

Job adverts

How they can be improved
for job hunters and recruiters



**citizens
advice**

Introduction

In April 2015, Citizens Advice looked at over 800 job adverts from across England and Wales on three public job search websites. We found a significant lack of information about what the jobs listed would involve. This lack of information can make it very difficult for a job seeker to know if the job is suitable for them.

We published our findings in July 2015 in [*How bad job ads are failing job-hunters and recruiters*](#). Our findings illustrated the scale and nature of the problem:

- 88% of the adverts fell short of the Advertising Code set out by the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) and used by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA).
- 40% of adverts were unclear about whether the job was full-time or part-time.
- 10% of adverts did not mention either an employer or an agency, so there was no way of knowing who would be receiving the application.
- 40% of adverts were unclear about whether the job was temporary or permanent.
- One-third of adverts did not mention how much you could expect to be paid and 20% didn't mention pay at all.

This short report explains how poor quality adverts are affecting the labour market and recommends ways in which advertising could be improved in order to benefit all groups. The recommendations are neither time nor resource intensive and would measurably improve the recruiting experience for both recruiters and applicants.

Methodology

In April 2015, a team of Citizens Advice research volunteers from across the country analysed over 824 employment adverts on three public job search websites. The adverts were accessed through sites that did not require sign-up. One site was free to use, one charged for advertising and one was government-run. Ten local authority areas were used with different rates of employment and with different demographic and geographic profiles. We searched for jobs in four ONS occupational classifications (Elementary, Sales and Customer Service, Care and

Leisure and Professional). Details of each advert were recorded by our volunteers as it was accessed.

Subsequent to publishing the initial findings in June 2015, we spoke to a number of industry professionals, including small recruiters, large recruiters, recruitment agencies and trade bodies. We asked them about their experience of online recruitment and what challenges they are currently facing. These conversations, along with the adverts themselves, have informed the research and recommendations.

What impact does a bad ad have?

The purpose of a job advertisement is to allow a recruiter to appeal to the best candidate for a particular role and to entice that candidate to apply. At its core, a good advert will match up the best candidate to the best job, ensuring that both employer and worker thrive.

When adverts have little or misleading information, job applicants don't know enough about the job they are applying for and recruiters are less likely to get the best candidates for the job. Lack of information on both sides is preventing the job market from running smoothly and contributes to badly matched candidates moving into jobs that are not well suited to their needs. The whole cycle of recruitment must then begin again, wasting time and money on both sides.

This section sets out how poor quality adverts are impacting recruiters, job websites and job hunters.

The recruiter

The journey of a job advert begins in the hands of a recruiter (either an employer or an agency working on their behalf). It is important for a recruiter to get the advert right so that they attract the best candidates and filter out unsuitable ones before they apply.

The risk and cost associated with failing to recruit the right candidate can be substantial. Employees who are unhappy in their job are less productive¹ and are likely to leave quickly, leading to frequent staff turnover and the need to re-recruit. Conversely, staff who start a role with their eyes open to the requirements of the job may be more likely to stay on and succeed.

Therefore the initial recruitment phase is very important, as it is the first opportunity that a recruiter has to “sell” themselves to candidates and to express what they are looking for in a member of staff whilst showing what they are offering in return.

¹ Department for Work and Pensions. (2009) [Healthy People = Healthy Profits](#); Oswald, Proto, Sgroi. (2014) [Happiness and Productivity](#)

Employers have told us they are very keen to give as much information about their company to prospective applicants as possible, so that applicants understand not just the nature of the job, but also the “culture” of the company they are going to be working in. Many of the adverts that we looked at reflected this desire, with recruiters often giving copious information about the advantages of working for the employer. What is often lacking is information relating to the vacancy itself, the terms and conditions, working patterns and whether the position is permanent or temporary.

