

Identifying Difficult-to-Fill Jobs Using the Conference Board’s Help Wanted Online Database

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The Job Search: A Two-Way Street

There is no doubt that labor markets are competitive across the United States and in Michigan. Notwithstanding recent economic improvements, unemployment remains high and many job seekers continue to search for work. At the same time, however, many employers are searching for the ideal candidates to fill their job vacancies. In this sense, the job search is a two-way street. Often, the right candidates are identified and put to work quickly. In other instances, employers search long and hard to find workers with the right set of skills, knowledge, and abilities. Sometimes this search can last weeks, or even months.

Measuring Difficult-to-Fill Jobs

This article will identify some difficult-to-fill job vacancies by analyzing online job advertisements that have been active for extended periods of time. This article will also attempt to shed some light on why those vacancies may be especially tough to fill.

The Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives, through its partnership with the Conference Board, uses the Help Wanted Online Database to research and analyze online job advertisements. One way these online postings can be used is to identify vacancies that have been advertised for long periods of time. The fact that a job has been advertised for several consecutive months, may suggest that the employer responsible for the long-running advertisement is having a

difficult time finding the right worker to fill the vacancy.

This article identifies advertisements that have been active for longer than 90 days and longer than 180 days. We consider those advertisements to represent “difficult to fill vacancies.”

Table 1: Difficult-to-Fill Vacancies – 90 Days or Longer

Occupation	Total Online Ads	Ads 90 Days or More	Percent of Total Ads
Internists, General	347	57	16.4%
Family and General Practitioners	512	71	13.9%
Pharmacists	303	35	11.6%
Mental Health Counselors	24	2	8.3%
Physician Assistants	325	21	6.5%
Medical Scientists, Except Epidemiologists	173	11	6.4%
Registered Nurses	5,053	289	5.7%
Occupational Therapists	607	34	5.6%
Medical and Health Managers	1,227	66	5.4%
Environmental Science and Protection Technicians	64	3	4.7%
Business Operations Specialists, All Other	150	7	4.7%
Biological Technicians	110	5	4.5%
Loan Officers	417	17	4.1%
Medical Assistants	739	26	3.5%
Directors, Religious Activities and Education	29	1	3.4%
Physical Therapists	875	30	3.4%
Electronics Engineers, Except Computer	294	10	3.4%
Electronics Engineering Technicians	177	6	3.4%
Chemical Technicians	30	1	3.3%
Nursing Aides, Orderlies, and Attendants	507	16	3.2%

Source: The Conference Board, Help Wanted Online. Data for September 19 to October 5, 2011

Three healthcare occupations led the list of difficult-to-fill vacancies. Greater than 10 percent of total job advertisements for general internists, family and general practitioners, and pharmacists were active for more than 90 days. Other healthcare occupations with long-running online job postings included: physician assistants, registered nurses, occupational therapists, medical assistants, physical therapists, and nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants.

In addition, some management and technical occupations that are heavily concentrated in the healthcare industry are represented on the difficult-to-fill list, including: medical and health managers, mental health counselors, and medical scientists.

There are many reasons that these healthcare and health-related occupations are especially difficult to fill. One reason is that the aging population in the United States and in Michigan has resulted in more demand for health services and in-turn, excess demand for trained or licensed workers in many health-related fields. Another reason is rapidly advancing technology that has led to innovation and a broader menu of health-related products and services. This has generated the need for new workers to meet increased consumer demand.

Technological advances have also caused increased demand for science and engineering occupations. Several of these occupations appear on the list of difficult-to-fill vacancies including: environmental science and protection technicians, biological technicians, electronics engineers, electronic engineering technicians, and chemical technicians.

These vacancies are difficult to fill because of the high educational requirements along with employer-specific skill requirements. For instance, some online advertisements seek candidates with long-term experience in very specific project areas.

The table below shows the occupations with online advertisements that have been active for 180 days or longer.

Table 2: Difficult-to-Fill Vacancies – 180 Days or Longer

Occupation	Total Online Ads	Ads 180 Days or More	Percent of Total Ads
Internists, General	347	24	6.9%
Family and General Practitioners	512	28	5.5%
Biological Technicians	110	4	3.6%
Pharmacists	303	11	3.6%
Medical Scientists, Except Epidemiologists	173	4	2.3%
Cutting, Punching, and Press Machine Setters, Operators, and Tenders	157	3	1.9%
Electronics Engineers, Except Computer	294	5	1.7%
Loan Officers	417	7	1.7%
Environmental Science and Protection Technicians	64	1	1.6%
Occupational Therapists	607	9	1.5%

Source: The Conference Board, Help Wanted Online. Data for September 19 to October 5, 2011

These vacancies are very similar to those discussed above. Many healthcare as well as science and engineering occupations appear on the list.

However, one occupation, cutting, punching, and press machine setters, operators, and tenders, is unique because it demonstrates the potential difficulty for employers to find particular advanced manufacturing skills needed in an evolving economy. For example, the employers responsible for these posts are looking for workers with at least 3 years of experience using RS Logix 5000 and HMI, which are human interface software packages used in machining.