



A Preliminary Evaluation of Online Job Seeking and Recruiting: The Job Market of Direct Marketing

Maxwell K. Hsu
Department of Marketing
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater
800 West Main St.
Whitewater, WI 53190
Tel: 262-472-5471
Email: hsum@uww.edu

Ching-Jui Keng
Institute of Commerce Automation and Management
National Taipei University of Technology
Taipei, Taiwan
Email: cjkeng@ntut.edu.tw

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Abstract

Help wanted ads become electronically searchable as companies post their job offers online. Powerful job search engines allow companies to expand the potential pool of qualified candidates from the local level to the national level. Surprisingly, no prior research has investigated these rich online job classifieds. This study attempts to examine both the demand side (i.e., the employers who offer direct and interactive marketing jobs) and the supply side (i.e., the job candidates) of the direct marketing job market equation. Our findings indicate that employers seeking direct marketing personnel today are placing emphasis on good verbal and written communication skills, interpersonal and teamwork skills, and computer skills. Interestingly, our exploratory results show that job candidates are well prepared for the direct marketing management positions. It appears that companies looking for bright and experienced new blood could benefit from online recruitment. These ads also provide a rich source of information to marketing educators when they help students to design successful career paths.

Introduction

Over the past 20 years, business professors and practitioners alike have witnessed various changes in the direct marketing industry and job recruitment practices. Given that direct and interactive marketing outpaced overall U.S. sales growth by more than 50% with a phenomenal \$1.73 trillion revenue in year 2000 (Direct Marketing, 2001) and that online advertising expects a 20-plus percent growth rate in 2005 (Morrissey, 2005), it would be beneficial to examine both the demand and supply sides of the direct marketing (DM) job market equation.

Palkowitz and Mueller (1987, p.124) cited a survey related to leading recruitment advertising agencies and suggested that “the face of recruitment advertising had changed in the past decade, and the future promises even more changes.” Indeed, the Internet has already streamlined the process of matching job hunters with employers (Booth, 2003). Approximately 90% of the Fortune 500 companies use some online recruiting systems and over 18 million people are posting their resumes online annually (Feldman and Klaas, 2002). Interestingly, though the demand for ‘techie’ staff is growing (Furber, 1998), the influence of technology (e.g., Internet) on job searching has not been examined in the business literature. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to document the specific required qualities of managers in today’s DM industry as well as

to examine how closely these qualities are being met by the job applicants. As a result, the findings would provide relevant information not only to employers and DM job seekers, but also to marketing educators and student advisors. Practical suggestions in terms of how to use the findings will be highlighted shortly after the empirical findings are reported.

Job skills can be generally divided into two categories: discipline-related skills and support skills (McCorkle *et al.*, 1999). In the DM field, discipline-related skills refer to the skills of database marketing, market segmentation, the preparation of interactive marketing plan, and direct mail copy, among others. On the other hand, support skills refer to communication skills, interpersonal relationship building skills, and creativity, among others (McCorkle *et al.*, 2003). Both types of skills can be learned in classroom (e.g., class projects, cases) and further strengthened in the practical field (e.g., internships, part-time DM jobs).

The landscape of today's marketing education is (and should be) different from the past few decades as interactive marketing starts to play an important role in the marketplace. However, two main modes of recruitment remain the same. The rather passive mode is to post help wanted ads or participate in a job fair, while the more active mode of recruitment is to search for qualified personnel. Ojala (1997) suggested

that online resources are helpful no matter how active or passive the employers' preference is. Internet technology offers an economical tool for direct marketing and provides maximum delivery to targeted audience (Roxas *et al.*, 2000). To date, prior research has used help wanted ads in newspapers to analyze specific fields such as accountancy (Johnson and Johnson, 1995). However, to the knowledge of the authors, no study has conducted a similar analysis based on Internet job advertisements and online resume banks (or electronic job bulletin boards). Notably, a unique advantage of this data collection method is that the online job classifieds provide an objective record of the qualities that employers sought in prospective employees, while the resumes posted on the relevant direct marketing websites offer an objective record of the qualities that job seekers claimed to have.