Description	Application
<p>Come join our team!</p> <p>Innovation for the clothing industry. ██████ people making it happen. Challenging both the right and the left. Not dominated by logos or politically correct tribalism. Challenging the boomer dominance of the economy. One of the fastest growing clothing companies ████████ Committed to doing things differently.</p> <p>████████████████████ is a progressive and provocative retailer, distributor and manufacturer of knit T-shirts and related garments. The company is committed to reinventing the way business is done in the clothing industry by not resorting to the use of exploitative labor. With over ████████ employees, we do not outsource any cut and sewn work; all of our garments are made at our 800,000 sq. foot ████████████████████ where we offer our workers pay rates well above minimum wage as well as free ESL classes, company-subsidized lunches, and affordable healthcare for employees and their families.</p> <p>Description:</p> <p>We currently have over ████████████████████ and we are continuing to expand rapidly. We are constantly recruiting intelligent, friendly, and hard-working people to join our sales team. If you are passionate about ████████████████████ and you feel that your personal style and customer service skills are perfect for our retail environment, then we would love to hear from you. We offer flexible schedules, affordable healthcare, competitive pay rates, and tremendous possibilities for advancement. Sales people can move on to get management jobs at the stores, as well as design, merchandising and marketing positions throughout the company.</p> <p>Applicants must have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">-Great sense of style- Exceptional customer service skills- Desire to learn about our products in order to assist customers- Basic computer skills- Fun attitude and strong work ethic- Previous retail experience is a plus, but not necessary	

▲ A job advert that gives a lot of information about the company but no details about the role, work patterns or rates of pay

Research conducted by the Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC) found that, although candidates are attracted to vacancies in many ways, if basic information is missing it will put them off applying.

“There is an appetite for using a range of formats to present the information, including video as well as written job descriptions. However, the general sense was that the basic building blocks need to be in place, with the basic job description with the correct job information being available for prospective candidates.”

The Candidate Strikes Back /Recruitment and Employment Confederation.

Employers have told us that standards of applications can be low while the volume of applications they receive can be very high, meaning that recruiters spend a lot of time sifting through and discarding unsuitable applications. Often candidates are

Large employer case study: A large employer told us that, in the past, they did not advertise pay rates. However, they found that when they started publishing salary details, the volume of speculative, unsuitable applicants dropped and the quality of applications rose. They are now changing some of their business strategy so that they will be able to confidently advertise pay for every future vacancy.

either unsuitable for the role or do not comply with instructions on how to apply, for example with a CV and covering letter. However, they have told us that this problem is partially solved by giving clear information about what the job entails.

Recruiters understand the value of providing the right basic information. However they are sometimes uncertain as to what information will be most useful to candidates when advertising a vacancy and therefore value guidance from websites to help. Some websites do provide this type of advice², but this varies across the industry and some websites provide no guidance at all. For multiple vacancies, recruiters also wanted

easier ways to post multiple vacancies without either having to spend time posting many adverts from scratch or having to put all the vacancies in one advert and risk confusing potential applicants.

² See, for example, <http://recadvice.totaljobs.com/improving-your-candidate-pool/> and <https://www.recruiter.com/recruiting-tips.html>

The recruitment website

After the recruiter has decided on the content of their advert, they will usually turn to a website or print publication to place their ad.

There are ever more websites that allow recruiters to post vacancies, either for free or at rates ranging from £80 to £400. This is a very competitive market. The number of vacancies a portal advertises has become a key selling point that drives traffic from recruiters and jobseekers.

However, if a website becomes known for having poor quality adverts, duplicate adverts or scams, applicants will be less keen to use it and recruiters will struggle to find suitable candidates. They may then fail to recruit and forfeit the costs of advertising. If this happens, recruiters are less likely to want to use the same website again, as they become dissatisfied customers. Ultimately, the website risks losing business and incurring reputational damage.

Whilst it would not be possible for websites to monitor every advert that is posted, action to drive higher quality ads at the guidance and listing stage of the process could significantly improve standards.

The Job hunter

People look for jobs at different stages of their lives and for many different reasons. Some are looking to move upwards in their career or looking for a second job. Others are searching for a job that fits better with their lives following a change of circumstance or an improvement in their local job market. Whether someone is unemployed or looking for a different job uninformative adverts can increase the difficulties that people face when trying to find a suitable job.

Changing jobs

Up to a third of people who are currently in work are actively seeking to change jobs³. There are also a significant number of people in work who are looking to increase their hours by taking on extra work. For each of these groups, it is crucial for them to have sufficient information about a vacancy so that they can decide if it fits in with their current commitments and current work. They may spend many hours every week looking for jobs that are suitable for them in terms of their childcare commitments, travel costs and other, existing work.

