

A GUIDE TO JOB HUNTING IN A DIFFICULT MARKET



By Daniel Cleaves.

Daniel Cleaves is Managing Director of Precise Placements and has more than 20 years recruitment experience.

"Whilst this pandemic is unlike anything we have seen before, there are familiar patterns I have seen in my career and I hope this guide helps you"

I have been thinking about what I can do to help people in these very difficult times, I am seeing increasing numbers of people who have been out of work for months and also some very heartbreaking LinkedIn posts by candidates who are struggling.

It hit me that much of the knowledge I have gained over 20+ years could be useful to some people looking for work in a nightmare job market. My hope is that this helps even a couple of people, to help improve their approach to job hunting and hopefully secure a role.

This is what I would call a real world list – I could have written something which was softer and more considerate to the feelings of candidates, but I have taken the view that if you really want to secure a role you don't need to be mollycoddled, many of these things in an ideal world wouldn't matter, but the cold hard facts are they do, so here they are:

1. Recruiters are currently getting hundreds of CVs per role – it is very difficult to cut through this noise as a candidate and the temptation is to send off ever more CVs in the belief getting more CV's sent out = more effort and therefore should yield more results. But the opposite is true, as a recruiter if you start to get the same CV for every single role it really has a diminishing effect and we start to ignore that person and their CV.

2. Due to the high volume of responses we don't advertise as much, if we get a really good role, we tend to go to the people we are already aware of – so how do you get on this list? Again, this comes back to not applying to too much, but identifying recruiters in your space and trying to build rapport with them. However don't just try to build rapport with every single recruiter out there, it's a waste of your time/ours and will see you bracketed as a nuisance.

3. A way to start to build a picture of who is a good contact for you is to build an excel spread sheet of roles you have seen, who the recruiter was, which agency they worked for etc. After a while a picture should form of recruiters it would be worth speaking with/ sending personal emails too as they are on your spreadsheet repeatedly.

4. If you are on Furlough/out of work use this time to really shine up your CV – I am still seeing far too many CVs of people who haven't worked in a few months with spelling mistakes, formatting issues and poor grammar, employers can and will dismiss your application due to these factors. (it's a buyer's market)

5. If you are a contractor looking to go perm, I would add story as to why – factor this into your profile. Line managers are receiving lots of contractors looking to get into perm right now. You need to try and set yourself apart.
Some reasons that work well are thinking about long term career, wanting to stay in a team longer term rather than moving on etc.
A reason to avoid is that the contract market is very turbulent so I think permanent would be good right now, as the client will be worried you will leave as soon as the contract market picks up again.

6. Another CV tip, more so for contractors but also for some people with long CVs – review your CVs formatting and make it consistent throughout. Many people simply add their most recent role to the CV they have had for years and somewhere along the way it changes the style and formatting to the point the end format looks nothing like the beginning (like a CV version of Chinese whispers)

7. Can the CV be shorter? Does it say what you need it to on pages 1 and 2 ... when we get hundreds of CVs now more than ever you need to get to the point quickly. We are not looking at pages 3,4, 5 and certainly not 9, 10 etc.

TO DO LIST

8. DATES: Double check all dates on your CV and whether they match up to your LinkedIn profile. Both us recruiters and line managers check this, we note if there are employers missing, discrepancies on dates and also look for any differences in job titles. .

9. SOCIAL MEDIA: Go through your settings on social media – are your settings private, have you made any inflammatory posts on anything public such as Twitter or LinkedIn etc I would be very honest with yourself about how you are online, backtrack through what you have been doing and delete whatever you need to. Treat this as an essential exercise.

10. EXPECTATION MANAGEMENT: I know this is a major issue for many candidates as its disheartening, but the cold truth is you won't get feedback on an application in this market if you can change your mindset to accept this, I believe it will enable you to cope better and help your mental health.

As a recruiter it is now a rarity to get feedback on a CV so we often have nothing to pass on.

If you do get feedback/update from a firm then it will be a nice bonus rather than feeling consistently let down. I can assure you I would love to get back to everyone, just as a matter of courtesy, but it is a logistical impossibility right now and I am sorry.

11. PHOTOS: If you are looking for work don't just make sure your LinkedIn has a nice pic, we will check Facebook/Instagram etc and so will clients... make sure all of your pics are something you don't mind an employer seeing (not you drunk in a field with a mate for example). I know this is shallow, but when we are looking for candidates in a buyer's market everyone is looking for all the boxes to be ticked.

If you insist on a photo on your CV, make it a good one that looks professional and is well taken.

12. FORMAT: Please don't put your CV in PDF format. Recruiters all have software which can convert a PDF to Word format so its not protected. But what you do run the risk of is the conversion to Word losing/changing your formatting - words are cut out, sentence structure changes shape etc. Its just not worth the risk, send a Word version for safety.

13. CV TAILORING: If you see a role you love and know you are perfect for make sure your CV reflects this, can you change your profile to mirror the description? Have you made sure the key skills they require that you have are very high up on your CV (Page 1 front and centre?!) Hammer that point home early.

14. If you message a recruiter your CV, think about how many clicks we have time for and also be mindful of what shows up in a preview.

Cover Letters do not work ... My advice is to avoid them like the plague, they require another click, 95% are generalist and as a result we don't open them.

However, if you can make your point in a couple of lines on an email this will have an impact... Often I will be looking at my phone away from my desk, this allows me to see about 2 lines of info without opening. For me personally often a note can get me to read that persons CV straight away would be something like:

"Hi Dan, I saw your ad for XXX and I have 5 years experience working with XXX "

Often this is enough to prick my interest and I will look at that persons CV, its says to me this person has read my ad, they have thought about why they are relevant and they have demonstrated it to me succinctly.

15. I know it infuriates you that recruiters and HR are not more technical and don't truly understand what you do – but that is not our skill set, I liken it to an art critic, chances are they can't paint to save their lives, but they know what they are looking for.

Your CV will usually go through two phases and I would write it with both in mind:

Page 1: Simplistic (Non technical audience) – lead the horse to drink, highlight to the recruiter/HR what you do in simple terms, for example if the role requires a certain skill, write down how many years you have with that exact skill. Write a profile which highlights your suitability.

Page 2: Technical - within your roles go into far more technical detail, this is for the benefit of the line manager now you have bypassed the two earlier gatekeepers.

Statistics.

These are the numbers for a couple of recent adverts I placed:

Contract Developer role more than 800 CVs in 2 days (100+ LinkedIn invites)

Perm IT Support role more than 550 CVs in 3 days.

Whilst these adverts were live, from my side of the fence there were new CVs coming in every few seconds, the volumes were frightening and hard to manage.

How do I cut through that and decide who does/doesn't get a call? It really Is a mixture of all of the above, I look at all the factors to build a very quick picture as I can't physically call through every single applicant.

Contact.

Send your cv or questions to:
info@preciseplace.com