Methodology and Data

To examine the qualities/skills that are required by DM employers, it is necessary to first locate information documenting employers' present demands. One way to secure such information is through surveys and personal interviews with a sample of DM employers; an alternative approach is to search from archived records such as position announcements or help wanted ads. Given that job boards such as monster.com have

been widely adopted by both job candidates and employers (Jansen, Jansen, and Spink, 2005), this study focuses on employers' online help wanted ads in the DM-related fields.

On the demand side, the present article reports the results from an examination of the classified ads from three main online job banks: www.monster.com, www.hotjobs.com, and www.the-dma.org/jobbank. On the supply side, this article reports results from an examination of the posted resumes on the Direct Marketing Association's (DMA) resume bank (i.e., www.the-dma.org/jobbank). Data collection for the study was initiated from January to March 2003. In order to produce a sample that represents DM job market, positions were selected from the above-mentioned three websites using key words such as "direct marketing manager" or "direct marketing director" in order to focus on the mid- to high-level management jobs in the direct marketing field. This data collection process was repeated until 120 full-time direct marketing positions were selected from each of the three websites. Results of this sifting process present characteristics of future career positions for college graduates and thus can help a college student in the DM field to prepare a more realistic career plan that meets those characteristics. On the supply side, it is worthy to note that there were more than 300 resumes posted on the Direct Marketing Association's job bank during the data collection period. In order to produce a representative sample, 180

resumes were selected to examine job applicants' qualifications. Specifically, half of the sample were selected from those DM job applicants whose last name starts with letters A-M and the other half of the resumes were selected from the remaining job applicants (i.e., their last names starting with letters N-Z). As each job ad and/or resume was examined, close attention was paid to the requirement for (1) education, (2) work experience, (3) computer skills, and (4) other skills, including verbal and written communication skills, analytic skills, and forecasting skills.

Those DM job ads which did not meet the predetermined requirement (e.g., part-time assistant) were excluded as well as those DM job ads where the main job responsibility was judged to be unrelated with the main DM functions (e.g., one direct marketing firm was looking for an accounting manager). This resulted in a total of usable 328 direct marketing job ads and 180 resumes.

Results

Educational Requirements

An examination of the classified ads reveals that most of the advertised direct marketing positions required a college degree. The appropriate degree was explicitly included in the majority of the ads, while the need for a college degree is implied in other cases. For instance, one employer who did not explicitly specify the minimum

educational degree required an educational background of 3-10 years and advanced SAS programming with complex database experience. In calculating the percentages reported in the remainder of this section, we dropped the ambiguous cases similar to the above-mentioned example and focused on the ads that explicitly stated a degree requirement.

Figure 1 summarizes the 2003 first quarter's classified ads that included an explicit degree requirement. Out of the 328 job ads, 217 employers explicitly stated the basic required educational level. Over 90% of the employers requested a college degree (201), 7% required a graduate degree (16). One noticeable case required only a high school diploma and it was found to be a job ad for an experienced call center account executive. In general, college education is an important stepping-stone in the DM industry, particularly for those who aspire to climb the corporate ladders at a faster speed. As previously stated, 7% employers required applicants with a graduate degree. This percentage is considered to be relatively low when compared to prior study reporting that the percentage of employers required or preferred accounting applicants with a graduate degree is 13%, 15%, and 12% in 1973, 1983, and 1993, respectively (Johnson and Johnson, 1995). It is surprising for the lack of emphasis on graduate

education in light of the increasing trend in information technology-based direct marketing (e.g., database marketing).

Put Figure 1 about here

Experience Requirements

This study intentionally ignores the rookies (i.e., part-time workers and entry level positions), and instead focuses on the more experienced direct marketing veterans. That is, more weight is given to the more advanced DM positions and thus the results could shed light on the skills that all job seekers should try to acquire along their direct marketing careers. Out of the 328 qualified job ads, the required average number of years of experience was 4.6 years, with 6 employers requiring at least one-year of experience; 162 requiring two to four years of experience; 131 requiring five to nine years of experience; and 29 requiring at least ten-years of experience. This data shows that lots of opportunities are available online for DM personnel with practical experience.