³ Institute for Learning Management. (January 2015)

Job seeking is an activity that requires time, focus and the ability to find appropriate job vacancies. Applicants in this group have less time for jobseeking than people who are out of work. This means that they need to be able to assess quickly if a job would be suitable for them without having additional burdens. Many job adverts that we looked at made statements such as “please call for further information”. While recruiters have told us that they may use this as a tactic to ensure that applicants are serious about applying, this is an extra step that risks deterring applicants. This is especially true of applicants who are already in full-time work and may be unable to call recruiters during working hours. In addition, many adverts have no contact details for the recruiter at all. This means that a candidate would need to apply, which may take several hours, for a job that may turn out to be entirely unsuitable for their needs and those of the recruiter.

Applicant example: Jane is working 16 hours per week in a shop. She works Mondays and Thursdays at the national minimum wage. She is struggling financially and decides to take on more work or better paid work. When she looks at the adverts online, she sees a job that she feels she might be able to do, also in a shop. However, the advert states that the job is “part time” with no further details. It does not mention rates of pay and has no contact details for the recruiter. Jane would have no choice but to spend time applying for a job which may be unsuitable for her.

Moving into work

People who are moving into work have similar needs to those who are already in work, as described above. In addition to these, they have further reasons that good job adverts matter to them.

Universal Credit example: Malik is actively seeking work. His Claimant Commitment states that he should be looking for a job for 35 hours per week. He has been offered a job working 12 hours per week, but needs to find more hours through a second job. His job search leads him to many jobs that might be suitable for him, but do not mention whether the job is part time or full time. He would find it difficult to apply without needing to contact the employers, many of whom do not leave any contact details. He risks having his benefit reduced or suspended.

Individuals who are in receipt of benefits are required to search and apply for certain jobs when in receipt of Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) or Universal Credit (UC). This is known as the Claimant Commitment. A non-claimant jobseeker will only apply for jobs that they believe would fit their existing responsibilities and abilities. The government recognises that this should also be true for jobseekers claiming benefits, which is why the Claimant Commitment is a “tailored document” which tries to take claimants’ existing circumstances into account.⁴

⁴ DWP. *Universal Credit and your Claimant Commitment*. February 2015.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/404215/uc-and-your-claimant-commitment.pdf

Within the Claimant Commitment, there are certain allowances made for jobs that would be inappropriate and for which a claimant would not be expected to apply. A common example is that a claimant is not obliged to apply for a job that is more than 90 minutes travel from their home⁵. Other exemptions may be made depending on a claimant's needs regarding childcare, access, etc. Once a jobseeker has a signed Claimant Commitment, they are bound to search for and apply for the number of jobs they have agreed to. If they fail to do this, they risk losing their payment of Jobseeker's Allowance or Universal Credit.

When a claimant is searching for work, they need to be able to know which jobs are unsuitable and can be set aside without falling foul of their Claimant Commitment.

At the moment, a claimant will be unlikely to be able to ascertain which jobs fall outside of their Claimant Commitment, given that many do not specify work location, hours of work, number of hours or rate of pay.

Universal Credit claimants will include people who are in work, as well as those who are unemployed.. It also introduces in-work conditionality⁶, meaning that Universal Credit claimants are expected to be earning at least the equivalent of their maximum potential hours at minimum wage⁷, or face having their benefits reduced or stopped if they don't.

This means that many people who already have part-time work are likely to be searching for jobs that complement their existing work schedule. If adverts do not specify hours, claimants will struggle to know which jobs they can apply for.

⁵ JSA Regulations 2013, reg 14(2)

⁶ <https://about.universalcredit.service.gov.uk/kms/Pages/Conditionality-earnings-threshold.htm>

⁷ This is currently £11,830 per annum for a claimant working full time i.e. 35 hours per week.

Recommendations

Good quality job adverts are in the best interest of all parties. With this in mind, Citizens Advice recommends the following:

Recruiters and job websites should agree an industry minimum standard of information which should be provided in each advert.

