

## The Job Seeker's Experience: Who Really Cares?

('Vinnie B' knows the answer and he is willing to name names.)

By Gerry Crispin & Mark Mehler  
CareerXroads  
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#### I. Introduction

For the last several years we tediously (and tenaciously) examined the website staffing pages on Fortune magazine's annual list of 500 public firms (April 14, 2003) in search of the very best online job-hunting experience *America's Largest Corporations* have to offer.

We enthusiastically jumped into the project this May in anticipation that more public firms would *get it* this year. Employment isn't *Rocket Science* after all and getting *it* should not be all that hard to achieve or so we thought.

In our addled way, we thought *public* firms would be the first to realize that their stakeholders are also *customers* and they (the customers) will, inevitably, ALL enter the job market. And we're not just promoting an altruistic line of babble here either. The business case for re-engineering a firm's hiring process as a *candidate-centered* strategy has been made by educators, pundits and practitioners ever since somebody at GE's Hawthorne Works discovered that paying attention actually makes a difference in performance (those not familiar with the Hawthorne effect from the 1930's are asked to please stop reading, place your tongue firmly in your cheek and find someone who can help translate the rest of this paper).

Much effort and ink has been expended to link the job seeker as a valued customer. Web site designers, hiring systems vendors, Internet hosting firms and job board services all extol their ability to help manage large numbers of candidates in a way that screens the best of them from the worst of them without turning any of them off...as customers.

These so called “end-to-end, globally-integrated hiring solutions” that many of America’s Largest Firms have bought into offer such customer-centered features as multi-tiered, fuzzy-logic search engines to help that visitor find the one special job; a “refer-a-friend” button conveniently located near each position description that our erstwhile candidate might not want to apply for but knows someone who would; and, *nearly*-instant messaging to acknowledge the newly minted and registered candidates (not applicants), those unsuspecting folks who are willing to spill their guts into a “profile” firmly tucked away in the firm’s database, that their résumé has been received and all is well. And let’s not forget the ubiquitous “Personal Agent”, a staple on nearly every site that offers to work 24/7 on behalf of those poor souls in the database by pouncing on any new job postings and forwarding them lickity-split if there happens to be a match. A “Match to what”, you say? So did we – along with many other questions we hoped to answer.

By the end of May it was clear that once again our cherished (and naïve) notions of job seeker empowerment had been dashed. Still there are glimmers of hope and our enthusiasm remained intact because of our secret weapon: Vinnie B.

#### - **Vinnie B the Job Seeker’s Alter Ego**

Vinnie Boombotz has his sights set on a Fortune 500 job. A CPA (that’s Chief Protection Associate), Vinnie has an accounting degree, expertise in credit and, especially, collections. After an international internship at a Sicilian olive oil exporting firm, Vinnie was employed for three years by Bad-a-Bing Corporation in (where else) NJ before deciding to look for another position. (Vinnie’s complete résumé can be found at <http://www.careerxroads.com/vinnieb>).

To help Vinnie we asked 25 out-of-work human resource executives to find and apply for a job as Vinnie on every one of the Fortune 500 sites that allowed them to. These HR helpers (See Appendix) were all members of the Princeton Group a job transition network active in NJ since 1990. They methodically recorded and reported their experiences.

By now it should be clear (we hope) that Vinnie doesn’t exist (although there is still one headhunter who expressed an interest in Vinnie that we are tracking down).

Vinnie B was created to get past the more obvious screening questions and, hopefully, be informed when positions requiring accounting experience, education and other factors were automatically matched. Vinnie has an attitude. If he spots a job he likes he expects he will be a top candidate. He’s so confident that he notes on his résumé that there is no need to contact his references, “Don” Amichi and Tony (Ducks) Carillo. Instead, he writes that they will, “be in touch”.

Vinnie, the ultra-confident alter ego of every job seeker, went out in search of the perfect online job-hunting experience, a sort of “Cook’s Tour” for the out-of-work or, soon-to-be-out-of-work set.

## II. Results

While our volunteers stuffed corporate databases and reported their experiences back to us, we completed our examination of the corporate sites using a checklist of three dimensions of the job seeker's experience that we have been developing over the years: Recognition (customer awareness), Navigation and Communication.

