

5 ways 2020 changed job searching

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FULL TEXT

Let's face it: Just about everything changed during 2020, and some of those changes will be permanent. For example, social distancing and remote work arrangements disrupted recruiting and hiring, and some of the ways that companies pivoted to compensate actually improved the process.

If you're in the market for a new job, how you go about your search may look a little different. Hiring experts give us their predictions on the changes that are sticking around for 2021 and how to prepare.

1. Tougher competition

Some companies have made the remote working arrangement they adopted during the pandemic permanent. That means location isn't critical, and you're now competing with applicants from across the country, says Tigran Sloyan, co-founder and CEO of CodeSignal, a technical assessment platform for tech recruiting.

"This means more candidates applying for the same job, making it harder than ever to get noticed," he says.

"Candidates will need to get creative in how they present themselves, show their skills and explain their value-add to the company."

To stand out, candidates need to do more to show how they're different, advises Michelle Robin, executive job search consultant with Brand Your Career. "They will have to truly become their own marketing machine in terms of keywords, thought leadership and digital presence," she says. "In other words, showing their skills, not just telling about their skills, especially soft skills like building human connections."

Consider launching a personal website where you can show a portfolio of your work, a blog to share your thought leadership, and a video introducing yourself and your expertise, Robin suggests. "Candidates need to start treating themselves as the CEO of their career," she says. "You are the service organizations are hiring, so what can you do to give organizations and hiring managers a taste of your value?"

2. Zoom interviews are here to stay

Video platforms saved hiring professionals a lot of time and expedited the interview process. Tom Gimbel, founder and CEO of LaSalle Network, a national staffing, recruiting and culture firm, expects the first- and second-round interviews to stay virtual.

"Companies found that they're faster and easier on schedules," he says. "What will change is the third or fourth interview will be face-to-face in an office because that's an important aspect of the process."

Ashley Stahl, career expert for SoFi, a personal and business financing company, suggests testing your internet speed before getting on a video interview. "The average home has 11 devices connected and that can stress your bandwidth," she says. "Turn off devices to help your internet speed."

And while Zoom's background feature can be fun, skip it for an interview, Stahl says. "Subconsciously, people think there is a mess going on behind you," she says. "Make sure your background is clean. Having some houseplants can be good because they make a professional setting."

3. Networking is more important than ever

Online application systems are flooded, and candidates should not wait for vacancies, Stahl says. Instead, network before there is a job opening.

"Get ahead of applicant tracking systems," she says. "Employers don't want to use it; they give incentives to their

employees to refer candidates so they can dodge the software. That makes networking more important than ever." With social distancing, you have to think of creative ways to network. In-person coffee may not be possible, so take virtual approaches, such as setting up Zoom chats. Eventbrite and Meetup host virtual events, and Stahl suggests joining professional groups on LinkedIn or Facebook or creating your own.

"It's about engagement," she says. "You need to add value and position yourself as someone who has a voice on topics. Position yourself as a resource."

Jen Morris, an executive career coach and job search strategist and founder of Career Inspo, calls this approach "social seeking."

"The job seekers who stand out in today's crowded online environment are the ones who are proactive and have mastered how to market themselves on social networks," she says. "Networking has always been the best way to land a job. However, today's job search is one part networking – or social networking – and one part marketing campaign. With social networking, your online professional brand is more important than ever."

4. A willingness to work on-site could give you an advantage

Many companies are sticking with remote working arrangements or they're allowing employees to make the decision. But this flexibility may not be offered to job candidates in 2021, Gimbel predicts.

"Candidates think they're going to have more control than they will about working from home, but employees who don't have a unique skill set or tenure may not have a choice," he says. "I believe once the vaccine is in wide distribution, companies will be settling back to a traditional mindset and they'll want employees back in the office." If you are looking for long-term career growth, you have to think about being in the office. "Even if it's not five days a week, it will be four days a week," Gimbel says. "There may be more work/location flexibility, but not as much remote work."

If you're willing to work in an office, this can be a great opportunity, Gimbel says. "Being willing to come into the office gives you a leg up on everybody else. It shows a willingness to get your hands dirty and can be an identifier for corporations."

5. Expect a new interview question

The pandemic may create a new question during your interview. Maureen B. Weisner, co-founder and managing partner of the career-consulting firm Kickstart Your Transition, predicts that more employers may ask how you've been improving your skills during your increased time at home.

"What have you been doing during COVID to broaden your knowledge base and to pursue something of personal, perhaps more obscure interest?" she asks. "Show me that you are curious. What are you reading? What are you excited about?"

Being able to pivot to the changes in the recruiting process will demonstrate to potential employers that you're ready for 2021 – and whatever it may bring.

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