Required Computer Skills

The increase in employers' demand for computer skills deserves special attention because of its importance in today's technology-driven marketplace. Computer skills involve a variety of applications including Microsoft products (i.e., Windows

operating systems and various Microsoft Office programs), computer programming software, database software, and statistical packages. Over sixty percent of the employers' ads mentioned that computer skills were necessary, with the greatest demand for computer skills being database management (44%) and Microsoft-related working knowledge (42%). This perhaps reflects the importance of database skills because "companies of all sizes in all industries are in dire need of professional employees grounded in one-to-one marketing and CRM" (Direct Marketing, 2001, p.64). In addition, it was surprising to find that statistical software package literacy such as SAS and SPSS was only required by approximately 10% of the employers.

Other Relevant Job Requirements

Four additional requirements often mentioned in job ads are: communication skills (i.e., verbal communication and written communication), interpersonal skills (i.e., team work), analytical skills, and forecasting capabilities. As shown in Figure 2, employers' demand for effective verbal and written communication skills is high – 82% of the job ads required verbal and written communication skills. The percentage of employers looking for individuals with strong interpersonal and teamwork skills is

moderately high with 64% of job ads mentioning the importance of teamwork skills, followed by analytical skills (63.7%) and forecasting skills (17%).

Put Figure 2 about here

Where Are The Direct Marketing Jobs?

Since our data allows us to analyze direct marketing job opportunities at the sub-national level, we further examined the regional difference in the United States. According to the Census Bureau, the United States consists of four regions or nine divisions (i.e., the Northeast region: New England and Middle Atlantic; the Midwest region: East North Central and West North Central; the South region: South Atlantic, East South Central, and West South Central; the West region: Mountain and Pacific). It was found that the Northeast region offers 40% of the total DM jobs. The other three regions offer approximately the same percentage of direct DM jobs, with the West at 22%, the South at 20% and the Midwest at 18%. Ranking at the state level also reflects the trend: the state with the highest amount of jobs is California (51), followed by New York (50), Illinois (28), Connecticut (24) and Massachusetts (22). Most of the DM job opportunities were located in the Middle Atlantic and Pacific divisions (see Figure 3 and 4).

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An examination of the online classified ads (see Figure 5) reveals that most of the advertised DM positions in 2003 were in the field of direct mail (34%) and E-Commerce related positions (34%). The remaining advertised positions were telemarketing (15%), direct response magazine (11%), direct response newspaper (9%), direct response television (7%), and direct response radio (6%) [some advertised positions seek expertise in more than one field]. The research results support the common belief that direct mail and E-Commerce/Interactive marketing are the most popular areas advertising for new blood. It should be noted that the above categories are not necessarily from a mutually exclusive list. For example, one job ad related to list management might be linked to both direct mail and direct response magazine because both media need accurate lists as a foundation for a successful direct marketing campaign.

Put Figure 5 about here

Profiles of the Direct Marketing Job Seekers

Companies can locate a qualified job seeker by searching Internet job banks that allow the recruitment managers to examine the job seekers' creativity. Ransom (2002, p.104) suggested, "candidates who send a traditional non-electronic resume may be considered out of step." Out of the 180 job hunters from the DMA's job bank, 170 reported their educational background: 4 had a certificate, 102 had their bachelor degree, and 64 earned a master degree. Moreover, 153 job hunters reported their undergraduate major. It was found that 47 had a major in Marketing, 44 had a non-marketing business major (e.g., Finance, Management) and 20 had a Communication or Journalism major. On average, people who posted their resume on the DMA's online job bank had an average of 12.7 years of practical experience. Nearly all job hunters (97%) reported their level of willingness to travel. Of that 97%, 10% were willing to travel 0-10% of the time and 41%, 30%, 9%, and 10% indicated that they were willing to travel 10-25%, 25-50%, 50-75%, and 75-100% of the time, respectively (these non-exclusive categories are specified by the Direct Marketing Association). Over 49% of job seekers indicated their willingness to spend more than 25 percent of their work time on business travel and this shows that the experienced DM practitioners recognized the importance of business travel in today's marketplace.

