



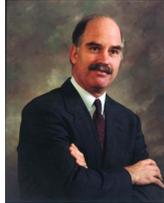
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February's eM+C/Bernhart Associates Employment Survey Shows Signs of a Bottom

By **Jerry Bernhart**

March 19, 2009

Despite the fact that the U.S. economy was slumping, online marketing employment held up relatively well for most of 2008. Around October, however, a change began. And, as noted in the first **eM+C/Bernhart Associates Employment Survey** — which ran in our January/February issue — online hiring was being impacted by the deepening economic crisis.



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Those levels more or less have held steady, according to the second installment of the survey, a positive sign when you consider how much the overall national unemployment rate has shot up in the past couple of months. In fact, our figures actually have improved slightly during that period.

In the second survey, 61 percent of respondents told us in February that they had no changes in their hiring plans during the second quarter, compared with 63 percent during the first quarter. That small difference is coming in the form of slightly more hiring and reduced layoffs. The percentage of companies planning to add staff rose to 30 percent versus 28 percent, and 8 percent said they're planning to reduce staff, down from 9 percent last quarter.

These are encouraging numbers, indeed. If you compare these statistics with broader hiring surveys, you could argue that online marketing is doing better than the economy as a whole. Employment services leader **Manpower**, for example, said in a recent employment survey that only 16 percent of U.S. employers planned to add to their staffs during the first quarter of this year.

Also, the **eM+C/Bernhart** forecast comes in much better than what we're seeing overall among direct marketers, who are planning to higher less and lay off more comparatively.

We're in uncharted ground here, however, because we don't really know if online employment is a leading or lagging indicator of overall employment.

The only real point of comparison we have for the e-commerce sector is the last time the economy was in recession. That, of course, was brought on by the dot-com bust. If consumers return online before they return to the stores — as some experts predict — then a more established uptick in e-marketing employment might be interpreted as a harbinger of better days to come.

*Jerry Bernhart is the owner of **Jerry Bernhart Associates Executive Search**, an Owatonna, Minn.-based executive search firm focusing on multichannel marketing. Reach Jerry at jerry@bernhart.com*

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