Matchmaker – Students and Employers

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ABSTRACT

One of the aims of educational institutions is to prepare students for work in industry. This paper examines the effectiveness of CIT's student placement program, and suggests ways in which this can be optimised. Greater success in student placement promotes greater cooperation between industry and the Institution, in addition to making the Institute more attractive to the student.

Employment agencies prefer applicants to have experience in the field and many actively discourage recent graduates. Thus few students approach agencies, leaving fewer avenues for the student to pursue in search of their first job. Larger employers tend to avoid media advertising, but use agencies, or direct approach to an employee pool, such as academic institutions, when seeking new recruits.

Some of the current methods used to facilitate student placement include seminars where industry members meet students, advertisement of jobs to the appropriate student base and acting as a point of contact for future employers.

In addition to regular correspondence with students, this year, a questionnaire was given to past students to determine how they found their first job, and to ascertain any extra skills, which the students consider important but which currently are not covered. The collated data was analysed. The initial indications are that most jobs are found by student's personal contacts, or with the help of the Institute.

A major problem that prospective employers have is that they often do not know who, or even if there is a person, to contact within the Institute for this type of service. Once contact has been established, then a mechanism needs to be available to allow the students and employers to communicate. Manual systems to achieve this are either work intensive or relatively ineffectual. A possible solution to this problem is to have a web system attached to the Institute's extranet, which provides the facility to advertise jobs to the students. As a third year project for a group of CIT's BIT students, a web system is proposed which will allow employers to enter jobs, students to search for jobs and enter their profile for automatic notification.

This will apply to all disciplines and be usable in other organisations.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the main reasons students attend tertiary education is to enable them to gain suitable and profitable employment. It is therefore in the interest of the relevant institutes to provide facilities to enable this to become a reality. This may be achieved by supporting the students by offering recruitment and career advice. Over the last few years I have been acting as a liaison with industry in the area of recruitment for students, both by arranging seminars/talks by industry representatives, and finding suitable students for industry jobs that have come to my notice. This began on a small scale but escalated to the point of virtually becoming a full time job at certain times of the year. I began to look for ways to streamline the process and yet improve the effectiveness. A small survey was conducted with the students who left last year as to the effectiveness of the current assistance, and in discussion with my colleagues we decided to develop a web site using our third year students. As the third year student projects are not until the second semester this has not yet been completed.

2. SURVEY

A questionnaire (Appendix A) was distributed to all students who were to leave at the end of last year together with a stamped and addressed return envelope. The main aim of this was to discover how successful students were in acquiring jobs, and if the resources at CIT were of benefit. The return rate was low with only 17 replies from a possible 60, this was not enough to form any definite conclusions, but over half of these found jobs either through personal contact or with direct help from CIT. I feel that if this exercise were to be repeated over a number of years more useful conclusions could be formed in part by monitoring trends and effectiveness of any changes made to the systems.

The types of jobs available and their suitability for graduates from various courses would also be of interest, especially when reviewing a graduate profile.

Survey Results

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Time to find a job (weeks)	7	7.64
Starting Salary ($)	37700	8643.3
Seminar Usefulness (scale 1-10)	8.2	1.4

Table 1

Survey Results

Breakdown of ways in which jobs obtained

Personal Contact	38%
CIT Assistance	25%
Commercial Agency	19%
Web	6%
SJS	6%
Media	6%

Table 2

2.1 Results

Results are shown in tables 1 and 2.

3. WEB PAGE

3.1 Why?

Manual notification of prospective jobs even with the use of E-Mail, was very time consuming, and relied on me to correctly identify the most suitable means of advertising to reach the most suitable group of students. Given that a significant number of students rely on our service or their personal contacts, there is obviously a requirement to facilitate better communication between employers and students. Web technology enables efficient and effective contact between these two groups.

Companies advertise a many jobs, especially in IT, on the web, either directly, or through agencies. Search engines make it easy to find jobs, which fit specific criteria, for example, location, contract permanent roles or types of jobs. The tools available make it possible to match profiles with jobs as they are entered, facilitating a significantly more efficient system.

