Shedding light on the job search

NEW STUDY ANSWERS THE AGE-OLD QUESTION: “WHY DIDN’T I HEAR BACK?”
Over the past decade, the biggest complaint among job seekers has become their frustration over applying for positions and never hearing back. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as the “Black Hole,” and while job seekers are quick to blame recruiters for not responding, they also contribute to the problem by applying to jobs for which they are unqualified.

A recent study conducted by TheLadders analyzed how job seekers read and evaluate job listings, and experimented with a new job-listing format that offered “TheLadders Scout,” a new competitive-analysis tool. The study had three goals:

1. Determine what information job seekers view as important
2. Analyze how job seekers read job listings
3. Measure whether competitive information would help job seekers make better choices about positions and applications

The conclusion: competitive information about other applicants increased the percentage of job listings that participants correctly judged to be a good or bad fit for them, and decreased the amount of time participants spent reviewing each job posting.

TheLadders Scout provides competitive-analysis data so job seekers can see how they compare to other candidates.
Tracking applicants’ behavior

In March 2013, 15 participants reviewed up to five conventional job postings. A second group of 15 considered up to five redesigned job listings using new competitive-analysis technology called TheLadders Scout, which aggregates and averages the data from applicants for a specific position, so job seekers can see how they compare to other candidates.

This heat map of a conventional job listing on TheLadders shows that job-description details were overlooked by job seekers.

WITH CONVENTIONAL JOB POSTINGS:

- Participants spent most of the time reviewing the information at the top of the job posting
- Job details were easily located and viewed a majority of the time
- The bottom of the page was most often skimmed
Sophisticated eye-tracking technology provided precise information on what job seekers read and how long they looked at different areas of each job. After job seekers were shown each listing, analytical software drew “heat maps” and eye-tracking charts to illustrate how much time each viewer spent with each job, and in what order each job listing was read. Follow-up interviews collected qualitative data from both groups, including opinions on the information supplied, ease of use, and how quickly participants understood TheLadders Scout and its value.

WITH THELADDERSCOUT:

- Users spent about 12 seconds reviewing TheLadders Scout for both “fit or no fit” positions
- Participants paid close attention to the profile of other applicants and salary information within TheLadders Scout
- Most of the overall viewing time was spent reading the job description
- The job details on the right were easily located and viewed by most

This heat map of a job listing with TheLadders Scout shows that competitor information and the job description commanded the most attention.
Participants, all of whom are currently employed, were asked to imagine they were seriously looking for a new job. They were allowed to spend as much time with each job posting as they wished, and then indicate whether or not the position was a good match for them and if they would apply.

TheLadders supplied job postings customized to the participants, who were selected to mirror the demographics of TheLadders members. Prior to the study, TheLadders determined whether each job seeker was a fit or not a fit for each job, based on the job seeker’s background and experience.

**WITH CONVENTIONAL JOB POSTINGS:**

- Participants notice job titles
- Point of gaze moves quickly to the job-description text
- Job details generally receive attention
- Part of description is simply skimmed

GazeTraces™ of a conventional job listing on TheLadders
Reading between the lines

The eye-tracking technology was used to draw a “heat map” that showed how much time each participant spent looking at each section, and results were averaged. Another way the eye-tracking software analyzed reading habits was with GazeTraces™. GazeTraces tracks eye movement and outlines the way a reader interacts with each job posting, whether the participant reads a job posting in a linear fashion or skips from section to section. The resulting line traces the path a reader takes through a job posting, which shows both the order in which a reader looks at a job posting and how a reader’s eye skips (and skips around) the sections in each job posting (in non-technical terms, GazeTraces shows what catches a reader’s eye).

WITH THELADDERS SCOUT:

- Participants fail to notice job title and “How you compare”
- Point of gaze goes immediately to the description of other applicants
- Participants look at TheLadders Scout salary information
- Job details receive attention
- Part of job description receives careful attention (usually the first part)
- Part of description is simply skimmed

GazeTraces™ of a job listing with TheLadders Scout
Understanding how a job seeker reads a job posting can help recruiters put key information where readers’ eyes fall. GazeTraces was used to show how participants read conventional job listings, as well as job listings with TheLadders Scout.

You can’t judge a job posting by its cover

With conventional job postings, participants spent less time with ones they felt were not a good match for them. The average time to decide on the suitability of a position was 49.7 seconds when the job was not a fit, and 76.7 seconds when it was.

With job postings using TheLadders Scout, participants spent more time with job postings that were not a good fit for them than they did with conventional job postings: 55.8 seconds with TheLadders Scout job postings vs. 49.7 seconds with conventional ones. Conversely, participants determined that a job posting was a good fit faster with TheLadders Scout: 62.0 seconds, compared to 76.7 seconds for a conventional job posting.

In addition, both sensitivity (proportion of true “Fits” — as identified by TheLadders — that are identified by the participant) and specificity (proportion of true “No Fits” that are identified by the participant) increased with TheLadders Scout.

Average time spent in each region when participants rated a job as a “Fit” or “No Fit"
Haste makes waste

• Participants were **35% more likely to correctly identify jobs for which they were a good fit** with TheLadders Scout, and they did so **24% faster** — 59.8 seconds with TheLadders Scout and 73.8 seconds without.

• Job seekers spent much less time with traditional job listings that were not a good fit for them than they spent reading job postings for positions that were a good fit – 49.2 seconds vs. 76.7 seconds, respectively.

• Participants spent **10-15 more seconds** reading redesigned job postings with TheLadders Scout.

• Participants who saw redesigned job postings with TheLadders Scout spent about one-third as much time reading the TheLadders Scout analysis as they did the job description.

• Overall, job seekers spend less time reading job postings than they think. When asked “How long would you say you typically spend looking at a job posting before deciding if it is a good fit for you?” participants responded:

  - Less than 1 minute 37%
  - 1-5 minutes 44%
  - 5-10 minutes 19%

  This contrasts with the amount of time eye-tracking technology showed participants spent reading job postings: a range of 49.2 – 76.7 seconds.
Scouting out the competition

This study showed that readers found competitive information about other applicants helpful when deciding whether a job was a good fit for them, and were more likely to make an accurate decision when that information was available. It also showed that applicants found the information useful, as evidenced by the additional time applicants spent with job postings that contained that information.

Participants found the competitors’ information helpful, as it provided insight into their chances of receiving an interview, and several commented on having increased confidence by seeing how they compare to other applicants. Providing additional insight helps job seekers better understand their probability of getting a particular job, which alleviates frustration caused by the “Black Hole.” The study shows how new technology can make the job-hunting process more efficient for both job seekers and recruiters, alike.

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