

## **Jobseeker's Guide to Accessing the Hidden Job Market**

You may have heard the term “the hidden job market.” What is it, and how do jobseekers get access to it?

The “hidden job market” is a phrase that describes job openings that are not publicly advertised.

Why would companies *not* publicly post a job opening?

- The cost of advertising an open position can be substantial.
- They don't want to be overwhelmed with applications.
- A new role is being created and they are unsure of the qualifications of the ideal employee.
- They are replacing an existing employee (who doesn't know they are being replaced).

Most of these job opportunities are accessed through referrals from current employees of the company. It's estimated that 60-80 percent of jobs are found through networking. While not all of the jobs found through networking are accessing the hidden job market (after all, your friends/family/acquaintance network can help you access interviews for advertised opportunities too), almost all candidates who get interviews for unadvertised jobs do so through networking.

Current employees can be an excellent source of candidates. Particularly if the company has a strong workplace culture, having existing employees identify prospective candidates can help ensure solid candidates are encouraged to apply. Some companies even reward employees — with cash or gift cards — for recommending a candidate who is eventually hired.

Employee referrals provide an advantage for the jobseeker too. Employee recommendations can carry great weight. Plus, there is less competition for job opportunities accessed through the hidden job market than for openly advertised opportunities.

Being referred by a current employee may also mean that your application is set apart from the typical internal processes that most jobseekers have to navigate — such as an applicant tracking system for online applications.

Recruiters are another source of unadvertised positions. An employer may choose to work with a recruiter to fill a job rather than advertise it publicly. The recruiter sources job candidates, screens prospective hires, and sends the hiring manager a handful of handpicked candidates. This saves the company time and money. In many cases, when working with a third-party recruiter, the company only pays the recruiter if a candidate is hired, and only if he or she stays for a specified period of time (say, six months).



So how do you tap into the hidden job market? Because opportunities are filled both through employee referrals and recruiting, you will want to cover both bases.

Accessing the hidden job market works best when you have a clear target in mind — either a specific job title or, even better, a specific list of companies you'd like to work for.

There are basically three ways to access the hidden job market:

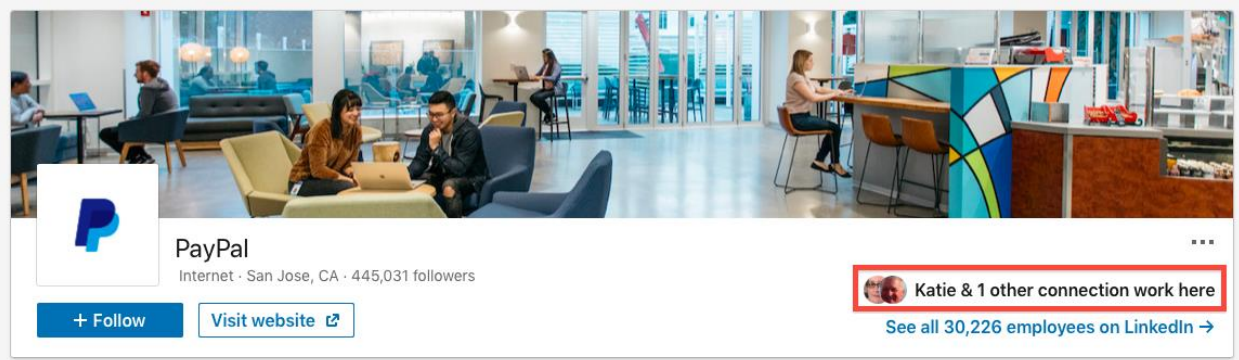
- Connect with someone at the company through your network (either an employee who can refer you or a hiring manager or a recruiter who works for the company).
- Contact the company directly about exploring unadvertised opportunities.
- Be visible enough in your industry or field to be contacted by a prospective employer.

Here are some specific tips for jobseekers looking to tap into the hidden job market:

- **Let your network know you are looking for a new position.** While this can be difficult if you are conducting a confidential job search, it's important that the people you know think of you when an opening comes up.
- **Following the advice of author Harvey Mackey, "Dig Your Well Before You're Thirsty."** Having a large network of contacts pays off when it's time to look for a new job — particularly when you want to tap into the hidden job market. Keep in touch with your former colleagues and bosses. Build your LinkedIn network by connecting with people in your field — but also by adding folks you know from everyday life — the other parents you sit with at your child's karate dojo, the members of your recreational softball team, your neighbors, etc. All of these can potentially help you tap into the hidden job market.
- **Help others.** "Give to get." Zig Ziglar famously said, "You can have everything in life you want, if you will just help enough other people get what they want." Keep your ears open about unadvertised openings and help connect those in your network to these opportunities. This type of assistance is often reciprocated. Cultivate relationships with peers in the industry. These connections at other companies can pay off.
- **If there is a particular employer you are interested in working for, consider approaching the company directly.** When approaching a target employer directly, research the hiring manager and see if there is a mutual connection you can approach to make the introduction. Focus on expanding your network until you connect with someone who works there. Ask him or her to keep you in mind for unadvertised opportunities — or even pass along your résumé right away, even if there isn't currently an opening.

