

# Digging for Data— Narrowing Your Options

By Barbara Kofman & Kaitlin Eckler

The following article is the second in our Career Zone series and is a follow up to the article “Know Yourself”- September ‘05. Visit [jobpostings.ca](http://jobpostings.ca) to view all the Career Zone articles.

**S**tep two in your career search project is Digging for Data followed by Narrowing Your Options. Once you’ve clarified your key strengths and values you have begun the process of narrowing down your career options. How do you use this information to recognize the right job fit? The career you want is out there. All you need to do is apply those same research and project management skills that enabled you to get where you are today in school. With a focused investigation and some ingenuity you can successfully uncover the crucial information to point you in a career direction and enable you to zero in on your job options. In this phase, you will research jobs, companies and organizations with the objective of finding and connecting with employers and job opportunities aligned with who you are and your plans for the future.

‘Digging for Data’ will help you to find out which companies are out there, what their business is, how they are structured, what their products or services are and how they can use your particular skill set. ‘Narrowing Your Options’ is about focusing your career search by taking into account what you would like to do and where you would like to do it. Finding the right fit job and employer entails researching a choice of industries and organizations and identifying which ones best suit your skills, personality and career goals.



Industries fall into sectors such as retail, financial, manufacturing, health care, technology, education etc. Organization types are typically categorized by size, as determined by volume of business and governance—small, mid-size, multinational, private, public, subsidiary with global branches and so on. Companies, and the jobs within them, are best understood through their corporate culture influenced by the rules and regulations set out by structure, function, and leadership style. Large businesses frequently have policies and procedures in place to ensure consistency throughout the organization. Smaller ones,

particularly start-ups, often display an open, unregulated environment. Certain industries are highly structured because of the nature of their products or services, with a set code for employee behaviour, hours of work and dress, while others are more fluid and casual about these matters. Doing this kind of research is crucial to develop an understanding of viable choices and to eliminate jobs and employers from consideration not aligned with who you really are.

Once you have identified the companies that appear to have the type of work and culture that appeal to you, confirm your

findings by conducting information interviews - these are meetings with someone in a company for the purpose of learning more about their business. This will enable you to get an inside perspective and begin the development of your network of contacts. Employers naturally respond to candidates who understand their business and what it takes to be successful within it. Knowing someone within a company positions you well for any future opportunities.

Before setting up information interviews, prepare your “20-second commercial,” a script that explains to people why you’d like to meet with them. Don’t make the mistake of asking for a job. You are conducting research into various options to narrow down your future career choices and may find, once you’ve learned more about the organization and/or the career, it isn’t what you want.

If you’re successful in setting up a meeting, then tap into that great research you’ve done and develop a list of fundamental questions to ask based on what you’ve learned would be a best fit for you.

By following these steps, you will get a clearer picture of the jobs that exist within certain organizations and industries. This will help to figure out what suits you best, while gaining the competitive advantage of having inside company knowledge and a network of contacts. **jp**

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## **Begin your research by exploring the numerous government and business sites accessible via the Internet and taking advantage of the resources available at your Library such as Scott’s Directory.**

### **Sites to get you started:**

<http://www.charityvillage.com> *Not-for-profit information,*

<http://www.hoovers.com> *Company and industry snapshots*

<http://www.rileyguide.com> *Links to work and career information*

<http://www.sedar.com> *Detailed business information on many companies.*

<http://strategis.ic.gc.ca> *Canada’s business and consumer site*

### **Pointers for developing your 20-second commercial:**

- Explain who you are, including your qualifications and current student status and why you’re calling—to get ADVICE in researching your career.
- Make it clear you’re not expecting a job.
- Ask to set up a short meeting at their office and confirm time and location.

### **Examples of questions to ask during an Information Interview:**

- How would you describe your company’s culture?
- How did you get started in this area?
- What do you like/dislike about your job?
- What are the challenges facing the industry?
- What kinds of jobs do you offer at the entry level?