

SEARCHER

The Magazine for Database Professionals

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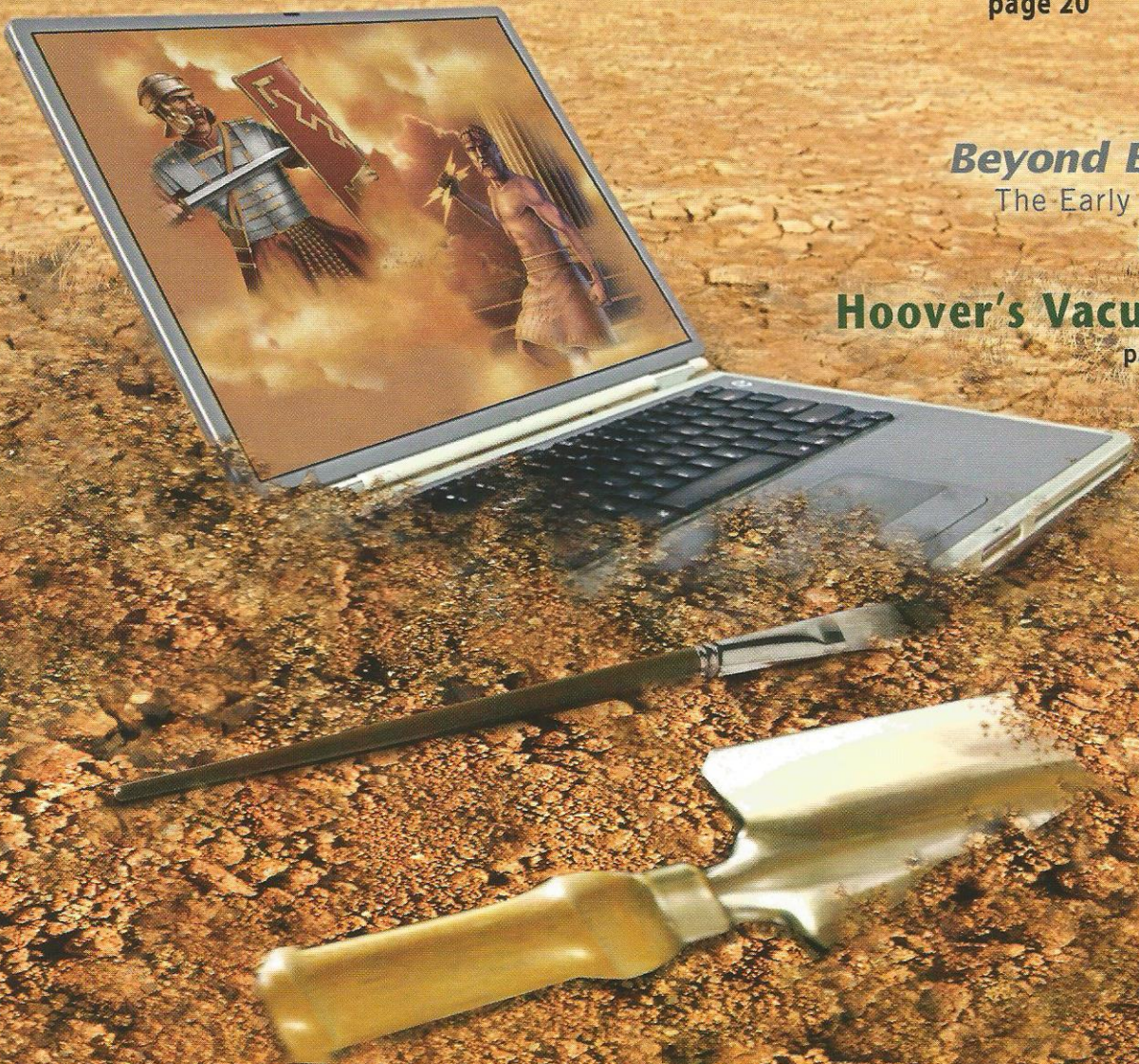
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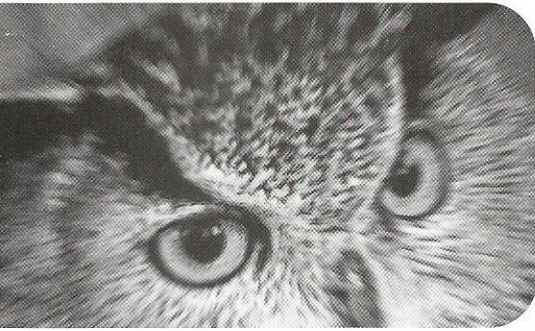
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WEB WISE WAYS

