

Job Seeker Imbalance

By Sharon L. Florentine

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Stephen Wolf, principal at Montenido Associates, is digging through more resumes than ever to find the same number of qualified candidates.

The recession has created an imbalance of job seekers and jobs. Recruiters find the jobs they post are quickly inundated with applications, often from unqualified candidates fishing for a position. To add fuel to the fire, employers have grown even more demanding in terms of what they consider a qualified candidate, Wolfe said.

Positions that would draw 250 resumes a year ago are now bringing in more than 350, which makes filtering, screening and interviewing candidates more difficult and time consuming, he said. It's a tough situation for hiring companies, applicants and for recruiters, Wolf said, since his clients can be increasingly selective about which candidates they choose.

"It's like a funnel," he said. "Of the total applicant pool, I'd make contact with about 25 folks, or less than 10 percent. Of that, only about 10 would be screened down to the client level, and only two will make it to the face-to-face stage."

Sorting through an ever-increasing number of applicants slows down the interview and hiring process, and a larger number of applicants doesn't guarantee a higher percentage of qualified job seekers, Wolf said.

"There's a lot of time wasted going through so many of these people and contrary to what you might think, there aren't any more qualified applicants," Wolf said. Many desperate job seekers will "apply to the neighborhood," blanketing job boards and recruiters in their immediate geography, regardless of whether they meet the specifications.

It used to be that Wolfe and recruiters everywhere had the freedom to offer his clients applicants who might not fit the specific job description but had the aptitude to be a great candidate. Candidates would often approach him, assuming he had the time to review their skill sets and match them to positions and he could in turn approach clients with some out-of-the-box candidates. No longer, he said.

"Recruiters used to be able to say, 'This person hasn't got exactly what you're looking for, but you really should take a look at them anyway,'" he said. But over the past five years, specifications and client requirements have gotten tighter.

One positive Wolf sees since the recession began is that he is able to place candidates with a stretch of unemployment on their resume. Two years ago, any employment gap could have cost applicants an interview or even an initial screening, but now it is not as great a deterrent, he said.

"I'm seeing more and more applicants who have been unemployed; one particular candidate, since fall of 2008," he said. "Two years ago, that wouldn't have made them a good candidate for my client, but now that isn't an obstacle."