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March 2016

Research Report

Use of Online Career Development Tools by Vocational Rehabilitation Professionals

Overview

Online career development refers to using online resources such as social media and job boards for finding employment and advancing careers. Social networking sites like Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter allow users to connect with potential employers and advertise their strengths to a diverse audience. Online job boards connect employers and job seekers based on specific interests, skills and locations. Unfortunately, the same online tools that can help people find employment and advance their careers can also limit opportunities if the job seeker's online presence is unprofessional or absent (Brown & Vaughn, 2011).

As an agency responsible for helping people with disabilities find employment, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), is uniquely positioned to support consumers with online career development activities. This fact sheet reports results from a survey of VR professionals about their preparedness to help consumers with online career development and their desires for additional training.

Methods:

We asked VR agency directors if their staff could participate in an online survey. Directors who agreed, forwarded an email with the survey link to all VR professionals within their agency who worked directly with consumers. The 24-question online survey focused on counselor use of social media and online job boards for helping consumers find employment.

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Results

Respondents.

A total of 1432 VR professionals representing 32 agencies and 25 states completed the survey. Of these, 12% (n=170) worked for a blind agency and 88% (n=1257) worked for a combined or a general agency. About half (49.1%) worked in their current position for six years or more. The majority of respondents (50.4%, n=722) served a mixed rural and urban caseload, while 26.6% (n=381) reported serving primarily rural consumers and 23.0% (n=329) reported serving primarily urban consumers. Respondents were aged 18-29 (8.6%, n=125), 30-49 (44.8%, n=642), 50-64 (42.5%, n=609), and 65+ (3.9%, n=56).

Frequency of Online Job Board Use:

The survey asked how frequently and for what purposes respondents used online job boards and social media sites. Respondents indicated that they used online job boards (n=1181, 81.6%) more than social media sites (N=628, 43.4%) for work.

Of the respondents who used online job boards, about 60% (n=860) reported using Indeed.com, a popular vertical job board that pulls jobs from all over the internet. USAJOBS, the portal for federal government jobs, and Careerbuilder.com, a website where users can post and search for jobs, were the two next most popular online job boards used by 56.6% (n=819) and 49.3% (n=713) of respondents respectively. After these top three, reported use dropped off substantially. Table 1 highlights the frequency of use of nine online job boards.

Frequency of Social Media Use

Nearly 40% of respondents (n=568) said that they were blocked from using some or all social media sites while at work. Among respondents who had access to and used social media sites for work, Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube were the three most popular. Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram were rarely used. Table 2 displays the most common social media sites used by VR professionals.

Table 1: Overall reported use of online job boards and the reported use of individual online job boards.

Do you use online job boards at work? (n=1447)		
	Yes	No
	81.6% (n=1181)	18.4% (n=266)
Which online job boards have you used for work? (N=1181)		
Indeed.com	59.4% (n=860)	
USAJOBS	56.6% (n = 819)	
CareerBuilder.com	49.3% (n=713)	
Monster.com	38.8% (n=561)	
Snagajob.com	22.1% n=320)	
Craigslist.org	20.5% (n=296)	
Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP)	16.4% (n=238)	
Glassdoor.com	5.7% (n=82)	
Beyond.com	3.9% (n=56)	

Table 2: Overall reported use of social media sites and the reported use of individual social media sites.

Do you use social media at work? (n=1447)		
	Yes	No
	43.4% (n=628)	56.6% (n=819)
Which social media site have you used for work? (N=628)		
Facebook	60.8% (n=382)	
LinkedIn	56% (n=352)	
YouTube	35.8% (n=225)	
Twitter	7.6% (n=48)	
Pinterest	6.7% (n=42)	
Instagram	2.2% (n=14)	

Respondents who said they used social media for work activities, were asked to identify how they used LinkedIn and Facebook, the two most popular social media sites. Table 2 displays the top five reasons for using Facebook and LinkedIn during the VR process. For both Facebook and LinkedIn, the number one reason for using online job boards was to “to learn about local employers.” The next two most commonly endorsed items for Facebook focused on finding and learning about consumers. The next two most commonly endorsed items for LinkedIn focused on job search and professional development activities.