3.2 How?

Using a database, web page and search engine it is possible for a prospective employer to load jobs which are suitable for students onto the Institute's extranet and into a database. The student can then access these jobs in two ways, either by using the search engine, or by inputting a profile into the database and getting automatic notification via E-mail when a suitable job is loaded. This could be achieved using keywords in the skill set and certain other areas. The student would only need to fill in the profile once, possibly by filling in a form, which includes such things as the skills they wish to advertise. The system would be accessible to current students only.

A group of third year students would be offered the development as a possible third year project, which would link into both the intranet and extranet of the institute giving access to both prospective employers and students.

3.3 Problems

A certain level of security needs to be present to prevent pranksters from loading unsuitable or non-existent jobs. The most obvious solution would be to have employer registration required on their first visit to the site, providing some form of identification, such as an ID and a password. The administrator could vet the jobs for time periods and suitability. The student profile would have to be secure from employers and other students for privacy reasons. There would have to be a maximum life for job advertisements, with a possible notification to both the administrator and employer when this expires. The employer should also be able to provide a date to allow for closing dates of certain jobs.

To maximise it's effectiveness the Institute would need to support the web page by integrating it into their main intranet and extranet system. The webmaster should be consulted during development to ensure uniformity in the look and function of the site.

4. FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

4.1 Other Disciplines

Although the main focus of this development has been in the area of IT job placement it would need little adjustment to enable it to be made suitable for other disciplines. Aspects such as keywords and the expertise of the administrator would need to be considered and expanded, with possibly an administrator per area of expertise.

A facility within the job loading area could give prospective employers the option of choosing a discipline or the job could be open to all students, as in the case of some of the part time or holiday work.

4.2 Other Institutes

Modification to allow for various platforms and extranet configurations would be possible, thus allowing the system to be utilized by other institutes. The universities are currently looking at having one integrated system covering all universities which has a similar focus to the one suggested in this paper. This could be another option, but institutes tend to differ from universities in the relationships they foster

with industry and local communities.

4.3 Vision for the Future

Some of the career advice sites have tests, which help a person decide the career for which they are best suited.

This is a distinct possibility here, allowing the system to become a 'one stop shop' by not only helping them decide on a career, but informing them of their path to that career, and helping them gain employment at the end.

Assuming some of the ideas produced by TEAC are implemented and all tertiary education is viewed as a whole, one site could test a person, suggest a course of education together with an appropriate institute, and provide employment opportunities both during and at the end of their education.

Employers could not only indicate their needs for one position in one geographical area, but throughout New Zealand. They could also help institutes decide on course content by the types of jobs and the skill sets employers request.

5. CONCLUSION

Over time, shortages in various professions have been followed by over supply and shortages in the job market, due to training establishments over reacting. Any Institute who could guarantee a student a job on completion of their course would have a definite marketing advantage. I am not saying that the type of system I propose will eliminate the first or enable the second of these, but it would make it possible to streamline the recruitment problem as well as helping institutes react more appropriately to the first.

There are currently a few barriers to taking my ideas to their logical conclusion as outlined in my vision for the future. Currently, there is a competitive regime within education where various training establishments are vying for the same market. This means that it would be highly unlikely that the cooperative model I discussed would be possible.

This year was the first year I surveyed the students after they had completed their qualification. This survey needs to be extended over a number of years to gain meaningful data, and help determine the needs of the market as well as the effectiveness of any new student support systems implemented.

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APPENDIX A

Graduate Job Questionnaire

Q1 Age in years

Q2 How long after leaving CIT did you get your first job?

Q3 What was your first job?

Q4 What was the salary for the above job?

Q5 Which Qualification did you have on leaving CIT?

Q6 How did you find your first job?

Circle one or more

CIT Assistance	Commercial
Agency	
Personal Contact	Media Advertisement
Web	Other (Specify)

Q7 Did you attend any of the lunchtime seminars? Y/N

Q8 **If the answer to Q7 is Y.**

How useful were they to you?

(circle, 1 low , 10 high)