by Jennie Starr
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The New 'Search' in 'Job Search'

Finding a new job got easier when job sites popped up on the Internet in the late 1990s. We created profiles and uploaded our resumes on such sites as HotJobs.com, FlipDog, Vault, HeadHunter, and CareerBuilder.com. We were thrilled with the frequent receipt of several new job opportunities through alerts that promised leads to interviews and new jobs. Those were the days! Recruiters got in on the fun, offering sites such as Heidrick and Struggles' Leadersonline (later integrated back into its other service offerings) and Korn Ferry's Futurestep, for what they called their "mid-level" searches.

Most sites ended up being purchased and integrated into larger information portals. For example, HotJobs.com was acquired by Yahoo! and FlipDog by Monster; HeadHunter became CareerBuilder.com, which partners with Knight Ridder and the Tribune Company as the search engine for their online classifieds. Several services, such as Monster, remain a solid bet for employers and employees — at least for "advertised" jobs. While these sites are very convenient for job seekers, employers pay a fee to list their positions, leading to a smaller database and more limited view of jobs available at any given time.

With the burst of the dot-com bubble and the downturn in the economy in early 2000, some new sites emerged for job hunting (e.g.,

one of my personal favorites, The Layoff Lounge). But many of us returned to using basic job hunting skills, which included visiting individual Web sites to look at career or job sections, networking with live people, reviewing local and trade newspapers, and creative prospecting (e.g., searching through directories, visiting alumni centers, etc.). All the while, we took copious notes of our efforts, tracking to whom we talked and when, so we could follow up properly.

In 2006, several companies are still trying to make finding a job easier. Stamford, Conn.-based Indeed and SimplyHired, a company located in Silicon Valley, Calif., are two companies attempting to aggregate jobs into the ultimate vertical job search engines. I've been experimenting with these sites for the last month or two with alerts set up to come into my e-mail in box either daily or in weekly digest form.

The new entrants to the field are trying to make job searching much easier by automating the process and essentially aggregating all the opportunities available on the Web at any given time for meaningful presentation to job seekers. These vertical search engines are taking input from job sites and/or job boards, newspapers, associations, and company career pages and pulling them into a single result set. Accessing the information is easy, as the sites provide Google-

like simple search options using keyword search techniques. But, the vertical engine produces more relevant results than searching Google or Yahoo! directly, which will return pages that contain the terms but not actually the jobs.

What's Not There

The features on these two sites are geared toward the job seeker's experience, not the employer's. SimplyHired's philosophy, according to CTO Peter Weck, is this: "The best way to serve the employer is to serve the candidate the best. As an employer you want the best talent available. To find it, you go where they have pulled together the best talent." I guess, it's the old "If you build it, they will come," à la *Field of Dreams*. And, wouldn't you know, it appears to be working.

You will not find a section dedicated to employers on the sites. Employers may not influence rankings of jobs in the results, even through fees. Both companies, as of the time of this writing, tout the integrity of their relevance rankings. However, Indeed presents Google advertising on result set pages and has pay-per-click text advertisements on search results pages that it sells directly. Most of these come from job sites rather than direct employers, according to Indeed. The "sponsored" links are designed to drive more attention to their job openings, if they appear in the retrieved result sets.

