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What role does networking play in finding new employment in direct marketing?

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Most people would agree that the best way to land a new job is to network. Now, there's some new research to back that up. The Bernhart Associates Employment Report has been surveying hiring trends in direct marketing since 2001. This was the first time we asked employers to identify their largest source of new hires.

Among 188 companies that responded, the largest percentage of new hires — 28% — came from referrals, including those from present and past employees and vendors.

Internet job boards were next at 14%, followed by hires with no third-party involvement at 12%, outside recruiters at 9% and company Web sites at 3%.

These numbers offer some valuable insight into how you should be spending your time on your job search. Direct one-to-one networking should be at the core of your job search strategy. Career Crossroads estimates that one of every 11 referrals results in a hire. Clearly, you want to focus more of your time and energy here — you should spend twice as much time networking as you spend on the job boards.

For each hour spent responding to postings, spend two reaching out to friends, clients, colleagues, associates and even those you don't know. That includes online communities.

Third-party recruiters and company Web sites can help increase your odds of landing a new position, but, if our survey results are any indication, your chances are considerably less. Four times as many companies said they find most of their employees through referrals and job boards than these sources.

Conducting a job search is a full-time job itself, and you should begin by putting together a strategy that incorporates all of the five major sources of hire that direct marketers have told us they use to locate, evaluate and hire needed talent: referrals, Internet job boards, direct hires, company Web sites and recruiters.