



## Navigating the Digital Job Market When You're Not Tech Savvy

### How boomers can compete in the online job hunt

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The job search is becoming increasingly digital, with companies and recruiters turning to Twitter, LinkedIn, and blogs to find candidates. But where does that leave older, less tech-savvy job seekers.

In many cases, it leaves them without jobs. Though the economy has begun to pick up, [workers between the ages of 45 and 54 are still losing jobs overall](#), with a decline of about 364,000 jobs nationwide for that age group so far this year. And while that demographic isn't getting hired for many reasons, one contributing factor is their lack of comfort with the online world, specifically social media.

Of course, plenty of baby boomers are Internet-fluent. But for the ones who aren't, it can be fatal for a job search.

Take Carol Castle, for example, who's been looking for a receptionist position near her home outside of Portland, Ore., since 2009, when she was laid off from her administrative assistant job at a paper mill. Until appearing as a guest on Oregon Public Broadcasting's [Think Out Loud](#) for a segment on job searching in March, she knew little about social networking and how it can be used for a job hunt. "I wasn't even aware that you could look for work that way," says Castle, 57, who was with her last company for 24 years. "It never even occurred to me."

[See [The Most Effective Ways to Look for a Job.](#)]

Job seekers like Castle know all too well how much the world of job search has changed over the last decade. The last time many of them looked for a job, filling out an application and shaking a few hands could do the trick. Now, job candidates get a leg up by using digital tools to research the company before the interview, learning about company culture and [preferences of the hiring manager](#). They [position themselves as experts](#) on Twitter and LinkedIn. Some even create unique Internet campaigns to catch a hiring manager's eye.

Yet the way people get jobs, in a broader sense, hasn't changed: networking.

"[Boomers] think they have to learn a whole new system, and it will make people shut down," says Anne Messenger, president of [Messenger Associates](#), a company that helps clients with career management. But she says boomers might not be as bad off as they think. "They have experience under their belt, they know what politics are like in the workplace, they really understand [in-person] networking," she says. "If we can just help them understand that social media is just another tool to use to help them do all of that other stuff that they're so good at, they are double ahead of the game."

People who aren't tech savvy actually have some advantages over job seekers who spend a lot of time on the Internet, says [Skip Freeman](#), a headhunter who self-published a book called *The Rules of the Hiring Game Have Changed... Forever!* "The tech-savvy people oftentimes let themselves get lulled to sleep behind what they think is the safety of their computer ... blasting out resume to online postings, joining a group on LinkedIn, joining discussion groups," he says. "The next thing you know, the whole day has passed and all you've done is been in a virtual world. You've never actually communicated with a human being, and that's what it's going to take to get hired."

Boomers who manage to land a job without online networking, however, may find they lack the technology know-how to succeed in the position. "If you don't have the skills to navigate the digital job market," says [Pam Lassiter](#), career coach and author of *The New Job Security*, "ask yourself whether you have the skills to perform the job."

[See [When Using Job Boards, It Pays to Go Niche.](#)]

How should boomers—or anyone who's not comfortable online—wade through the digital job market? A few tips:

**Turn to in-person networking.** This age-old strategy still works, so continue to broaden your network by attending in-person events and following up with interesting people. "The most important thing you can be doing is networking," says [Phyllis Mufson](#), a career and small-business consultant. "But," she added, "you can be using the Internet to facilitate that."

**Learn to use LinkedIn.** There's no way around this one—career experts agree job hunters need to be on LinkedIn. That means if you don't know how to use it, you should learn. "Today, not having a LinkedIn profile is like, to me, five or 10 years ago, not having a resume," says Messenger, the career-management group president. "If you want a good job, you need to be visible [online]."

The good news is the social networking tool requires less maintenance than Facebook and Twitter, and it's arguably easier to learn. It also revolves around sharing professional—not personal—information, which tends to appeal more to social-media newbies. To learn how to use the tool, take an online course or ask a young relative or neighbor for help. Start by connecting only with people you know in person and feel comfortable networking with, says Lassiter, because it's less overwhelming than dealing with new contacts or strangers who want to ...  
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connect professionally.

If you're still not convinced, remind yourself that most recruiters and hiring managers use LinkedIn, Messenger says. "These are the decision makers in the virtual room. Don't you want to be in the room with the decision makers?"

**Improve your skills.** The skills you need to land a job in your field may have changed since the last time you tackled the job hunt. One way to figure out whether you're up-to-date is by browsing job boards, finding openings that appeal to you, and looking at their requirements. "And if you don't have [those skills], go get them," Lassiter says.

Even if you didn't need to know how to use the Internet effectively for your last job, it might be important for your next employer. Most hiring managers "want you to have some level of computer skills," says Kathryn Schafer, case manager for an older-worker program at [Michigan Works!](#), a workforce development association. "They want a multi-layered and skilled [employee]."

[See [How to Market Your Skills in Your Job Search](#).]

**Volunteer.** Once you figure out which skills you need to develop, hone them by offering to work for free for a nonprofit, Lassiter suggests. Volunteering also is a great form of networking and could lead to a connection that helps you land a job.

**Try snail mail.** Send your cover letter and resume to the hiring manager through the postal service, preferably by certified mail, Freeman says. It will get read, he says, because you've avoided the over-crowded email inbox. But make sure this approach suits the company you're approaching; some coaches say it could backfire, making you look like you don't use email. Including your email address on your cover letter for future correspondence could solve that problem.

**Take baby steps.** You don't have to learn everything at once. Rather than feeling overwhelmed over what you don't know, learn one tool at a time. Make a list of priorities—possibly starting with LinkedIn—and tackle them in order.

When all else fails, focus on your strengths—and communicating those strengths to people who have the power to hire you. "The old things that we used to do, they still work," says Charles Purdy, a senior editor at job board [Monster.com](#), who oversees career-advice content. "Social media is a complement to them, it's not a replacement for them."

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