

Striking out with job postings? Avoid these red flags.

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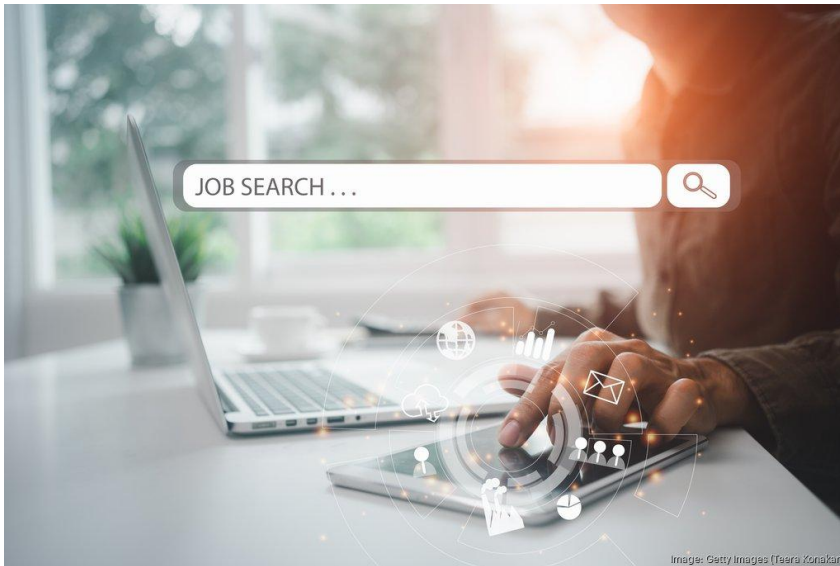


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Story Highlights

- Adobe study reveals job seekers avoid buzzwords like "customer obsessed."
- Companies should write clear, honest job descriptions without jargon.
- Many applicants abandon complex application processes requiring manual data entry.

Employers looking to boost the draw of their job postings will want to avoid terms such as “customer-obsessed,” “fast-paced environment” and describing your company as a “family.”

That's one of the many takeaways from [a new study by tech giant Adobe Inc.](#), which conducted a survey of both hiring managers and job seekers to find out what would deter employees from applying — and how employers can make the most of their job listings.

The stakes are high. According to Adobe, workers spend around 30 minutes applying for a job, so they need to decide which ones are most worth their time.

The top 10 red-flag phrases identified by Adobe inside job postings, and the percentage of workers who said they would not apply for a job with that phrase included, are:

1. Customer-obsessed (33% would not apply)
2. Wears many hats (33%)
3. Rockstar (32%)
4. High sense of urgency (29%)
5. Fast-paced environment (25%)
6. High energy (24%)
7. Works well with ambiguity (21%)
8. Family (20%)
9. Entrepreneurial spirit (18%)
10. No task too small (16%)

“Put simply, the days of vague buzzwords are coming to an end,” said Nick Derham, director at recruiting firm Adria Solutions Ltd., in a statement via email. “Terms like 'customer-obsessed' or 'wear many hats' might sound exciting to employers, but they often leave candidates unsure of what the job actually involves.”

Instead, companies should write clear, honest descriptions. Workers want to know what they will be doing day-to-day, whom they will be working with and how success will be measured. Overused phrases can come across as insincere or off-putting. It’s better to use plain language, Derham said.

How workers perceive various terms

The degree to which catchphrases draw negative attention varies by industry, the Adobe research found. In education, for example, 48% of applicants said they wouldn't apply to a job that uses the term “customer-obsessed,” while “wears many hats” is the top red flag in the health industry at 37% and in finance at 32%. In the tech tech, "rockstar" is the top red flag, turning away 36% of prospective applicants.

Kelly Del Fuoco Mota, co-founder and chief operating officer at business consulting and recruiting firm Pembroke & Co., said in an email terms like “fast-paced environment” and "wearing many hats" used to excite candidates coming out of the 2008 recession because they signaled a company was bustling and had plentiful job security — an assurance workers wanted at the time.