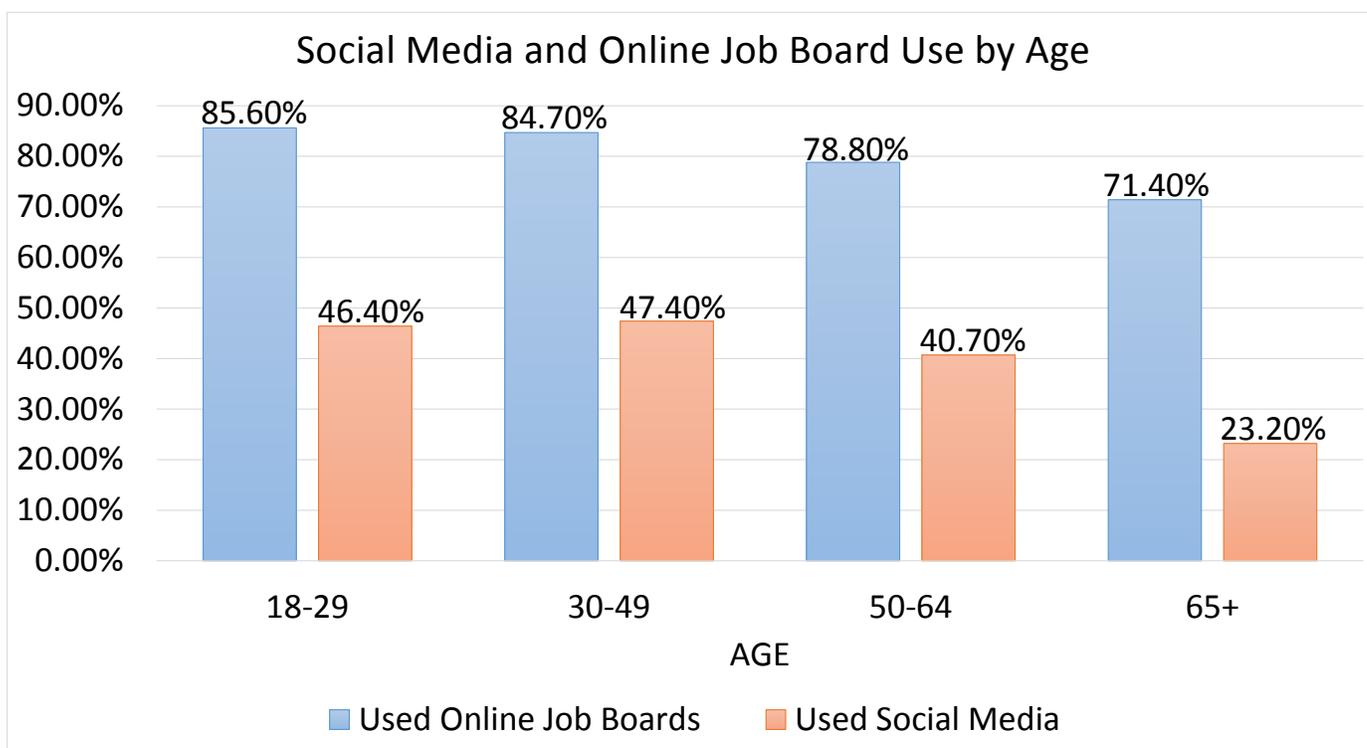
Table 3: The top five reported reasons for using Facebook and LinkedIn during the VR process.

The top five reasons for using Facebook and LinkedIn during the VR process	
Facebook	LinkedIn
Learn about employers	Learn about employers
Find out information about consumers	Search for jobs
Find consumers you've lost touch with	For professional development
To search for jobs	To develop relationships with employers
For professional development	To help consumers network with employers

Age and Online Career development:

We hypothesized that age would influence social media and online job board use. Chi-square tests of independence showed significant relationships between age and social media use, $\chi^2(3, n= 1432) = 15.591$ $p < .01$ and between age and use of online job boards, $\chi^2(3, n= 1432) = 12.597$ $p < .01$. Older VR professionals were less likely to use social media and online job boards. Figure 1 highlights the frequency of social media and online job board use by age.

Figure 1: Social media and online job boards use by age



Training and Online Career Development

About 37% (n= 538) of respondents said they received training about social media or online job board use. We hypothesized that receiving training about social media use would better prepare VR professionals to help their consumers with online career development activities. To evaluate this hypothesis, we ran a chi squared analysis for a series of six questions assessing preparedness to help VR consumers with online career development activities. Because age is a significant predictor of using online career development tools, we controlled for age by splitting the analyses into two groups: 49 and younger, and 50 and over. Respondents evaluated their preparedness on a scale

from 1-5 with 1 being, “very unprepared” and 5 being “very prepared.” Table 4 highlights the results of the analysis.

Table 4: Results of a chi-square analyses evaluating preparedness to help consumers with six different career development tasks with age as a control. Preparedness was evaluated on a scale from 1-5 with 1 being, “very unprepared,” and 5 being very prepared.