Currently, each website has its own criteria for mandatory information that need to be completed before an advert can be posted. This is checked automatically by the website and the recruiter cannot proceed without completing this information. The detail of mandatory information varies but most websites require the recruiter to give a job title, a location for the job (which does not need to be specific), details of the recruiter (which remain private) and a free text box⁸.

Recruiters have told us that the mandatory fields would help them to understand best practice and what information potential applicants need. It would also ensure that adverts do not fall foul of advertising standards⁹.

The minimum standard that is required by the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) does not give specific guidance as to the type of details that job adverts should provide¹⁰. We recommend the following minimum information:

- Rate of pay within a reasonable scale.
- Hours of work.
- Whether it is a temporary or permanent job.
- Location of the role.¹¹
- Details of employer or agency, including direct contact details such as email or phone number.¹²
- Whether this is an employed job or a business opportunity (i.e. self employment)¹³

⁸ For an example of this, see <http://www.localjobs.co.uk/free-job-post.php>

⁹ For an example of this, see ASA Ruling:

https://www.asa.org.uk/Rulings/Adjudications/2013/10/RH-Client-Solutions/SHP_ADJ_235493.aspx#.Va4DGeIVhBc

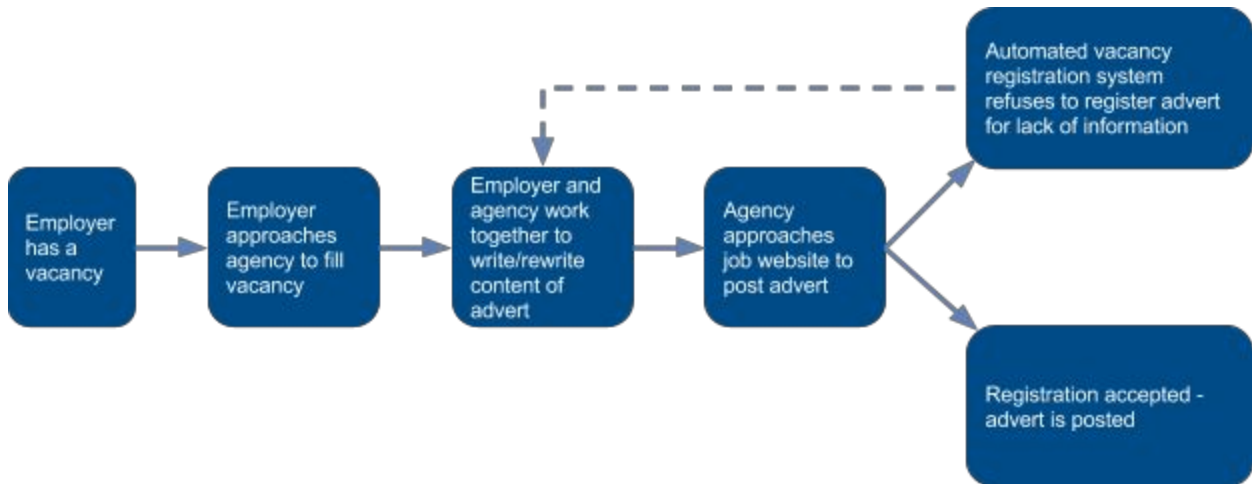
¹⁰ Committee of Advertising Practice (2015) *The UK Advertising Codes*

¹¹ To at least the nearest town. In large cities, the location would need to be more precise.

¹² Currently specifically covered by the Advertising Code

¹³ Currently specifically covered by the Advertising Code

The next step would be for job websites to ensure that these minimum standards are mandatory fields when a recruiter is posting an advert. For employers this will mean that they will need to be clear about this basic information to post an advert or when using an agency to do this.



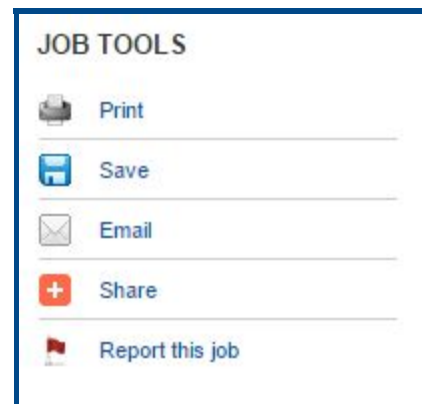
▲ The journey of an advert under the proposed system.