Neither service currently offers to upload resumes. If you want to apply for a job, you are linked to a different site — the site that hosts the job opening.

Viability of the Companies

Both companies are at the early stage in their funding. Indeed received a round of \$5 million in funding in August 2005 from The New York Times Company. SimplyHired received a round of \$3 million in August 2005 from Silicon Valley Angels.

As discussed above, neither company charges job seekers to use their sites, nor do they currently provide any real premium services to employers. So, how do they plan to make their money? Indeed is signing co-branding partnership deals, making its engine available on other portals such as About.com. It also sells “Sponsored job links” that appear on the side of job results but do not impact the integrity of the actual search results.

According to Weck, SimplyHired is focused on building a brand and a new product. He said, “Google is a media company, aggregating a large audience and providing advertisers to that group.” SimplyHired considers itself in the same way. So advertising opportunities for employers should not be far behind, though they will not discuss the specifics at present.

These companies view what they do as synergistic with the job boards and still link out to those sites to reach job openings. Meanwhile, not willing to leave aggregation to these new companies, Yahoo! announced in August 2005 that HotJobs.com would be aggregating other sites as well. The beta on the site at <http://hotjobs.yahoo.com> is nice, but hardly seamless yet. For example, Web results display in a separate result set on the page and cannot be saved in your HotJobs account. The Web results are also placed below the fold on the page, under the re-

mainder of the HotJobs “paid for” listings to ensure their lack of priority. That said, the Yahoo!/HotJobs aggregation is well on its way to being competitive and can only mean good things for job seekers. One would not expect Google to remain far behind.

Features — The Basics

Both Indeed and SimplyHired have a familiar set of features. Basic and Advanced searches available on both sites allow keyword searches and even a few field-specific searches, such as title and company name. Location can be used to narrow down the search by city, state, or ZIP code. Job seekers can see recent job searches (10 on SimplyHired, four on Indeed) and sort results by relevance or date. Updates can be obtained through e-mail alerts or saved as an RSS. And companies can add their jobs free of charge by providing an XML feed or by sending them individually.

Of course, search results differ on both services, and the sources each offer vary. Both seem to contain some “noise” in the result sets and appear to have some issues in their attempts to provide clean and accurate results. I asked both companies to talk with me a bit about how they aggregate their content, the selection process, the technology they use, and steps they are taking to build in high quality.

According to Paul Forster, CEO of Indeed, “Indeed’s proprietary search technology was designed with the benefit of years of tracking job seekers’ online behavior. Our search algorithms ensure that job seekers are returned the freshest, most relevant jobs from any search.” Forster and his colleagues designed one of the first, and still one of the best, job sites for the finance field, Jobsinthemoney [<http://www.jobsinthemoney.com>]. They sold the company in September 2003 to Financial News and decided to work together

on another venture, leveraging their industry expertise by staying in the job search arena. Forster claims Indeed has better quality jobs because they understand how job seekers behave on the Web as well as what works and what doesn’t. He emphasizes that they focus their efforts on building a comprehensive index, adding more than 130,000 new jobs per day. When questioned about the specifics of the technology used to aggregate the data, Forster didn’t offer much detail on how they translate that experience into results. He said they use “best of breed” search engine technology and apply it to semistructured data in jobs. They add metadata to the jobs to make the search more powerful and have proprietary relevance algorithms to assure best results appear first. I thought they might want to leverage their experience by adding a human element for editing or reviewing the process of aggregating content, but I was told it is strictly an automated process.

The founders of SimplyHired do not have industry experience per se, but they do have a wealth of Internet startup experience. The founders worked at @web, a Web site garage, essentially a Norton utilities for the Web to help people who had Web sites maintain and service their Web site. Netscape acquired @web in 1998. The group enjoyed working together and decided to build another company. They looked at a host of ideas before stumbling on the SimplyHired concept. They do appear to know something about building a database with integrity. According to Weck, they try not to include “spam jobs.” They have seven people reviewing and editing aggregated content. They then identify the fields of data for extraction. The process combines technology and some verification and human involvement to ensure data accu-

racy. They are normalizing the data and handling some deduplication as well. For their taxonomy, they have licensed a set of data — master data — which they normalize against the master set of data. Since they recognize that there are many other companies beyond those presented in the licensed information, they question, augment, and then modify the master list to correct issues that come up.