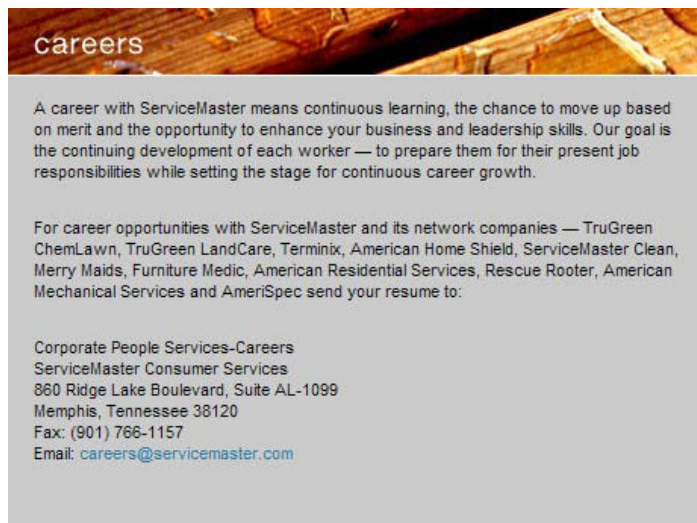
Oh, and we also *referred* Vinnie every chance we could by clicking company "refer-a-friend" buttons (more than 200 times).

### – The Big Picture – The Top 25

OFFLINE (27). Ignoring the effects of a merger or two, it was still surprising to find that when visiting the websites of 27 of America's largest 500 firms there is not a single trace of hiring activity to be found. Nothing. We characterize these firms (Appendix B) as "OFFLINE". We guess a job seeker will have to hotfoot it to the local plant or follow the web links well past the dead ends we came up against to uncover a conglomerate's openings in an even more obscure division. Given a choice, Vinnie wouldn't give these firms a second look.

Most disappointing among this group is Omnicom ([www.omnicomgroup.com](http://www.omnicomgroup.com)), an advertising giant who should know better. Fidelity National Financial ([www.fnf.com](http://www.fnf.com)) does have links to divisions but little else. It could be argued that Interstate Bakeries technically has a website but, with an address like [http://www.corporate-ir.net/ireye/ir\\_site.zhtml?ticker=IBC](http://www.corporate-ir.net/ireye/ir_site.zhtml?ticker=IBC) one might wonder why Wonder, Hostess and Drake have to go it alone.

BROCHURE (79). The staffing page of ServiceMaster ([www.servicemaster.com](http://www.servicemaster.com)) perfectly represents a category of sites we call "BROCHURES".



careers

A career with ServiceMaster means continuous learning, the chance to move up based on merit and the opportunity to enhance your business and leadership skills. Our goal is the continuing development of each worker — to prepare them for their present job responsibilities while setting the stage for continuous career growth.

For career opportunities with ServiceMaster and its network companies — TruGreen ChemLawn, TruGreen LandCare, Terminix, American Home Shield, ServiceMaster Clean, Merry Maids, Furniture Medic, American Residential Services, Rescue Rooter, American Mechanical Services and AmeriSpec send your resume to:

Corporate People Services-Careers  
ServiceMaster Consumer Services  
860 Ridge Lake Boulevard, Suite AL-1099  
Memphis, Tennessee 38120  
Fax: (901) 766-1157  
Email: [careers@servicemaster.com](mailto:careers@servicemaster.com)

We found 79 firms with no jobs and a few pages of innocuous verbiage or, conversely, a few jobs and no information about their company at all. Equally embarrassing are companies like Burlington Resources ([www.br-inc.com](http://www.br-inc.com)) with a few lines of welcome and a link to “their jobs”...on CareerBuilder, a job site that is happy to have you and takes the time encourage you look at the all the other firms with opportunities appearing on their site. Vinnie was happy to do so and never went back. Vinnie found that the public sections of the top three job boards (Monster, CareerBuilder and Hotjobs) served as substitute staffing sites for dozens of our largest public firms. We’re not talking about privately hosting the company’s jobs. That’s a perfectly reasonable alternative which only needs a few lines of disclosure to make worthwhile. No, we’re talking about inviting someone over to dinner and then sending them by themselves to the local restaurant.

STANDARD (304). On the outside, the majority of companies have devised sites that have what it takes to give any visitor a great experience. Jobs can be found and applied for, benefits are itemized, diversity is acclaimed, awards are listed, college pages discuss careers and Frequently Asked Questions attempt to answer what you always wanted to know but were afraid to ask. Just don’t scratch too deep. Sometimes when Vinnie drilled down these seemingly satisfying sites came up empty. The customer is sometimes recognized here but generally the content lacks depth.

BEST PRACTICES (86). These 86 firms have taken care to let their visitors know just a little bit more about what it takes to succeed, what you’ll get if you come here, what will happen next and why. We acknowledge these firms in Appendix C.