Job websites should make it easier for jobseekers to tailor their search to their needs.

At the moment, most websites will allow jobseekers to search by location and by job title, but very little else. Some provide filtering options, but it is often only by rate of pay, which is not helpful to the jobseeker if the recruiter has not stated the rate of pay. We recommend that the job portals allow jobseekers to search according to the same criteria listed above. This benefits both the job hunter, who will be able to find suitable vacancies more easily, and the website, which can use creative filtering options to give itself a competitive advantage and attract more business.

Job websites should make it easier for users to report sub-standard job adverts

Some websites make it very easy to report any adverts that do not meet minimum standards. At best, adverts can be missing crucial information. At worst they can be misleading or even a potential scam. All job websites need to provide an effective mechanism for jobseekers to report problems to them. This ensures that job hunters can easily alert the website to problem adverts. The website can quickly deal with any reports, thus providing the user with a better experience and potentially giving them a competitive edge.



▲ A tool for reporting a job

The Advertising Standards Authority should continue to review and rigorously investigate complaints about adverts that do not conform to the Advertising Code

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is the independent regulator for the advertising industry that investigates complaints made about advertising. It uses a code of practice created by CAP, which specifies what information must be contained in an advert. The Advertising Code has two sections that are relevant to recruitment advertising, the section specific to “employment and business opportunities” and the rules relating to “misleadingness”.¹⁴

The ASA has ruled on five employment related cases in the last 12 months¹⁵. Of these, four were upheld. This suggests that the complaints that are being made have merit, and many of them raise the same issues that Citizens Advice have found. Nevertheless, our research shows that, despite this action, the situation is not improving.

We would therefore recommend that the ASA continue to support complainants and ensure that, once a ruling has been made, compliance with the ruling is strongly enforced.

Job websites should provide guidance to both recruiters and jobseekers about what information should be provided and why

When jobseekers and recruiters sign up to a website, the website then has an opportunity to explain to both parties the value of accurate information in job adverts. As discussed, informative job adverts help to match up the most suitable

¹⁴ See Appendix for full code of practice

¹⁵ 23 July 2014 to 21 July 2015

candidates with the most appropriate jobs for them. Websites can provide guidance and signposting to services that would be able to advise recruiters on advertising codes and best practice. Information about Working Time Regulations, annual leave entitlements and the National Minimum Wage could be provided to both sides, to ensure that recruiters and jobseekers are aware of the law. This would be of benefit to both recruiters and jobseekers.

Who benefits from our recommendations?



Jobseeker

Minimum standard of information

Tailored searches

Effective reporting

Robust enforcement of rules

Helpful guidance

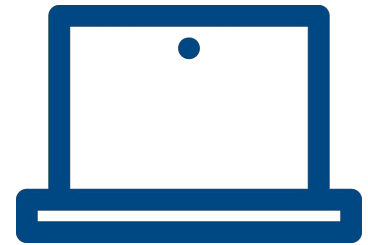


Recruiter

Minimum standard of information

Robust enforcement of rules

Helpful guidance



Job website

Minimum standard of information

Tailored searches

Effective reporting

Helpful guidance

Appendix:

CAP Advertising Code

Employment

20.1 Marketing communications must distinguish clearly between offers of employment and business opportunities. Before publication, media owners normally require marketers' full details and any terms and conditions imposed on respondents.

20.2 Employment marketing communications must relate to genuine vacancies and potential employees must not be asked to pay for information.

Living and working conditions must not be misrepresented. Quoted earnings must be precise; if one has to be made, a forecast must not be unrepresentative. If income is earned from a basic salary and commission, commission only or in some other way, that must be made clear.

Employment agencies and employment businesses

20.3 Employment agencies and employment businesses must make clear in their marketing communications their full names and contact details and, in relation to each position they advertise, whether it is for temporary or permanent work.