It was found that astonishingly over 85% of job seekers felt they were equipped with verbal and written communication skills (see Figure 2). The percentages of job seekers indicating they had already armed with the analytic skills, forecasting skills, interpersonal/team work skills, and database skills were 73%, 47%, 88%, and 69%, respectively. In comparison to minimum qualification in the job ads, the job seekers' job skills slightly exceed the recruiters' expectations. This is possibly due to the fact that the majority of our studied resumes were posted by DM workers who have both a college degree and some practical experiences. This might also be the result of some job applicants embellishing their skills in order to appear more desirable by claiming that they are capable of running DM campaign on their resumes but their working knowledge on a specific field may not live up to the firm's hiring expectation.

Employers' demand for effective verbal and written communication skills is high – 82% of the job ads required verbal and written communication skills. This finding is in concert with Middleton and Long's (1990) study, who surveyed employers and identified top ten most desired attributes for career entrants: communication, creativity, analytical skills, numeracy, resilience, entrepreneurship, initiative, organizational skills, planning, and selling skills. Recently, Floyd and Gordon (1998) found that problem-solving skills

were the most highly valued by employers while communication skills, work experience, and interpersonal skills are the next most preferred.

Limitations

Our data sources focus on the national well-known job websites as well as niche DM job websites, but the help wanted ads from regional/local newspapers and trade journals are ignored. Since most employers would advertise at a well known website when they are looking for talented individuals to fill leading edge jobs that affect the success of a firm's direct marketing program, it is reasonable to assume that their impact on the current study is within an acceptable boundary. It would be advantageous for researchers to enlarge the data sources by searching the online job banks for several strong regional markets as well. For instance, such data is available via Career Path (<http://www.careerpath.com>) which groups help wanted ads from 23 local newspapers including *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times* etc., to provide local job advertisements a national exposure (Ojala, 1997).

Notably, we do not claim to have had a truly random sample of the entire DM job applicant pool based on this set of individuals. Rather, our intent was to identify the characteristics of the current DM labor market. Although this sample included job ads from the leading job search websites and a substantial number of job applicants, it may

not necessarily be representative of all employers and/or DM job applicants. Some caution is thus warranted when trying to draw inferences about the entire labor market for direct and interactive marketing.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

The above limitations should not downplay the importance of the present exploratory research study. According to a survey done by the Direct Marketing Association in 1998, two-thirds of the respondents bought something over the phone or through the mail as a result of direct marketing media. DM appears to be an appealing channel even to revamp the marketing programs for colleges and universities. Marketing educators who want to provide the best opportunities for their students should consider viewing DM as a legitimate component within the business environment. The marketing curriculum at the Christopher Newport University, for example, is perhaps an extreme case where its marketing program focuses solely on direct and interactive marketing.

The present study attempts to examine the DM job market by comparing job requirements and job candidates' self-reported skills. Insightful information arises from analyzing available data. Our findings indicate that job candidates are well prepared for the DM management positions in those job seekers' qualifications meet or exceed job

ads' requirements. Given the various advantages of online recruitment, such as shorter recruiting cycle time and the existence of niche sites like www.the-dam.org, it may be safe to suggest that companies incorporate online recruitment as part of their integrated recruitment process in order to find the best qualified direct marketing employee(s) from a larger pool of qualified candidates.