There are 34 firms in the above category that are a step above the rest. We argued about which are the 25 best and, after some debate, decided that Bank One, Boeing, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Dell Computer, Goldman Sachs, Medtronic, Merck, Oracle, and Xerox are all #26. Here then are the sites that top this year’s list of

CAREERXROADS 2003  
TOP 25 CORPORATE STAFFING SITES

<p><b>Bank of America</b> <a href="http://www.boa.com">www.boa.com</a></p> <p><b>BellSouth</b> <a href="http://www.bellsouth.com">www.bellsouth.com</a></p> <p><b>Darden Restaurants</b> <a href="http://www.darden.com">www.darden.com</a></p> <p><b>Electronic Data Systems</b> <a href="http://www.eds.com">www.eds.com</a></p> <p><b>Exxon Mobil Corporation</b> <a href="http://www.exxon.com">www.exxon.com</a></p> <p><b>Federated</b> <a href="http://www.retailology">www.retailology</a></p> <p><b>Ford Motor</b> <a href="http://www.ford.com">www.ford.com</a></p> <p><b>General Electric</b> <a href="http://www.ge.com">www.ge.com</a></p> <p><b>General Motors</b> <a href="http://www.gm.com">www.gm.com</a></p> <p><b>Intel Corporation</b> <a href="http://www.intel.com">www.intel.com</a></p> <p><b>IBM</b> <a href="http://www.ibm.com">www.ibm.com</a></p> <p><b>Level 3 Communications</b> <a href="http://www.level3.com">www.level3.com</a></p> <p><b>Limited</b> <a href="http://www.limited.com">www.limited.com</a></p>	<p><b>McDonald's</b> <a href="http://www.mcdonalds.com">www.mcdonalds.com</a></p> <p><b>Microsoft</b> <a href="http://www.microsoft.com">www.microsoft.com</a></p> <p><b>Morgan (J.P.) Chase</b> <a href="http://www.chase.com">www.chase.com</a></p> <p><b>NCR</b> <a href="http://www.ncr.com">www.ncr.com</a></p> <p><b>Proctor &amp; Gamble</b> <a href="http://www.pg.com">www.pg.com</a></p> <p><b>Robinson (C.H.)</b> <a href="http://www.chrwjobs.com">www.chrwjobs.com</a></p> <p><b>Rockwell Automation</b> <a href="http://www.rockwell.com">www.rockwell.com</a></p> <p><b>Sherwin Williams</b> <a href="http://www.sherwin.com">www.sherwin.com</a></p> <p><b>Southwest Airlines</b> <a href="http://www.sw.com">www.sw.com</a></p> <p><b>Sprint</b> <a href="http://www.sprint.com">www.sprint.com</a></p> <p><b>Texas Instruments</b> <a href="http://www.ti.com">www.ti.com</a></p> <p><b>UPS</b> <a href="http://www.ups.com">www.ups.com</a></p>
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All things considered, the sites named above would be Vinnie's choice to work for – if he had one. Table 1 below contrasts CareerXroads results from 2002 and 2003. The results show fewer firms at the ends of the spectrum and more in the middle. Perhaps it is understandable in this economic climate why firms with easy access to willing candidates would be reluctant to invest in improving their hiring process. Vinnie however, has taken notice of those who did.

Table 1. Overall Ratings of the Fortune 500 Staffing Pages

	2002	2003
Offline	8.0% (40)	5.6% (27)
Brochure	13.0% (65)	15.8% (79)
Standard	56.5% (282)	60.7% (304)
Best Practice	22.6% (113)	17.8% (89)

## - The Devil Is in the Details

Vinnie's first goal is to determine if he is the *target* of the firms he visits. Next he wants a user-friendly way to navigate in order to find the information that helps him connect and communicate. He doesn't ever want to get lost and would certainly like to know where he stands when he is finished. We've labeled these elements of the job seeker experience Recognition, Navigation and Communication. (A detailed checklist is available from the authors on request).

**RECOGNITION.** *"I recognize their interest in ME and I am offered a path to learn more."* Awareness on the part of the job seeker that he or she is targeted.

When Vinnie first graduated from college he was thrilled by the companies that welcomed him the moment he reached their company staffing page. It is here that 280 of the Fortune 500 have a button that says "college" or "intern" or "MBA" or something similar that means "if you are starting out, come this way". As an entry-level candidate Vinnie was able to find great information about which job titles matched his degree, what likely career tracks he might take and the dates the firm planned to come to campus for an interview. He could get interview tips and even learn how well suited he was at TI, Dell, Ford and GM. Overall no one could have offered a college grad more information about careers than Federated's "Retailology" but Proctor and Gamble has taken the college path to a new level. They offer free online courses on networking, interviewing and much more to sophomores and juniors – just register, select the option, and they'll "stay in touch". Vinnie's experience was less fulfilling at the majority of company sites whose college hiring is over and whose pages are in dire need of updating. The 2002 Spring campus schedule for example just doesn't do it in May, 2003.

