

Lots of Fish in the Sea

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[Readers: This short essay was written for *The Scientist* during the trials and tribulations of the 2002/2003 biotech job market, one of the most difficult periods in thirty years of industrial life sciences. While the market has now begun to come back, the concept it discusses still has value.]

A client of mine recently expressed her views on the availability of scientists by saying “There are a lot of fish in the sea.” I’d agree there are many job seekers currently and plenty more being laid off in this biotechnology retrenching period. But what does this mean for the scientist considering a move to industry? Recessions generally bring increased competition, longer job searches, and more frustration. However, a bad economy may also mean that it is time to switch gears and think about doing something different. The old “stick a CV in the mail” approach may not work so well any longer.

Companies get lots of mail. They simply run an ad in *The Scientist* or on an Internet site and find themselves with enough work to keep several staffers busy. The process they use is fairly simple, but it is geared around reducing the amount of paperwork they receive. Here’s how the process breaks down in this company:

- 1) Open the daily mail and separate the CVs into three groups: Talk-to's, Maybe's, and No Way's.
- 2) Send the Talk-To's over to the Department Head where the opening exists and they are screened again for their technical fit.
- 3) The Maybe's get a brief second look, many of them are discarded.
- 4) The No Way's get placed into the round file.

Using this friend's analogy of "fish in the sea," I began to think about how fishermen would work if the ocean really *was* overflowing with fish. Would they use the age-old formula of hook and line? Or, would they simply start scooping them up out of the water with a bucket?

Bingo. These companies are simply scooping up fish in a bucket. This makes me think that the only way for a job seeker to be visible is to go into the process via a different route. My H/R friend gave me the answer I was looking for when I asked how she handles CVs that are referred by employees of the company:

"Oh, we have a very active employee referral program. Our employee gets a cash reward, and the CV goes directly to the hiring manager where the opening exists," she described.

What a choice you have, job seeker. You can flop around with all the other fish in a bucket, or you can find yourself an internal contact via networking . . . a person who will be rewarded while you are placed directly at the top of the pile. Networking doesn't sound like a "fishy" approach to me in the least!

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