

Make the connection

Building strong contacts often uncovers 'hidden' jobs

By Shannon Tan
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MIAMI — After being transferred to another division at a Boca Raton, Fla., dot-com, Angela Ricciardi immediately turned to her list of networking contacts.

Ricciardi had realized her new position at First Pop was not a good fit.

For the next five months, Ricciardi turned to people she had met through various Chamber of Commerce events.

Bingo! She found a job as a business consultant with Southeastern Companies, a human-resources firm in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

"To really get somewhere, I think networking is the No. 1 thing," Ricciardi said.

Whether you are feeling antsy about your job security or if you already have been pink-slipped, it is never too late to build a strong network of contacts.

About 18 percent of workers say it is likely they will be laid off or fired, up from 11 percent in 1999, according to a recent "Mood of the American Workforce" survey conducted by Harris Interactive and Spherion Corp.

Research shows that about 65 percent of jobs are found through networking. Most professional, executive and managerial positions are not advertised, so mass-mailing resumes often leads to heartbreak.

A human resources "professional is usually inundated with unsolicited candidates," said Marilyn Durant, president of the Human Resource Association of Broward County in Florida. "The way to get the HR professional's attention is through a referral. Cold calls don't work with HR people."

Finding this "hidden" job market takes time. Last-minute networking campaigns are often ineffective.

"You're in the business of marketing your services," said

"You want to be on as many people's radar screens as possible. It's not a question of how many people you know. It's a question of how many people know you."

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Here are some tips to advertise yourself:

● **Research:** First, make a list of your skills and three types of contacts: people you know, people who make the hiring decisions and those who know the people hiring.

If you have worked in the aviation and hospitality industry for the last few decades, do not pigeonhole yourself. Think outside the tourism industry.

"Now the industry has been cut back," said Robert Morgan, president of the Human Capital Consulting Group of Fort Lauderdale-based Spherion Corp. "They're really having to look outside their industry. An airline mechanic can be a great mechanic in the automotive industry. Flight attendants can go into other customer-service positions."

● **Networking:** Comb newspapers and trade magazines for networking events. Call your local Chamber of Commerce. Select an event either for the speaker or because it caters to the profession in which you are interested.

Ricciardi tries to attend three to five networking events a week.

"I think it really helps with your public speaking — you have to present in front of people you don't know," she said.

Experts suggest practicing your introduction. When you have only 30 seconds to speak, you want to grab people's attention. Tape yourself to make sure you sound confident.

At the event, select a table in the corner with your back to the wall so everyone can see you when you stand up to introduce yourself.

Marcia Glatt of M. Glatt Associates, a career consulting firm in Tamarac, Fla., informs her clients of which events she will be attending so she can introduce them.

"The handshake is so important, and don't stand there with 50 business cards handing them out," Glatt said. "Talk with respect. Don't fidget. Look into their eyes."

Exchange business cards, and later make a note of how you met that person.

Find out who makes the decisions for a job you are interested in, and plan your networking around meeting that person.

When speaking to the hiring manager or recruiter for that company, "insinuate yourself with an idea," Glatt said. "What if you could solve this problem? Start out telling them and then stop and say, 'Hire me and I'll tell you.'"

After the initial meeting, follow up by phone or e-mail. When the relationship has developed to the point where you can ask for career advice, send your resume.

● **Referrals:** Build relationships in the professions to which you aspire.

Search firms often call executives who are employed. They might suggest you as a candidate.

If you are happy with your current position, take the opportunity to develop a relationship with recruiters by helping them source candidates or sending them business.

"Every person you speak to can create a ripple effect and can create a bridge to the next person," Durant said.