

America's Job Bank: A Corporate Solution

As America's Job Bank closes, the business community offers sensible alternatives that could help employers satisfy federal guidelines

by Kurt Ronn

The Internet career site America's Job Bank, which currently posts more than 2 million jobs online, will cease to exist as of midnight, June 30, 2007. About 18 months ago, the Labor Dept. decided not to fund the site (www.jobsearch.org) past the end of June, 2007, which means that as of July 1, the U.S. will be the only industrialized nation without a federally funded labor exchange. Corporations—and job seekers—need to pay attention because of the way both small and large employers incorporate America's Job Bank as an important part of their recruitment strategy.

First, in a world of pay-for-placement Internet career sites (such as Monster.com and CareerBuilder.com), America's Job Bank is unique in that job postings are free and have a broad, national reach. Second, posting open positions to America's Job Bank helps federal contractors (companies that have 50 or more employees and perform more than \$100,000 in business with the government) comply with federal affirmative action guidelines.

Affirmative Action Compliance

Federal contractors are required to make their career openings available to any qualified person regardless of race, gender, age, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. In order to meet the requirements established for affirmative action and on behalf of veterans' groups, companies' job postings must reach every state, which could mean faxing or mailing them to every state agency on an individual basis, a labor-intensive process. The Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP), the agency that oversees federal contractors, accepts posting to America's Job Bank as a good-faith effort to comply with the Affirmative Action requirement to make positions available to all qualified candidates. Failure to comply can result in significant fines as well as loss of federal contractor status and related revenue.

Without the government-sponsored, federally funded job board, employers will be forced to search out niche job boards that offer free postings, to pay for individual postings, to post only on company career pages, or to decide to step back in time 10 years and not post open positions on the Internet. Free job boards exist, but none have the breadth of coverage of America's Job Bank. Posting on a corporate careers site will not meet the current compliance requirements or give necessary exposure to job seekers. Pay-for-posting sites charge by the posting and the individual location; thus, the cost of a national posting would be prohibitive due to the quantity of individual postings and the time management involved. Failure to post job positions on a broad, national basis would mean noncompliance for federal contractors and is, in any case, a poor strategy for companies that want to attract a diverse pool of talent.

Privately Funded Options

Private enterprise has stepped in with a couple of replacement options for America's Job Bank. The first option: DirectEmployers, a nonprofit consortium of major U.S. corporations, has created JobCentral, a centralized national job board. JobCentral is available now for postings and will be in compliance with current federal guidelines for federal contractors as of July 1, 2007. DirectEmployers was previously a member association and job-search engine only; now, they have created a job-posting solution. JobCentral will pick up the responsibility to reach all state agencies and veterans' groups, even via fax, if necessary. The site is an enhanced version of America's Job Bank, working closely with veterans' organizations and the states to create a socially responsible solution that will meet the OFCCP compliance requirements.

Posting to JobCentral is free; postings are cross-posted on major diversity careers sites and specialty niche sites, including military and veteran-related career sites. Major corporations fund the job board. Membership with DirectEmployers provides the benefits of automating the posting process as well as access to industry-related education and sharing of best practices. The major boost to the remainder of the business world is a free replacement for America's Job Bank.

A second option is America's Job Exchange, created by the company that currently hosts America's Job Bank. This is a for-profit business model based on advertising revenue. It functions similarly to America's Job Bank and is currently up and running.

Compliance Catch-22

We have noted that federal contractors are required to post all opportunities nationally in order to meet compliance regulations. Private enterprise has provided a couple of options, but so far, neither has been endorsed by the OFCCP as a solution that will be in compliance with federal guidelines. Based on the letter of the law, JobCentral will be a compliant solution, but it seems unlikely that the government will authorize a private alternative.

So what are federal contractors to do? OFCCP Deputy Director Charles James recently announced that the OFCCP would issue a statement by the end of June regarding the state of OFCCP compliance post-America's Job Bank, and would clarify if either new, private option will be in compliance. Let us all hope when we hear the final word from the government that business gets credit for providing a solution.

Act Now

Remember that America's Job Bank currently posts more than 2 million jobs. Job seekers may not be aware that America's Job Bank is closing. Also, businesses will need to post these 2 million jobs elsewhere. What should employers do now? It's a good idea to move forward by posting open positions on JobCentral and/or America's Job Exchange. Small businesses that have relied on America's Job Bank aren't compelled to make postings available nationally. However, they still need exposure to a diverse pool of talent. The good news here is that private enterprise has stepped up to fill a void left by the government.