As for DM job seekers, they should determine their self-marketing strategy such as their strengths, areas of specialization, and their own career anchor(s). It would be advantageous if they visit other job seekers' online resumes and/or Web sites to determine what makes an effective online job resume, and they must make an appropriate commitment of time and efforts to exploit the capability of online job searching. After all, a better than average resume is more likely to attract the attention of the hiring managers and hence secure telephone or personal job interviews. Charles (2000, p.94) warned "instead of posting your resume and hoping for a response, take a proactive approach to job hunting online." In other words, posting on a job board is one thing and actively searching multiple sources is a different approach to job hunting. Experienced DM veterans who are interested in career-oriented promotion or advancement need to continue to improve their job skills/qualifications (e.g., communication, interpersonal, technology) as well as to learn about benefit packages

and corporate culture related to their desired company so that they can present themselves with confidence as an informed candidate.

Our analysis of employers' expectations, expressed in the classified ads, also offers a number of important messages to business educators. First, half of the employers mentioned that database skills are necessary, indicating that the demand for 'techie' personnel is strong in the DM industry. In redesigning the business curriculum, it is important to recognize that employers are looking for personnel who have both the marketing know-how and computer/technology skills. In other words, DM courses should be structured in a way to focus not only on theoretical frameworks but also on practical applied skills (e.g., database management, catalog design and production, budget development and management for annual communications plans). Next, whereas Microsoft Office was the most frequently mentioned office software product, few (5 out of 328) requested programming skills. This suggests that it is important to help students master Microsoft products (and be familiar with other emerging software such as Linux) but not necessary to make most DM graduates computer programming masters. Third, communication, interpersonal, analytical, and forecasting skills are all important for DM job candidates to find a desired position. Johnson and Johnson (1995) discovered that from 1973 to 1993, employers' demand for verbal and written

communication skills increased 750%. Obviously, business educators need to provide their students plenty of opportunities to fully develop and practice their communication skills at school. Since “most recruiters indicate that internships, part-time jobs, and leadership positions in university organization are better indicators of employability than classroom experiences” (Feldman & McNeilly, 2002), educators should be creative and use a wide range of learning methods such as real-world client projects, field studies, interactive cases, and internships to strengthen students’ job skills. Fourth, better career advising and planning can result from this increased awareness. In other words, our reported information would allow marketing educators and student advisors to help student better understand the importance of skill acquisition, the types of specializations open to them, and the types of demands employers make.

Our study takes advantage of the current technology to create a brief profile of today’s DM job market, which benefits employers, DM job seekers, and marketing educators. Likewise, similar studies of other subfields (e.g., professional selling) can shed lights on their respective job market equation. Together, more transparent job market information can facilitate today’s marketing educators to update the curriculum, course learning material, advisement, and in turn, better prepare tomorrow’s marketing superstars.