As an employee of Bad-a-Bing, Vinnie did not have the ability to go to his company's web site or even through his intranet to see the openings for which he might have applied. He was told the firm considered him first before going outside but he had little evidence that this was the case. Vinnie thought that with one-third of all openings filled from within (Impact of Hire Study<sup>1</sup>), the most important people to know they are targeted should be your own employees. It is one of the major reasons the better ones leave.

UPS invites its own employees to see its firm's openings. Even more curious, is that any visitor to the UPS website can see which openings the firm's employees are able to apply to thereby putting some *meat* to the statement that they promote from within. Bell South, ATT, JP Morgan Chase, Affiliated Computer Services, Hershey Foods, and Union Pacific also get it right by featuring opportunities for employees on their website.

Returning *Military* can see that Sprint targets them. Visiting *Executives* to Tenet Healthcare's site can travel down a separate path as can *Former Employees* of Mercer and Fannie Mae.

Few firms have thought through who their audience really is let alone publicly tell them they are targeted. Would *employee referrals* which represent ¼ of all external hires (Impact of Hire Study<sup>1</sup>) be an even better source if they and those that aren't referred knew from the outset that they would be treated differently when they came to the company site? Why wait until the candidate is applying before asking him or her if they've been referred. Would a high performing employee from a competitor be more or less likely to engage your firm if your staffing home page included a flashing button to compare their firm with yours?

The bottom line is that Vinnie cannot even tell if he (or anyone for that matter) was targeted on the websites of 180 firms (36% of the total). If there isn't anyone special these firms do want, could there be anyone they don't want? Are these the same firms that complain the most about all the unqualified applications they receive?

**NAVIGATION.** *“I can see where I want to go, how to get there and know where I am at all times.”* A Job Seeker's experience is significantly enhanced when firms identify the candidates they want, show them they are targeted, map the path(s) they want them to take and fill them (the paths) with relevant content and communication options.

Getting around a site should be simple. It just isn't. And it hasn't improved since last year.

**Visibility.** Let's start at the beginning. It would seem logical that Vinnie, upon arriving at a company's home page would immediately see an invitation to "Careers" or "Jobs" and yet ¼ do not offer anything as shown below.

<b>Table 2. Company Home Page Links To "Careers"</b>	
24.2%	- 121 firms have no (0) Careers link on their Home Page
9.6%	- Another 48 firms hide the link in 6 point type at the bottom of the company home page (next to the privacy link).
38.5%	- 192 firms offer a reasonably visible link to their site's staffing pages.
27.7%	- 138 firms have a premium career link on their main navigation bar.

Vinnie has complained that he has spent as long as 15 minutes searching for jobs on a corporation's website and the Home Page Hide-and-Seek was only the start of his navigation problems. It is as if otherwise sane people must have fallen under the influence of consultants who engineered the placement of the milk in grocery stores (another idea designed to engage the hearts and minds of the customer).

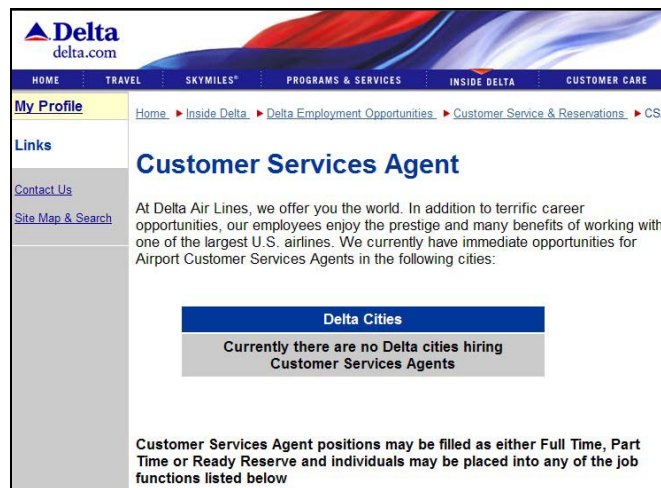
**Distance.** We devised a simple index to navigate to the job. Just count the "clicks" (hyperlinks) starting at the company Home Page to a Job Description (any job description). The distribution for the last two years shown below indicates 4 clicks is the most frequent result. There just isn't any rationale we can imagine for having someone drill through 6 or 7 levels of your site.

