

Analysis

Despite low unemployment, young people say finding a job is as difficult as ever: Don Pittis

And for employers, sophisticated job websites are no panacea in the search for workers

By Don Pittis, [CBC News](#) Posted: Feb 09, 2018 4:00 AM ET Last Updated: Feb 09, 2018 4:00 AM ET

With Canadian unemployment [at 40-year lows](#), you might think it would be easy to get a job. That's certainly not what young job seekers are saying.

And despite so many young people hungry for work — and sophisticated technology designed to connect jobs and workers — **employers insist finding the right people for the right jobs is as hard as it's ever been.**

In the run-up to today's labour force survey figures, economists had been predicting Canada's job-creation bonanza would run out of steam.

Nonetheless, an unemployment rate below six per cent means plenty of jobs are available and already there are signs that employers are beginning to bid up the salaries of workers in short supply.

Not just English majors

Some commentators have complained of a jobs mismatch, where **employers want students trained in high-tech or business**, while universities produce too many English majors and political scientists.

But at Edmonton's Alberta School of Business, Sylvia Nguyen says for her fellow students trained in such in-demand specialties as human resources, marketing and accounting, finding a job in their field remains a struggle.

To try to tackle that problem, Nguyen and her friend Faye Lloyd have begun assembling an online guide for job seekers with the tentative title *Career Get Go*. The goal is to help other young people navigate the complicated first step on the way to a career.

'It's so hard'

"We have friends who have graduated and they're complaining: 'Oh, I can't find a job. It's so hard,'" says Nguyen, in her fourth and final year of a program specializing in HR.

One of the projects the two prospective authors have assigned themselves is to spend time on the growing number of job search sites. Nguyen says even for a generation of young people who don't remember a time before the internet, maximizing the value of the different online tools is an art.

That includes tracking down all the sites, such as the current hot one for technology jobs [Indeed](#), and more established names such as [Workopolis](#) and [Monster](#).

But there are many more. Specialized sites offer jobs in specialized career areas, and employers searching for workers typically use more than one, says Sylvia MacLure, HR boss at national animal feed company [Masterfeeds](#), from her office in London Ont.

"When I'm doing a paid posting, it would be on [Agcareers](#)," says MacLure, whose company pays about \$1,000 for a set of six postings on the site.

MacLure also posts her jobs on a free Canadian job search site called [CareerOwl](#).

Clicks for cash

Founded and funded as a labour of love by a group of Canadian university professors back in 1999, the non-profit CareerOwl is different from many commercial sites because employers can't pay to give their jobs greater prominence.

One of the founding members, Alice Nakamura, a labour economist and professor at the University of Alberta, still contributes cash monthly for the site's upkeep, but she says online ads on the site have reduced the amount the founders have to ante up.

She says commercial sites might not be as good a fit for students trying to find entry-level jobs.

"When the job seekers go in there, they're seeing some things prioritized, which really were prioritized because the employers are paying more," she says. "You can say that's not bad for the job seeker because, after all, those are employers who are more keen on hiring, but they may be more keen on hiring because they're looking for somebody, like, with ten years of experience and that's not so useful for the new job seeker."

CareerOwl may offer a cheap alternative to employers looking for entry-level employees, but one job on the site highlights a flip-side challenge for employers.

Tamara Mason has a listing on CareerOwl for an accounting position paying \$50 an hour that she says has been vacant for about a month. Finding just the right person in a tight job market has proven difficult.

"When you're doing accounting for a restaurant, you need to understand a restaurant and how it works," says Mason, who is managing director of [Katana on Bay](#), a high-end eatery in the middle of Toronto's business district.

Making connections

Mason says her business has a very low staff turnover, but revealingly, when she does need staff, she doesn't usually use electronic job searches. Instead, **she counts on word of mouth and the social media connections of her workers.**

That point is not lost on the two Alberta students working on their job-finding guide. **They say there's a danger their generation of internet kids might be too tempted to count on online searches instead of the most common way of finding a first job: networking.**

"We all know that there's lots about a person you can't know unless you've personally known that person," says the draft of *Career Get Go*. **"Employers tend to hire those within their network, or those recommended by a trusted colleague."**

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Education and aptitude count. But like almost everyone with an interesting job, Mason's career path has been the result of an unlikely series of coincidences, good luck **and networking** — certainly not a computer search.

Her gig at the restaurant came about because she met the owner through her investor relations job and he trusted her to run the entire business for him when he left the country.

English majors take note: she doesn't have a business degree.

And that investor relations job? Mason got it because she worked in a bar that served the downtown financial industry crowd.

"Because I worked in the industry serving all these guys for, like, seven years, I knew all of them, so that's why the investor relations company came to me."

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