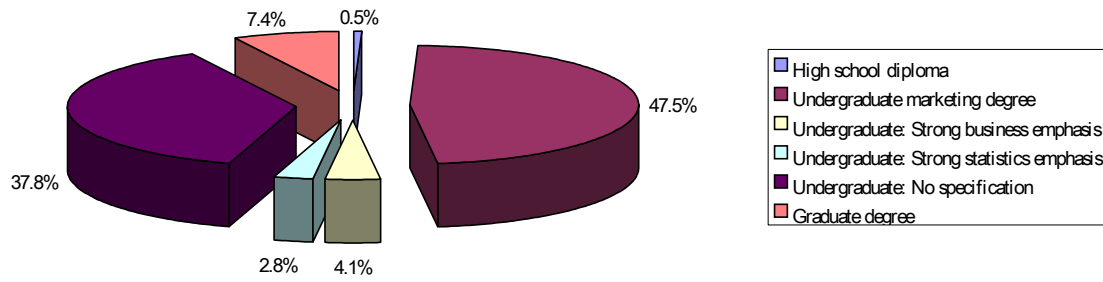


Figure 1: Degree Requirements for Direct Marketing Positions

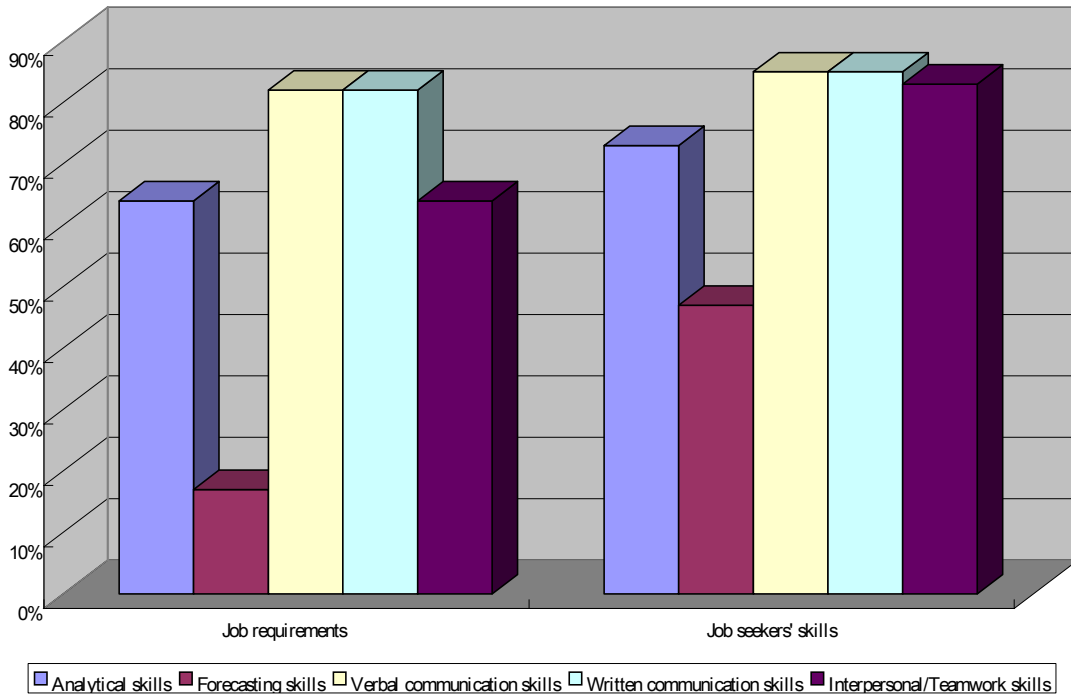


Figure 2: Job Requirements vs. Job Seekers' Skills

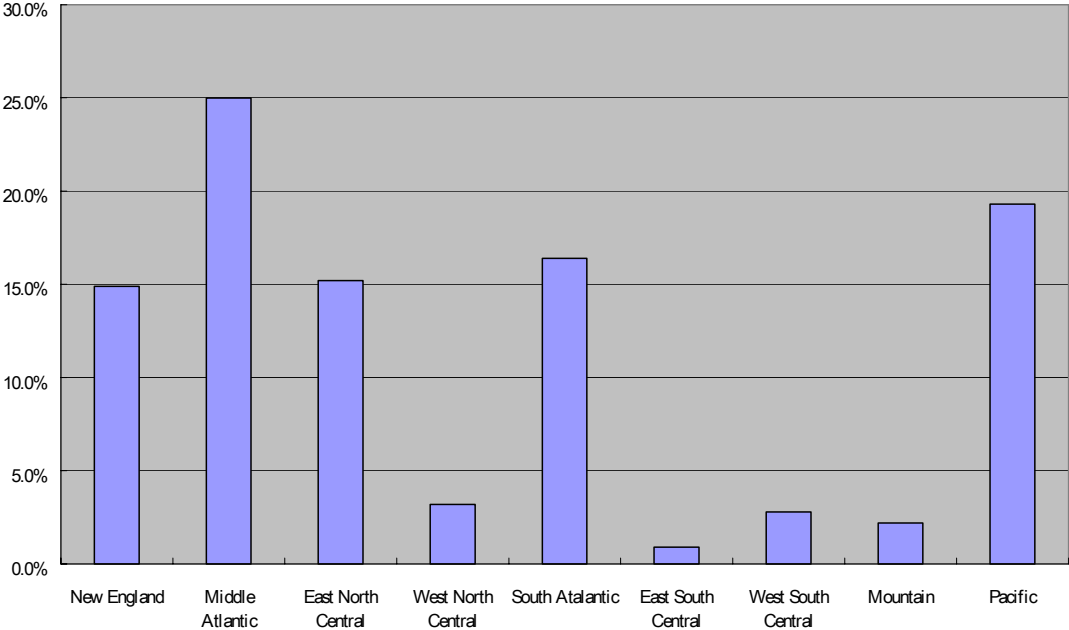


Figure 3: Location of Direct Marketing Jobs (U.S. Divisions)