Table 3. Navigating to the Job Description from the Home Page

2002	2003	Distance
6.5%	3.0%	2 clicks
25.8%	18.9%	3 clicks
50.9%	50.3%	4 clicks
13.6%	21.2%	5 clicks
3.0%	4.9%	6 clicks
0.2%	1.5%	7+ clicks

We would like to invite Textron, American Standard, Chevron Corporation, Occidental Petroleum Corporation, Viacom, Avon Products, and Coca-Cola (to name just a few) to examine how sites like TI, AFLAC, Amazon, Anadarko Petroleum, CAI, CSC, Colgate, GE and Southwest are able to get their potential candidates viewing job descriptions in 2 or 3 clicks. (This is an obvious play on our part to influence the industry average).

**Dead Ends.** Still one more detail sure to irritate Vinnie as he navigates from the Home Page to the Job Description is what he finds when he arrives. Here is a typical result:



At least at Delta you can guess there won't be any jobs in any category. The logical solution to *dead ends* is to offer the information before you make the search. Let Vinnie know how many jobs exist in a category. Or, failing that, post prominently a note to search ALL JOBS before making specific searches (assuming that option is available). Only Northeast Utilities, State Street, Clorox, Autozone, Avnet, EMC, Autoliv and Microsoft seem able to offer this simple pleasure.

**Applying for a job.** Sharing data is not a simple process despite the comforting phrases about how easy it is and the candidate's willingness to comply. Different firms asked to take Vinnie's work-related information by phone, mail, email, fax, cut and paste, résumé builder, profile template and "personal agent". A courier was not offered. There are firms that require attendance at career fairs to get hired and another that offers a list of kiosk locations to candidates without access to computers (of course we read these

instructions on the web). Many firms offered multiple approaches to apply and just as many forced the candidate to accommodate a single method. Only Sun Microsystems made sense of their options by offering the matrix below.

Method	Speed	Clarity	Overall Rating
Build Resume	Fastest	Best	10
Paste Resume	Fast	Best	9
Email Resume	Fast	Good	7
Fax Resume	Good	Low	5
Mail Resume	Slow	Average	4

Even before applying, Vinnie had to master dozens of radically different methods of searching for jobs, organizing the ones that were of most interest into “job carts” (we were surprised there weren’t job checkout counters) and preparing “agents” to find more jobs in coming days, weeks and months. What was enlightening about these convenience features is that only ½ of the Fortune 500 firms even had them. What wasn’t surprising was how difficult and time consuming some of the forms were to complete. Eli Lilly’s approach to offering an interest-based agent that is easy to manage and understand captures our award for best practice.

Nearly 40% of the Fortune 500 firms offered Vinnie an opportunity to “Refer-a-Friend”. He didn’t. We did... nearly 200 times. Typical of the best formats was Intel:

**Email Job to a Friend**

[Job Match](#)  
[View Shopping Cart](#)

To email this job to a friend, please enter the information below.  
You may also include a message to your friend.

**Job Title:** Senior Consulting Engineer (Job# 254956)  
**Career Area:** Information Technology and Services  
**Location:** NJ-Central, NY - New York  
**Candidate Type:** Experienced  
**Date Posted:** Apr 24, 2003

Friend's name:  Friend's e-mail address:   
 Your name:  Your e-mail address:

Message to your friend:  
 I found this job on the Intel web site and thought you might be interested...

The email addresses you've entered above will not be saved, nor will they be used for any purpose other than sending this one email.

As an idea, the Refer-a-Friend feature is brilliant and Intel’s version captures critical information and suggests appropriate text. The problem is what happens next – or doesn’t happen. Typically an acknowledgment is flashed on the sender’s screen indicating the message has been sent.

Occasionally, something pleasant like the note below from Motorola's recruiting team appears:



That's it. The sum total of all the Refer-a-Friend activity is that nothing else ever happens. Vinnie never received a follow-up from a single firm based on our referral (remember, almost all of the referrals were made prior to Vinnie's application being submitted for jobs that were advertised as open). Worse yet, we were never thanked by anyone in follow-up for referring Vinnie. Our independent inquiries into how corporations use this feature support Vinnie's experience – not a single firm in the universe actually uses their Refer-a-Friend feature. Recruiters are either too busy or too lazy to make friends of the people who've gone out of their way to Refer-a-Friend (Actually we're hoping to irritate someone enough to prove us wrong.)