Homework schemes

- 20.4 Marketing communications for homework schemes must contain no forecast of earnings if the scheme is new. Marketers may state the likely level of earnings only if it can be supported with evidence of the experience of existing homeworkers. Marketers must not exaggerate the support available to homeworkers.

- 20.5 Marketing communications for homework schemes must state:
 - 20.5.1 limitations or conditions that might influence consumers before their decision to participate

 - 20.5.2 whether the marketers will buy any products made

 - 20.5.3 if a financial outlay is, or might be, required.

- 20.6 Marketers of homework schemes must include this information in the initial marketing communication or in follow-up literature made available to all consumers before commitment:
 - 20.6.1 the full name and geographical address of the marketer

 - 20.6.2 a clear description of the work

 - 20.6.3 whether participants are self-employed or employed by a business

 - 20.6.4 charges for raw materials, machines, components, administration and the like.

Business opportunities

- 20.7 Marketing communications for business opportunities must neither contain unrepresentative or overstated earnings figures nor exaggerate the support available to investors.
- 20.8 Marketers of business opportunities must include in their initial marketing communications or in follow-up literature made available to all consumers before commitment:
 - 20.8.1 the full name and geographical address of the marketer
 - 20.8.2 a clear description of the work involved
 - 20.8.3 a statement of the extent of investors' commitments, including any financial investment or outlay.

Misleading Advertising

General

- 3.1 Marketing communications must not materially mislead or be likely to do so.
- 3.2 Obvious exaggerations ("puffery") and claims that the average consumer who sees the marketing communication is unlikely to take literally are allowed provided they do not materially mislead.
- 3.3 Marketing communications must not mislead the consumer by omitting material information. They must not mislead by hiding material information or presenting it in an unclear, unintelligible, ambiguous or untimely manner.

Material information is information that the consumer needs to make informed decisions in relation to a product. Whether the

omission or presentation of material information is likely to mislead the consumer depends on the context, the medium and, if the medium of the marketing communication is constrained by time or space, the measures that the marketer takes to make that information available to the consumer by other means.

- 3.4 For marketing communications that quote prices for advertised products, material information [for the purposes of rule 3.3] includes:
 - 3.4.1 the main characteristics of the product
 - 3.4.2 the identity (for example, a trading name) and geographical address of the marketer and any other trader on whose behalf the marketer is acting
 - 3.4.3 the price of the advertised product, including taxes, or, if the nature of the product is such that the price cannot be calculated in advance, the manner in which the price is calculated
 - 3.4.4 delivery charges
 - 3.4.5 the arrangements for payment, delivery, performance or complaint handling, if those differ from the arrangements that consumers are likely to reasonably expect
 - 3.4.6 that consumers have the right to withdraw or cancel, if they have that right (see rule 3.55).
- 3.5 Marketing communications must not materially mislead by omitting the identity of the marketer.

Some marketing communications must include the marketer's identity and contact details. Marketing communications that fall under the Distance Selling, Database Practice or Employment

sections of the Code must comply with the more detailed rules in those sections.

Marketers should note the law requires marketers to identify themselves in some marketing communications. Marketers should take legal advice.

- 3.6 Subjective claims must not mislead the consumer; marketing communications must not imply that expressions of opinion are objective claims.

Substantiation

- 3.7 Before distributing or submitting a marketing communication for publication, marketers must hold documentary evidence to prove claims that consumers are likely to regard as objective and that are capable of objective substantiation. The ASA may regard claims as misleading in the absence of adequate substantiation.

- 3.8 Claims for the content of non-fiction publications should not exaggerate the value, accuracy, scientific validity or practical usefulness of the product. Marketers must ensure that claims that have not been independently substantiated but are based merely on the content of a publication do not mislead consumers.

Qualification

- 3.9 Marketing communications must state significant limitations and qualifications. Qualifications may clarify but must not contradict the claims that they qualify.

- 3.10 Qualifications must be presented clearly.

Exaggeration

- 3.11 Marketing communications must not mislead consumers by exaggerating the capability or performance of a product.
- 3.12 Marketing communications must not present rights given to consumers in law as a distinctive feature of the marketer's offer.
- 3.13 Marketing communications must not suggest that their claims are universally accepted if a significant division of informed or scientific opinion exists.

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