Content Is King

Both companies obtain feeds from sources directly but do a substantial amount of spidering or crawling the Web to aggregate their content and update it daily or multiple times a day, in some cases.

After conducting multiple sample searches, it's fair to say that results can differ significantly on each of these company's search engines. Without going into the disparity in the number of hits received each time, since relevancy is key, both companies brought back results predictably from job boards such as AJB (America's Job Bank), Monster, Dice, and others. Both pull from craigslist and seem to do a good job of capturing input from local newspapers and the companies named in *Fortune* lists. Predictably, the variation in sources happens in the area of journals, recruiter sites, less well-known job sites, and smaller companies.

Those of us used to the traditional model of proprietary database directories will long for an HTML list of sources updated regularly, but that is not likely to happen. Both companies do a good job, however, of providing information on the freshness of the job, listing the number of hours/minutes the item has been available on the site. However, this "freshness" date can be deceiving, as the companies can only give you an accurate picture if they received an XML feed from the source. The item also does not tell

you the date if it was generated as a result of a spidering effort.

Search — In More Detail

Of the two sites, SimplyHired offers a richer suite of additional features. When it comes to search, it offers both keyword searches as well as the ability to browse by location or occupation. The browse option presents a Yahoo!-like hierarchy by category and permits the job seeker to drill down to the most relevant category.

There are very powerful filters available in the Advanced Search feature or after you've retrieved a result. These filters include by Job (type, work experience, education, and freshness date) and by Company (ranked lists, company revenue, and company size). The ranked lists may be as familiar as the *Forbes* lists, or they may be as unique as the *Working Mother* 100 Best.

SimplyHired also offers a third search methodology. After using the site for a bit and not only reviewing several jobs of interest but also rating the job (users can either select "rate this job" or "not interested"), the site will offer suggestions of jobs as well. Weck explained they are using NLP (natural language processing) technologies to identify the similarities in the jobs a job seeker selects or rates and heuristics to identify good candidate matches. These suggestions are updated on-the-fly as new jobs go onto the service and they are remarkably good. I strongly encourage you to take the time to try this out.

Indeed offers an interesting JobTrends tool that can approach your job search a little differently. If location is largely driving your job searching, but you are open to a few different destinations, the JobTrends tool identifies which city has the most job postings per capita. There are quarterly statistics for the 50 most populous cities in the U.S. After only a few months of operation,

this data has limited value right now, but as the company can present archival information, it could become more valuable as a research tool. Drill into the visualization of the data and you get the actual job search results for that location.

Beyond Search — Managing the Details of the Job Search

SimplyHired built a set of tools for the job hunter that helps him/her manage the job hunting process better from the actual search, through the interview process, and beyond.

The My Jobs section of this site helps the job seeker manage the job-hunting process. Job listings saved by the job seeker appear there, but the site also saves "Expired Jobs" for future reference and "Viewed Jobs" in case you've failed to save them (these are saved until the job expires). The site will also permit you to map the jobs that interest you and then show where they fall in comparison to one another. Add in your address or where you think you might like to live near these jobs and it will tell you how long a commute you'll have.

You can also find a link from some job results to research salary information. This information comes through a partnership with PayScale. Average salary information by location is provided at no cost. PayScale offers more detailed reports for a fee as well.

