also get you prematurely rejected at many firms.

A Format That Is Not Scannable Can Cut Your Odds by 60 Percent

TheLadders' research also showed that the format of the resume matters a great deal. Having a clear or professionally organized resume format that presents relevant information where recruiters expect it will improve the rating of a resume by recruiter by a whopping **60 percent**, without any change to the content (a **6.2** versus a 3.9 usability rating for the less-professionally organized resume). And if you make that common mistake of putting your resume in a PDF format, you should realize that many ATS systems will simply not be able to scan and read any part of its content (meaning instant rejection).

Weak LinkedIn Profiles Can Also Hurt You

Because many recruiters and hiring managers use LinkedIn profiles either to verify or to supplement resume information, those profiles also impact your chances. Ey-tracking technology used by TheLadders revealed that recruiters spend an average of **19 percent** of their time on your LinkedIn profile simply viewing your picture (so a professional picture may be worthwhile). The research also revealed that just like resumes, weak organization, and scannability within a LinkedIn profile negatively impacted the recruiter's ability to "process the profile" (TheLadders).

50 Seconds Spent Means Many Apply for a Job They Are Not Qualified for

Recruiters report that over **50 percent of applicants** for a typical job fail to meet the basic qualifications for that job (Wall Street Journal). Part of the reason for that high "not-qualified" rate is because when an individual is looking at a job opening, even though they report that they spend **10 minutes** reviewing in detail each job which they thought was a "fit" for them, we now know that they spend an average of just **76 seconds** (and as little as **50 seconds**) reading and assessing a position description that they apply for (TheLadders). Most of that roughly 60-second job selection time reviewing the position description is actually spent reviewing the narrow introductory section of the description that only covers the job title, compensation, and location.

As a result of not actually spending the necessary time reviewing and side-by-side comparing the requirements to their own qualifications, job applicants end up applying for many jobs where they have no chance of being selected.

Be Aware That Even if Your Resume Fits the Job Posting, You May Still Be Rejected

To make matters worse, many of the corporate position descriptions that applicants are reading are poorly written or out of date when they are posted. So even if an applicant did spend the required time to fully read the job posting, they may still end up applying for a job that exists only on paper. So even

though an applicant actually meets the written qualifications, they may be later rejected (without their knowledge) because after they applied, the hiring manager finally decided that they actually wanted a significantly different set of qualifications.

Making it Through a Keyword Search Requires a Customized Resume

The first preliminary resume screening step at most corporations is a computerized ATS system that scans submitted resumes for keywords that indicate that an applicant fits a particular job. I estimate more than 90 percent of candidates apply using their standard resume (without any customization). Unfortunately, this practice dramatically increases the odds that a resume will be instantly rejected because a resume that is not customized to the job will seldom include enough of the required “keywords” to qualify for the next step, a review by a human.

Even if you are lucky enough to have a live recruiter review your resume, because recruiters spend on average less than **2 seconds** (of the total six-second review) looking for a keyword match, unless the words are strategically placed so that they can be easily spotted, a recruiter will also likely reject it for not meeting the keyword target.

No One Reads Resumes Housed in the Black hole Database

If you make the mistake of applying for a job that is not currently open, you are probably guaranteeing failure. This is because during most times, but especially during times of lean recruiting budgets, overburdened recruiters and hiring managers simply don't have the time to visit the corporate resume database (for that reason, many call it the black hole). So realize that recruiters generally only have time to look at applicants who apply for a specific open job and who are then ranked highly by the ATS system.

Some Applicants Have Additional Disadvantages

Because four out of the five job-related factors that recruiters initially look for in a resume involve work experience, recent grads are at a decided disadvantage when applying for most jobs. Their lack of experience will also mean that their resume will likely rank low on the keyword count. To make matters worse, the average hiring manager begins with a negative view of college grads because a full **66 percent** of hiring managers report that they view new college grads “as unprepared for the work place” (Adecco).

Race can also play a role in your success rate because research has shown that if you submit a resume with a “white sounding name,” you have a **50 percent** higher chance of getting called for an initial interview than if you submit a resume with comparable credentials from an individual with a “black-sounding name” (M. Bertrand, University of Chicago Graduate School of Business).

Remember a Resume Only Gets You an Interview

Even with a perfect resume and a little luck, getting through the initial resume screen by the recruiter only guarantees that your resume will qualify for a more thorough review during what I call the “knockout round.” During this next stage of review, the recruiter will have more time to assess your resume for your accomplishments, your quantified results, your skills, and the tools you can use.

Unfortunately, the recruiter is usually looking for reasons to reject you, in order to avoid the criticism that will invariably come from the hiring manager if they find knockout factors in your resume. If no obvious knockout factors are found you can expect a telephone interview and if you pass that, numerous in-

person interviews (note: applicants can find the most common interview questions for a particular firm on glassdoor.com).

Even if You Do Everything Right, the Odds Can Be Less Than 1 Percent

Because of the many roadblocks, bottlenecks, and “knockout factors” that I have highlighted in this article, the overall odds of getting a job at a “best-place-to-work” firm can often be measured in single digits. For example, Deloitte, a top firm in the accounting field, actually brags that it only hires **3.5 percent** of its applicants. Google, the firm with a No. 1 employer brand, gets well over 1 million applicants per year, which means that even during its robust hiring periods when it hires 4,000 people a year, your odds of getting hired are an amazingly low **4/10 of 1 percent**. Those unfortunately are painfully low “lotto type odds.”

Up to 50 Percent of Recruiting Efforts Result in Failure

In case you're curious, even with all the time, resources, and dollars invested in corporate recruiting processes, still between **30 percent and 50 percent** of all recruiting efforts are classified by corporations as a failure. Failure is defined as when an offer was rejected or when the new hire quit or had to be terminated within the first year (staffing.org). Applicants should also note that 50 percent of all new hires later regret their decision to accept the job (Recruiting Roundtable).

Final Thoughts

Unfortunately, much of what is written about “the perfect resume” and the ideal job search approach is based on “old wives’ tales” and is simply wrong. However, when I review the numbers that are available to me from internal company recruiting data and publicly through research done by industry-leading firms like TheLadders, Adecco, BeHiring, staffing.org, and Careerbuilder, it doesn't take long to realize that the real job search process differs significantly from the ideal one.

Rather than leaving things to chance, my advice both to the applicant and to the corporate recruiting leader is to approach the job search process in a much more scientific way. For the applicant that means start by thoroughly reading the position description and making a list of the required keywords that both the ATS and the recruiter will need to see.

Next submit a customized resume that is in a scannable format that ensures that the key factors that recruiters need to see initially (job titles, company names, education, dates, keywords, etc.) are both powerful and easy to find during a quick six-second scan. But next comes the most important step: to literally “pretest” both your resume and your LinkedIn profile several times with a recruiter or HR professional. Pretesting makes sure that anyone who scans them for six seconds will be able to actually find each of the key points that recruiters need to find.

My final bit of advice is something that only insiders know. And that is to become an employee referral (the highest volume way to get hired). Because one of the firm's own employees recommended you and also because the recruiter knows that they will likely have to provide feedback to that employee when they later inquire as to “why their referral was rejected,” résumés from referrals are reviewed much more closely.

I hope that by presenting these 35+ powerful recruiting-related numbers I have improved your understanding of the recruiting process and the roadblocks that you need to steer around in order to dramatically improve your odds of getting a great job.