

Students and young professionals always ask us the same questions: How they can go about finding work in a specific country abroad? How should they write a country-specific resume? How can they find employers based locally in their favorite international city?

What these students don't realize is that by limiting themselves to a country-specific job search, they seriously decrease their chances of actually finding internationally oriented work. It may come as a surprise, but young professionals almost never work abroad directly with domestic foreign firms. Let's explore why this is true, and what students can do about it:

Is a Country-specific Job Search Ever the Answer?

YES! If you're looking for **low-skilled work** abroad to gain experience.

If you're going abroad with the intention of doing casual or low-skilled work, you can specifically target a country of choice. This works for jobs like: waitressing, au pairing, volunteering, teaching English, interning, or working in the tourism or farming industries. Short-term or short-notice jobs like these don't tend to have the same visa restrictions as professional positions. You can do these jobs with a student or working vacation visa, or even under the table. Organizations like BUNAC in the US and SWAP in Canada can help you work out the details of finding working holiday visas, or you can also contact embassies directly.

Although such experiences may not be directly related to your professional field, they still provide you with high-value cross-cultural experience, and allow you the opportunity to develop international skills. It also gives your career a boost, by allowing you to demonstrate to employers that you took a leap and succeeded abroad.

NO! If you're looking for **professional work** after graduation.

When you're trying to land an entry- or mid-level "professional" position, the country-specific approach doesn't work; and it all comes down to the visa process. To hire a foreigner, local employers abroad have to go through a lengthy process to help that person obtain a work visa; and most employers just aren't willing to go through this hassle. The major roadblock is that your local employer must prove to their government that no other citizen is available to do the job, which is an almost impossible hurdle to overcome.

The result? Applying directly to a foreign company is almost always a fruitless strategy for young North American professionals on the hunt for international work. But there are certain strategies that young professionals can use to support the development of an international career. Let's take a look at some:

So, Who Really Hires North American Students?

Many North American firms, organizations and government bodies operate offices abroad, and even more conduct work internationally from home-based offices. It is with these companies that young professionals are most likely to land internationally oriented positions. In short: most international employers are based here in North America. Eighty percent of people who go abroad for professional work do so with a US or Canada-based employer; and in these cases, it is the employer – not you – who arranges the visa and, oftentimes, determines the country you'll be stationed in.

What Does "Working Internationally" Mean?

Most students envision that an international job means being posted abroad or moving from country to country. But this model is actually becoming quite rare. But there is exponential growth in the number of home-based international jobs – meaning that an employee stationed in North America spends his or her days working directly with individuals or offices in other parts of the world. These employees are often purchasing or negotiating the terms of services from foreign firms, traveling on short-term assignments or managing international teams online. They work on internationally oriented content, but often in a domestic workplace.

The rise of Internet technologies is driving a new global economy, and greatly increasing the demand for internationally skilled workers. Businesses of every size are being transformed – from large international corporations to small local firms – and they are conducting business across cultural and national borders. Whether you're

hired for a position at home or abroad, your employer will want to know that you have an excellent international skill set and can deal with cross-cultural environments.

The Industry-specific Solution

So, what does all this mean for the young professional job seeker? Well, it means that if you want to find a professional position with an international component, you should target your job search to North American companies that are working internationally, rather than looking for work with foreign firms. And this means developing an industry-specific job search strategy rather than the classic (and ineffective) country-specific strategy.

With an industry-specific job search, you'll start by finding out who the international players in your field are. Just about every industry has an international component, so make it your business to find out what that international component is, and begin envisioning where you could fit in. Identify employers who have employees with international responsibilities. You need to identify organizations whose mandate is international, such as international engineering, health, finance, disaster relief, teaching, research and consulting firms. Don't ignore small and medium-sized firms, since they too require internationally skilled young workers for projects at home, or even abroad.

Where to Start Your Search

To begin your industry-specific search, determine your field of interest, and decide what type of organization you wish to work for: private firm, NGO, government or international organization. Once you've done this, your goal is to uncover the "international hierarchy of organizations" within your area of professional interest.

Start by identifying the world umbrella organizations representing your field and the international organizations representing your industry. These organizations will have regional bodies, national associations and, most importantly, institutional members located in your home country. At each level in this hierarchy, you'll find a rich layer of potential employers who are working internationally.

Be exhaustive in your research, and you'll uncover a wealth of information. You'll find lists of member organizations that are active internationally, along with lists and descriptions of their current international projects. Check out industry websites and trade journals to find out which organizations and firms are active internationally, and what their current projects are. These leads may point you directly to opportunities for internships, scholarships, research opportunities, courses or conferences. You'll also be able to find names of international experts working in your field who can provide career advice and international networking opportunities. Some of these experts may even be based near you. Get in contact and ask for advice. Those who are already working internationally in your field can be invaluable resources as you begin building your career. Invite them to speak at your school, organize a visit to their offices or volunteer your services.

Key Points to Remember

- **A country-specific job search is not effective when looking for professional work.** Domestic employers in foreign countries almost never hire recent US/Canadian graduates for professional work.
- **A country-specific job search only works for casual and low-skilled jobs,** such as teaching English abroad, internships and volunteer abroad positions.
- **An industry-specific job search is the most effective strategy for finding professional international work,** and "working internationally" does not always mean working abroad. The vast majority of international jobs are actually found at home with home-based companies and organizations!
- **No matter what your goals, create a targeted job search plan for yourself and research, research, research!** Entry-level job seekers are most successful when they're bold, confident and proactive. Do your research, network and be smart about your international career goals.

Good luck!

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