Finally, from a search result, click on "Who Do I Know" and it will launch the site "Linkedin.com." LinkedIn is a personal networking tool that claims it can connect you to people and the people they know based on either their experience or alma maters. While I don't usually create accounts for these kinds of services (I was a bit skeptical about these kinds of online communities, as they have always seemed better-suited to me for dating than

professional networking), I did create an account and was impressed with the level of participation in this product. It does appear to be gaining momentum as a professional networking tool. And I freely admit I spent quite a bit of time on the site reviewing the professional contacts of prior colleagues of mine. I can see the LinkedIn service becoming extremely useful for recruiters and job seekers alike.

Forster at Indeed emphasizes that, for them, the comprehensiveness of the index is the key to their success. Forster admits, however, that other types of content are interesting and said that related sources of information, company information to enable people to drill down into company info from search results, and salary information are all in the pipeline.

Making It Better

Right now, the companies seem to be focusing on the obvious. The aggregation makes sense with the content there for the taking. But, I'd like to see these companies develop plans to bring in alternative sources to help with networking and identifying individuals at companies to target for jobs not yet created or posted.

Trade or vertical industry directories, for example, list key personnel and their roles (e.g., Corporate Counsel for legal job searches). Identifying people who have worked for the same companies as you or competitors or who attended the same schools and/or programs can help target a potential employer or mentor.

What about the money trail? It would help to see what companies have recently received funding and to have those noted somehow in the process as targets or ideal places to look for work even though new positions may not yet have been posted.

Though you won't find it easily referenced on the SimplyHired site, SimplyHired has a twin sister site, SimplyFired.com. It is a very popular destination for sharing odd sto-

Recruiter/Employer Tools

There is plenty going on in the job searching industry on the recruiter/employer side as well. Several new startups are attempting to speed up the process for recruiters to find the best talent for an opening.

H3 (<http://www.h3.com>) was founded by a name *Searcher* readers may find familiar, Hans Gieskes (once president of LexisNexis and, later, Monster). H3 is a cash-reward referral hiring tool designed to identify relevant candidates within personal and extended networks. The model is totally contingency-based; you only pay a referral fee if you hire a candidate found through H3. The idea is to notify your network of the opening and pay out a referral reward to motivate people in your network to help you find the right candidate.

Jobster (<http://www.jobster.com>), which recently merged with Workzoo, also leverages personal networks to provide job seekers with a means for referral to a company. Recruiters can also use the site's Talent Networks to reach out to passive candidates. The middlemen in the Talent Networks are the company's own employees, whose referrals the recruiters track to identify who typically finds them the best candidates.

Nimblecat (<http://www.nimblecat.com>) purports to save recruiters the laborious task of reading all the resumes they receive for a given opening. It offers a recommendation engine that identifies for recruiters the ideal candidate based on an analysis of the resumes they have received. It uses a quality metric it devised that purports to offer up the top performer and the candidate with the best match based on skills.

ries of how you got fired with hot competition raging for prizes from the SimplyHired folks.

Both companies offer blogs to learn more about the company, the products, etc. They both offer the means to make their search engine available on your site or blog as well. Indeed offers a fun "JobRoll," which will dynamically update a saved search on your site. It looks similar to a Google Ad placed in your page, but it is a nice alternative to simply placing a search box on your site.

The Verdict

Both Indeed and SimplyHired do a good job of aggregating job opportunities into a single interface, making searches on their systems certainly less time-consuming than visiting job sites independently. There's no question that I'm seeing openings from companies, headhunters, and recruiters that I would not have known about through my existing network. That alone is extremely valuable and amazing, in

some ways, to think it has taken this long to get here.

As a job seeker, I was more taken with SimplyHired, in large part because of the additional features that it offers to manage the job seeking process, such as filters that leverage third-party data (*Fortune* lists and others company lists of its kind), a Suggestions feature that looks for similarities in the jobs you rate highly and presents you with more like them, and salary information that can help you prepare for interviews and salary negotiations. I also liked being able to use the site as a single workplace. The My Jobs section of the site does a good job of supporting the effort by allowing you to store openings of interest and permitting you to add notes on particular jobs in one place. ♦

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