“Now, those terms are perceived as a company being understaffed and that the work-life balance is poor. Instead, companies can describe departments as 'growing' with 'opportunities to learn,' as that may speak to candidates better in today’s market,” Mota said.

Job seekers are also turned off by having to write a cover letter, with one-quarter of the respondents to Adobe's survey saying they wouldn't apply for a job if a cover letter is required. On the flip side, 40% of hiring managers said they require cover letters, in part to cut down on applicant volume.

Nearly 20% of survey respondents said they will not apply for a role if there is no easy-apply method.

Workers who upload a resume but then are asked to manually re-enter information already on the resume are also likely to abandon a job application. Across generational lines, according to Adobe, 49% of Gen Z applicants will not finish an application that requires them to re-input resume data manually, followed by 47% of millennials, 39% of Gen X and 33% of baby boomer applicants.

Derham said a lot of good candidates will simply scroll past a role that asks for a cover letter, especially if it's not clear why it's needed.

"If you're going to ask for one, make sure it's genuinely part of your decision-making and let candidates know what you're looking for. Otherwise, it can feel like a box-ticking exercise," Derham said. "As for the application process, it's important to keep it simple. Asking someone to upload their CV and then manually re-enter all their job history is a fast way to lose interest."

Nearly two-thirds of hiring managers surveyed (64%) told Adobe they use AI tools in some form during the hiring process. Fifty percent said they use AI tools to parse and analyze resumes, while 45% said they used the technology to initially assess candidates for roles.

Adobe stressed that workers who are asked to spend time filling out applications likely don't appreciate the fact that most of those applications will be read first by AI tools and not a hiring manager.

"In a time when AI often scans resumes before a human even sees them, it's understandable that job seekers are frustrated by how much effort applications still require," Adobe stated in a report with its survey findings.

What companies can do differently

The future of job listings ultimately is going to be dictated by technology as well as companies' efforts to comply with legal and regulatory obligations, said Adam Calli, founder and principal consultant at Arc Human Capital, LLC.

"So many organizations have adapted their current job postings to address legal issues in advance of possible [or] foreseeable problems — so much that a bulk of many postings today entail run-on regulatory jargon rather than the specifics of certain business roles and environments," Calli said.

Companies instead should aim to convey what it is actually like to work at the business, Calli added. That's why more companies are turning to video to showcase their work environment. Companies also should aim to write clear, concise and honest job descriptions that leave out as much industry jargon as possible.

"To be honest, in most instances, organizations only really need a name, phone number, email address, and the last few job titles a candidate has held to initiate a dialogue with most candidates," Calli said. "A

candidate who is genuinely and earnestly on the job search is against the clock. Making them do more work to jump through more hoops ... only increases the dropout rate of finished applications received.”

Job market creates frustrations

The focus on the hiring process comes at a time when the company that owns job boards CareerBuilder and Monster.com [is selling parts of its business after filing for bankruptcy protection](#). CEO Jeff Furman attributed the move to sell its businesses to a "[challenging and uncertain macroeconomic environment](#)," but experts also blamed a flood of low-quality emails and applications, both fake and real, that have diluted the usefulness of generalized job boards.

Other surveys have shown there's a growing frustration with what's widely seen as a broken job market.

Among people who are searching for a job, [46% of those interviewed by Clarify Capital](#) said they encountered a scam or a fraudulent posting during their search, while 44% said they found so-called “ghost postings,” or listed jobs the company in question never plans to fill. Additionally, 17% said they encountered an artificial-intelligence recruiter or hiring manager, not a human, in their job search.

[An extensive survey from hiring platform Checkr](#) in February found 58% of surveyed Americans looking for jobs said securing an interview or response through traditional job boards felt "nearly impossible," while 66% reported applying for jobs that appeared to be open but were later found to be ghost postings. A majority of respondents (61%) said they believed landing a real, in-person interview without a personal connection has become nearly impossible.