



Bernhart Survey: Recession Easing Its Grip on Direct Marketing Employment

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Owatonna, MN, July 13, 2009 — Hundreds of direct marketers, agencies and service providers are offering some new glimmers of hope for direct marketing job seekers, according to the latest Bernhart Associates employment update.

"It appears the direct marketing job market is scraping the bottom," said Jerry Bernhart, Principal of Bernhart Associates Executive Search, LLC, a leading direct marketing recruiting firm which has been issuing quarterly direct marketing employment reports since 2001. "This is the first quarter in two years in which the hiring index is showing improvement, and planned layoffs are continuing their trend lower," said Bernhart.

According to the survey, 20% of the respondents said they will be adding to staff during the current summer quarter, up from 16% in the spring. Layoffs declined for the third quarter in a row, with 8% planning to reduce staff compared with 13% last quarter and 20% at the start of 2009. The number of companies reporting hiring freezes held steady at 30%.

The hiring freeze figure was even higher for agencies, with 44% reporting that they're holding the line on hiring.

Bernhart said responses to the hiring freeze question underscores the prevailing mood of uncertainty. "We always ask when they plan to lift their hiring freezes, and the vast majority said they expected those freezes to remain in place through the rest of 2009," said Bernhart.

Bernhart noted that business-to-business direct marketers are faring better overall in the key employment indicators compared with their business-to-consumer counterparts.

For example, when asked if they plan to reduce staff, 13% of business-to-consumer direct marketers said they expect further layoffs this summer compared with 9% among business-to-business respondents.

Despite the uptick in the survey's overall results, Bernhart foresees no significant comeback in direct marketing hiring until at least 2010.

"You can't stage a recovery with only one in five direct marketers planning to hire, and one-third of the others holding on to hiring freezes with no plans to lift them until at least the end of the year. In my conversations with senior level executives, there is no consistent level of optimism in the current economic environment for them to jump into the employment market. I'm also seeing that same caution in executive search. Companies are telling us they're thinking about making staffing changes, but they are slow to pull the trigger."

Despite the abundance of job seekers, the survey also shows that filling open direct marketing positions is not always an easy task. When asked if they were experiencing difficulty hiring new talent, 42% said it was either "very difficult" or "somewhat difficult" to fill certain positions.

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