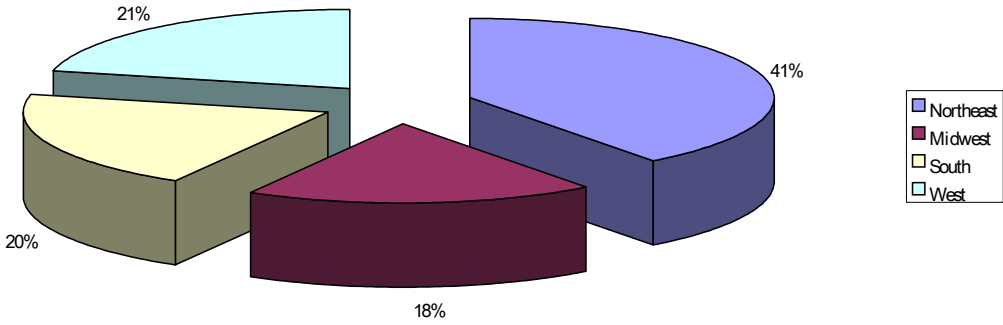


Figure 4: Location of Direct Marketing Jobs (U.S. Regions)

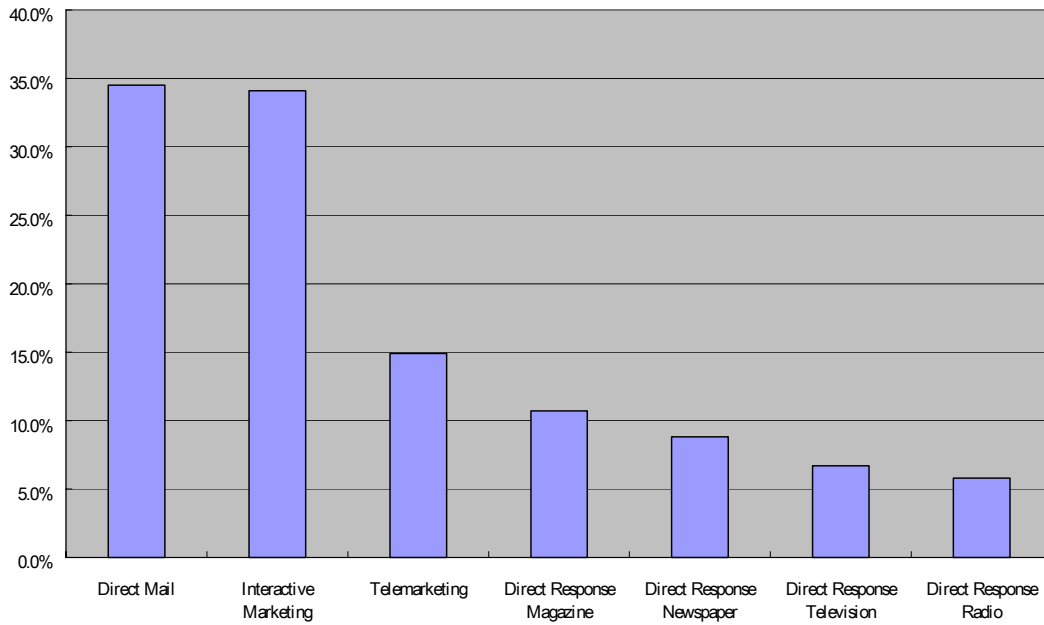


Figure 5: Direct Marketing Job Opportunities

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