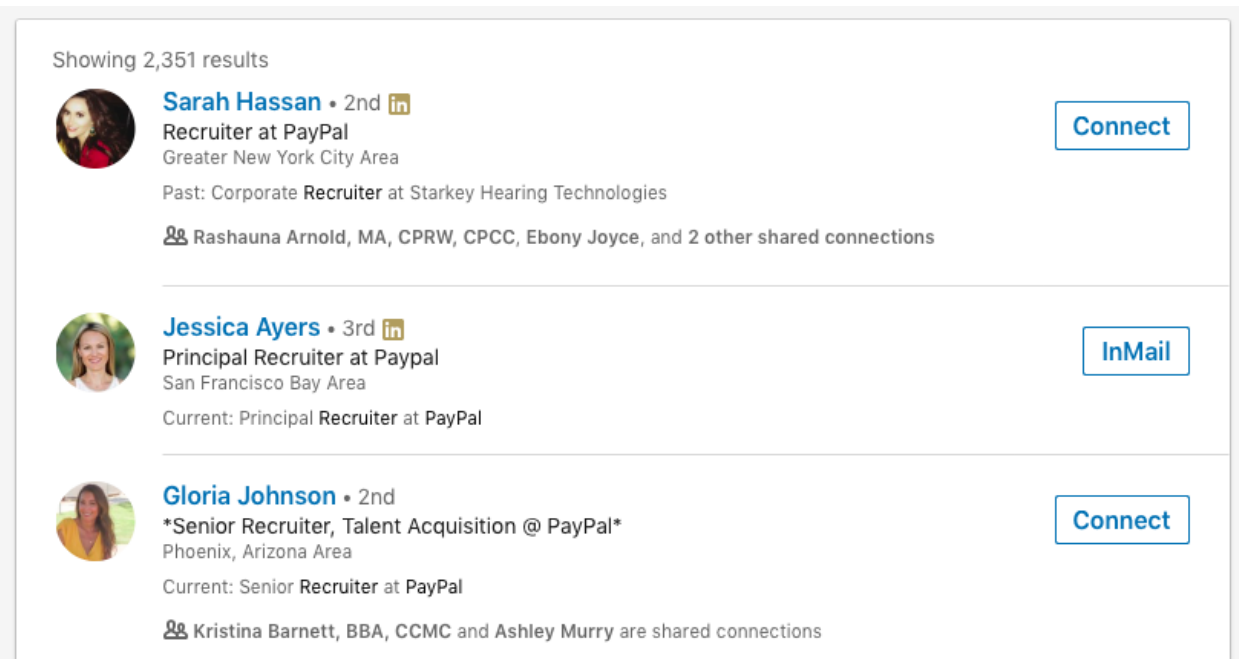
*While you are logged into your LinkedIn account, go to the company page and see if you have any existing connections with current or former employees:*

# AJ | ayanna e jackson CAREER COACH



- **Identify companies in growth mode.** Read your local business journal or the Business section of your local newspaper to find out which companies are growing. You'll find announcements of new contracts, large office leases, and similar news in local publications or by setting up a targeted Google News alert.
- **Look on LinkedIn for recruiters who work at your target employer.** Some companies recruit primarily through in-house recruiters (recruiters who are company employees). Connecting with these individuals can be an excellent way to access the hidden job market.

*While you are logged into your LinkedIn account, do a search for recruiter + [company name]:*



- **Connect with 2-3 recruiters in your industry or specialty.** You may even be able to find out if the company uses a specific outside recruiter or agency for its searches. (Your network may be able to help you find this information, or you can contact the company directly to



ask.) Having these extra eyes and ears looking out for opportunities can be a valuable asset in your job search.

- **Make it easy to be found.** Another angle to accessing the hidden job market is being approached directly about an unadvertised opportunity. Make sure your LinkedIn profile is up-to-date and make yourself visible by participating in industry activities, speaking and writing (when possible), and positioning yourself as a thought leader.
- **Be active on social media.** Follow employers you are interested in and engage them thoughtfully — liking and commenting on status updates and participating in online conversations with the brand itself or key employees. Share articles and insights about your industry. Follow and interact with key influencers in the industry using social media.
- **Join online groups in your industry.** While LinkedIn Groups have diminished in influence over the years, they still remain a good way to connect with colleagues. (Did you know that you can send a LinkedIn connection request to a fellow Group member without having to know their email address?) Plus, being active in Groups can make you more visible to recruiters in your industry.
- **Join other online groups.** Industry groups are the most logical choice for growing your network, but really any online groups can help you connect with others who may be able to help in your job search. This can include groups focused on your hobbies and interests as well as school alumni groups (not just college, but high school too).
- **Get involved in associations and activities in your industry.** Participate in professional association activities and build rapport with colleagues. Attend conferences and industry events. These are an opportunity to meet hiring managers and decision-makers at your target companies. The wider your network, the more opportunities to access the hidden job market.
- **Another source of networking connections may be your university's alumni association.** If you are looking for a connection at a target company, see if the alumni association knows of one, or peruse the bios of company employees or leadership and see if you have a school in common. Looking at a company's profile on LinkedIn may also potentially help you find alumni connections.

Remember, exploring the hidden job market is just one possible way to connect with your dream job. It's a strategy that can pay off handsomely, but will often take longer than simply identifying advertised openings and applying. However, you will likely find there is less competition for the job opportunity, and if you are using an "inside source" — either a current employee or an internal recruiter — your likelihood of landing an interview can be higher than seeking out a traditionally advertised opening.



Action Items:

- Make a list of all of your existing offline connections (your holiday card or Christmas card list can be a good source to start).
- Get more involved on LinkedIn. Focus on adding 2-3 new connections each week, including recruiters in your industry. Participate in Groups and like and comment on posts. This can take as little as 5-10 minutes each day.
- Write out a list of employers you'd like to work for. This is your target company list. Next, focus on identifying anyone you know who currently works for that company.
- Commit to reading the Business section of your local newspaper and any local business journals weekly to look for companies in hiring mode.
- Get involved — whether online or “in real life,” visibility is important. Engage with groups, organizations, and associations by volunteering and participating in activities and events.