UNDER 49						
	Received Training		Did not receive training			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	χ^2	P-Value
Help consumer research job opportunities	4.08	.967	3.80	.996	19.450	.001
Help consumers post resumes to online job boards or resume websites	3.84	1.083	3.53	1.130	16.707	.002
Help consumers develop skills for online professional networking	3.37	1.134	2.99	1.102	22.882	.000
Help consumers improve their online reputation	3.28	1.186	2.88	1.172	24.490	.000
Help consumers address issues of disability disclosure on social media sites	3.14	1.189	2.66	1.178	41.348	.000
Help consumers change privacy setting on social media sites	3.37	1.274	3.14	1.278	8.576	.073
50 and Over						
	Received Training		Did not receive training			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	χ^2	P-Value
Help consumer research job opportunities	3.88	1.223	3.53	1.092	22.96	.000
Help consumers post resumes to online job boards or resume websites	3.63	1.140	3.23	1.120	9.776	.044
Help consumers develop skills for online professional networking	2.90	1.250	2.55	1.105	18.919	.001
Help consumer improve their online reputation	2.78	1.231	2.30	1.113	25.807	.000
Help consumers address issues of disability disclosure on social media sites	2.71	1.261	2.39	1.179	13.944	.007
Help consumers change privacy setting on social media sites	2.43	1.245	2.22	1.225	5.423	.247

Receiving training had an overall positive impact on VR professionals’ preparedness to help their consumers with online career development. VR professionals who received training about social media use and/or online job board use were significantly more likely to report feeling “prepared” or “very prepared” on five out of the six items evaluating readiness to help consumers with a variety of online career development tasks. However, regardless of age, receiving training did not appear to influence readiness to help consumers change their privacy settings on social media sites.

Given the significant influence training has on VR professionals' preparedness to help their consumers with online career development activities, it is not surprising that prompts about additional training topics were highly endorsed. Of those who responded to the survey: sixty-four percent (n= 893) said that they "definitely" wanted more training about improving online privacy, 63.2% (n=866) said that they "definitely" wanted more training about how public policies (e.g. HIPPA, ADA) apply to social media sites, 62.8% (n= 877) said that they definitely wanted more training about strategies for online professional networking, and 61.4% (n=863) said they definitely wanted more training about online ethical practices.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate the desire and need for more training about online career development for VR professionals. Specifically, there is a need for more training about the utility of social media tools within the VR process. This is made evident by the fact that nearly twice as many respondents reported using online job boards than social media sites for online career development activities. Online job boards are the modern iteration of newspaper want ads and the skills needed to use them may be more accessible to VR professionals familiar with traditional strategies for helping consumers find jobs. Whereas skills to effectively use social media may be less well understood and can be difficult to apply for people with little or no experience using social media sites.

Training can help moderate this skill deficit. Respondents who received training about online career development were significantly more likely to report feeling prepared or very prepared to help consumers with online career development tasks. Interestingly, confidence among respondents who received training remained even when controlling for age, which is significantly associated with using online career development tools. In general, younger VR professionals were more likely to report using these tools than their older peers. This finding reflects general population use of new technologies, where younger people are more frequent users and earlier adopters of innovative technologies (Poushter, 2016). It is promising that receiving training seems to eliminate differences in preparedness by age, but additional research is needed to evaluate whether or not training influences adoption.

Receiving training about using online career development tools may facilitate a conversation about the ethics of their use within the VR process. Currently, the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification Code of Ethics (2012) does not directly address the use of online career development tools. Over 60% of respondents indicated that they wanted more training about the ethics of their use. VR professionals are looking for more guidance, but may be unsure about where to find it.

Lack of ethical guidance may be reflected in responses about social media use within the VR process. Although the number one reason for using both Facebook and LinkedIn was to learn about employers, the next two most commonly endorsed reasons for using Facebook were to learn about consumers and to find consumers they've lost touch with. It is unknown how finding information online, without a consumer's consent, may affect the counseling relationship. Furthermore, reaching out to consumers who have discontinued contact with VR may present some ethical dilemmas. It is possible that both of these actions are appropriate in certain circumstances, but there needs to be continued conversation surrounding the issue.

Finally, nearly 40% of respondents said that they were blocked from using some or all social media sites. No amount of training will improve the use of online career development tools if VR professionals cannot access them at work. In order for VR agencies to be as effective as possible VR administrators and directors need to advocate for their use.

Conclusions

The study results reported in this fact sheet demonstrate that VR professionals are using online career development tools for various activities related to the VR process and show that receiving training about online career development was associated with counselors' preparedness to help consumers effectively use these tools. Although younger users tend to be the early adopters and biggest users of technology for online career development, with the appropriate training, their older peers can be just as competent and confident in using this important resource.

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