***Firms that do not monitor, analyze, or interpret the data from features that engage the job seeker will reduce, not enhance, their credibility as an employer of choice. Use it or lose it.***

**Job Descriptions** are so poorly written by nearly everyone that it deserves a separate whitepaper – just not one we'll do. Fortunately, Vinnie has had extensive graduate experience in job analysis so he can actually read most descriptions with some hope of comprehending them. Unfortunately for the employer Vinnie is neither interested nor qualified for most positions. The folks who are qualified might not realize it and certainly the ones who aren't will apply in any case. Exceptions to the rule include SBC, Coca Cola, NTL and Sprint.

Vinnie was often asked to complete "**Pre-Application**" questions. This *first screen*, an attempt to customize knock-out questions, ranges from "Can you Drive?" to "Are you legally able to work in the US?" This approach is an increasingly popular means to narrow the field. Employers could then tell someone they shouldn't waste their time applying, inform those who lack some specific requirement about what they might do to increase their ability to compete or, possibly offer additional encouragement to those who do meet all the screening requirements. At least that is our thinking about what employers might do. They don't. Vinnie waded in 119 times and was never outed. He was also never encouraged. In all fairness, Vinnie did have the basic skills and experiences for most of the jobs he applied for but we suspect that if Vinnie didn't pass muster, he would still be told to go on and complete the remainder of the application in all but a handful of firms.

Vinnie was also asked by 120 firms to complete an optional **EEO** form about Gender, Race, Age, etc. Great care was taken to write a message we would understand and realize was linked with the company's commitment to diversity. That was the good news. The bad news is the message "your application for this job is not to be taken as meaning that you are actually an Applicant." More on this in the discussion around disclosure and diversity but let's keep focused on the point we want to make here. Does Vinnie think he is an *applicant* after completing an *application* – oh, excuse us, a dozen firms boldly call this collection of data an "Interest Form".

**COMMUNICATION. "I understand why others join & stay here." "I have what I need to make a decision." "I know where I stand."**

A clear staffing message, relevant content and honest feedback are the essential ingredients of communication. This is the "tipping point" of the job seeker's experience.

A clear message is not the same thing as an advertising tag line. Last year we were enthralled when Anheuser Busch claimed that "We Tap Talent". Our favorite tag line for 2003 is Hershey's "Are You Ready to Give your Current Job A Kiss Goodbye?" Both tag lines and staffing messages should be memorable. Memorable isn't enough.

A staffing message goes beyond the cliché of a brand. It is the firm's statement about why people are attracted and why they stay. More importantly, the message recurs in a consistent theme that is embedded in the hiring process and, should Vinnie be so lucky to interview, continues until the candidate is an employee and then beyond. Look at J&J's "Small Company Environment, Big Company Impact" as a perfect example of how the concept works. The effect on a high performing candidate who shares these images is positive. Oh, and the message has to be real.

With only 97 firms even attempting to communicate a staffing message, here are a few of the best:

Home Depot	Build Something
J&J's	Small Company Environment, Big Company Impact
Lehman Brothers Holdings	Building Businesses. Building Careers.
Medtronic	Careers with a Passion for life
Intel	Discover a Company Where You Continuously Learn, Develop and Improve
Winn-Dixie Stores	Fresh Ideas. Fresh Attitude. Fresh Thinking.
Microsoft	How Far Will You Go?
Eli Lilly	Innovation Has a Face: Our People
Abbott	Inspired To Achieve. Make a Difference In Your World.
CDW Computer Centers	Passion for Technology. Reputation for Excellence.
Kodak	Picture Yourself at Kodak
TI	See the Future, Hear the Future. Feel the Future. Touch the Future.
Kellogg	Success So Big You Can Taste it

GE

Why Join One Great Company  
When You can Join Many

Xerox

Xpress Yourself

Communicating relevant content in a staffing context is a project intimately tied to your understanding of your target audience.

If Vinnie had a family or were a single parent, he might want to view your firm's relevant benefits but he wouldn't want to scroll down an alphabetical listing that began 401K.

If Vinnie were transitioning from school, the military or even another industry, he might want your help in matching up his skills or his degree with your job titles. Or, as someone unfamiliar with big firms he would seek links to material that profiles real employees with a similar background. Testimonials and profiles that feature confectionery comments about the wonders of working for a living aren't nearly as effective as honest answers about what it takes to succeed, portrayals of a day-in-the-life or excerpts from the diary of an intern.

If Vinnie were a female engineer, she would like to see other female engineers describe how they've developed in their careers. She would like to see that information in the career section, not behind the diversity section. She would also want to see the numerical distribution of how many technical females there are in each level. Show me the data!

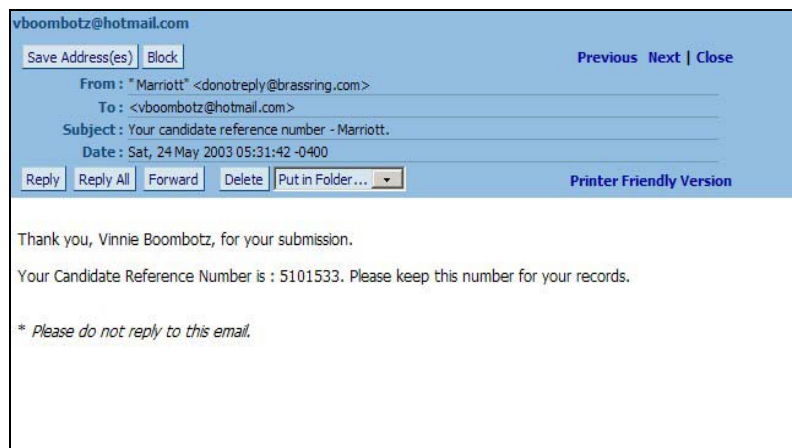
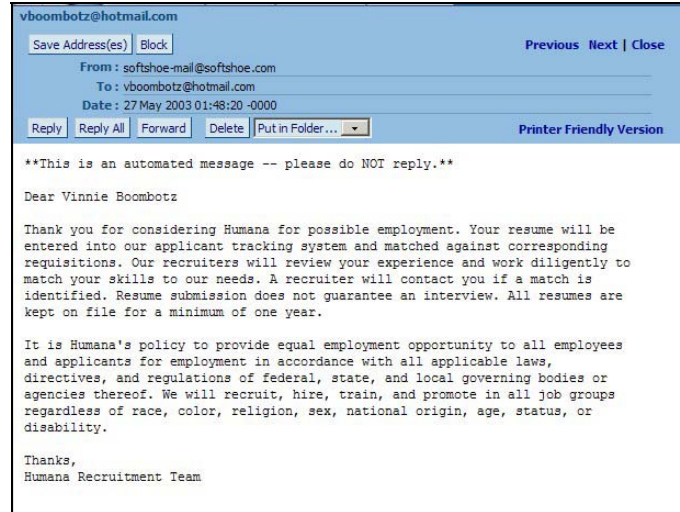
If Vinnie were to consider living in an out-of-the-way location, he would want to know what the community is like. Not just the restaurants and night-life but the schools, the education, the housing. Not just a list of links but the tools to compare.

The 86 firms listed in Appendix B are a wellspring of content and ideas. They range from "Living in Corning" a comprehensive local tour within Corning, Inc.'s staffing pages to Ford's archive of employee profiles covering nearly every job or Bristol-Myers "Career Explorer" and TI's "Engineering Career Center". A thorough study to mine these practices is beyond this (free) whitepaper.

***When we give and receive feedback, we communicate in a way that influences how people perceive us more powerfully than most imagine (at least most of the Fortune 500).***

The first and most basic level of feedback is the acknowledgement. A simple thank you can go a long way. This is especially true if a candidate has just shared his or her personal data with you and has some expectations about what comes next.

While thanking someone may be basic, apparently it is still too complex for most firms to master. Vinnie received hundreds of responses to his applications. The two below are typical:



These responses require no explanation. Instead, go to [www.hotmail.com](http://www.hotmail.com), type in [vboombotz@hotmail.com](mailto:vboombotz@hotmail.com) and use Vinnie's password: stoney. Feel free to explore the best replies America's Largest Corporations can make. There are a few that are outstanding. Just a few. Look at this as an invitation to a treasure hunt.

Of special note are Apple and Union Pacific, two firms that promised Vinnie the ability to obtain the status of his application. Only a dozen firms had the courtesy to let Vinnie know he wasn't chosen for the job.

### III. Final Thoughts by the Side of the Road

Today, with rising unemployment and limited investment in a world all too uncertain, firms are less likely than ever to shake up their traditional approach to hiring. “Let them eat cake” was someone’s response to the masses cry for basic food. The response of most firms to job seekers’ request for basic information, acknowledgement and feedback seems almost as harsh.

Pundits claim that the demographic shifts over the next few years will correct the problem. “When employers discover they have fewer qualified workers”, they say “They’ll start to pay more attention.” We’re not so sure. Technology has a way of offering productivity enhancements at just the right time and multi-national companies are becoming adept at moving large numbers of jobs to where there is an excess of qualified and compliant workers.

Still, our premise is that the best workers:

- A) Will always have a choice.
- B) Will choose firms that can offer a better experience in the hiring process.
- C) Will stay at firms where that experience is continued.
- D) Will perform better than they would if they were not treated with respect.

Who cares about the job seeker’s experience? Vinnie does and so do the few firms that understand what acquiring talent is really all about. They know that to hire people who *can* perform is a simple matter to which even poorly trained recruiters with limited sourcing skills can aspire. To hire people however who will perform and *stay the course* is another matter that requires openness, dialogue and shared information as an equal. The firms that are leading the way in designing more candidate-centered approaches to hiring will hopefully find that they also perform better as a company – a sure indication that a current trend will become a lasting standard.

**Gerry Crispin, SPHR and Mark Mehler, write, speak, teach and consult internationally about employment strategy, process, technology and trends. They edit and publish the world’s leading annual guide to job and resumé websites, CareerXroads, which is now in its 8<sup>th</sup> edition.**

**Gerry and Mark present each year at local, regional, national and international conferences for HR professionals. They consult with some of the world’s most competitive corporations and conduct their own ‘informal meetings of peers’ with the CareerXroads Colloquium, where top corporate employment strategists meet in small groups four times each year to discuss and share critical issues and benchmark best staffing practices.**

Learn more about them at [www.careerxroads.com](http://www.careerxroads.com), [mmc@careerxroads.com](mailto:mmc@careerxroads.com) or 732-821-6652

## **Appendix A - Acknowledgments**

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## **Appendix B – OFFLINE (27)**

AES Corporation, Allied Waste Industries, Inc., American Standard Companies, Inc., Berkshire Hathaway Inc., Brunswick Corporation, Dover Corporation, Echostar Communications, Encompass Services Corporation, Energy East, Enterprize Products, Fidelity National Financial, First American Corporation, Fortune Brands, Inc., Illinois Tool Works, Inc., Interpublic Group of Companies, Inc., Interstate Bakeries Corporation, Kerr-McGee Corporation, Lennox International, Inc., MEAD, Mohawk Industries, Inc., Nucor Corporation, OM Group, Omnicom Group Inc., Smurfit-Stone Container Corporation, United Auto Group, Inc., United Stationers Inc., USA Networks, Inc., Wesco International, Inc.

## **Appendix C – BEST PRACTICES (86)**

Abbott Laboratories, Aetna, AFLAC, Inc., Agilent Technologies, Amazon, American Express Company, Anadarko Petroleum Corp., Anthem Insurance Companies, Inc., Apple Computer, Inc., Avaya, Capital One Financial Corporation, Chevron Corporation, Chubb Corporation, Colgate-Palmolive Company, Comerica Incorporated, Corning Inc., Deere & Company, Disney, Du Pont De Nemours (E.I.), Eastman Kodak Company, EMC Corporation, Entergy Corporation, FedEx Corporation, FleetBoston Financial, Georgia-Pacific Corporation, Guidant, Hewlett-Packard Company, International Paper Company, Johnson & Johnson, Johnson Controls, Inc., Kelly Services, Inc., Lehman Brothers Holdings, Inc., Lilly (ELI), Marsh & McLennan Companies, Inc., Merrill Lynch & Co., Inc., Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Company, Morgan Stanley Dean Witter & Co., Mutual of Omaha Insurance Companies, Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company, Office Depot, Inc., Parker Hannifin Corporation, Pepsi Bottling, PepsiCo, Inc., Raytheon Company, Roadway, Rohm and Haas Company, SBC Communications, Inc., Schering-Plough Corporation, State Farm Insurance Companies, Tjx, Unisys Corporation, United Technologies Corporation, Valero Energy Corporation, Verizon Communications, Wal-Mart Stores, Inc., Bank One Corporation, Dell Computer Corporation, Goldman Sachs Group, Inc., Medtronic, Inc., Oracle Corporation, Xerox Corporation, Bank of America Corporation, BellSouth Corporation, Boeing, Bristol-Myers Squibb Company, Darden Restaurants, Inc., Electronic Data Systems Corporation, Exxon Mobil Corporation, Federated Department Stores, Inc., Ford Motor Company (D 1,49), General Electric Company, General Motors Corporation, Intel Corporation, International Business Machines Corporation, Level 3 Communications, Limited, McDonald's Corporation, Merck & Co., Inc., Microsoft Corporation, Morgan (J.P.) Chase, NCR Corporation, Proctor & Gamble, Robinson (C.H.), Rockwell

Automation, Sherwin Williams, Southwest Airlines Co., Sprint Corporation, Texas Instruments Incorporated, United Parcel Service of America, Inc.,

Footnote 1 - Impact of the Internet on Sources of Hires, CareerXroads, January 31, 2003, <http://www.careerxroads.com/news/03sourceofhire.html>