

Ghost job listings: A beneficial oversight, or a hit to the job-seeker experience?

- Both employers and job boards derive some benefits from ghost jobs
- But the job-seeker experience ultimately suffers in the long run
- Move to performance-based models to limit volume of ghost posts

by Matt Krumrie

Ghost jobs. Fake jobs. No matter what you call them — they are real.

Well, the postings are real. The job itself? Probably not.

Ghost job postings refer to the practice of leaving irrelevant or outdated job ads active on job boards, often unnoticed and unattended. They can help companies appear more active and growth-focused, while inflating the volume of ads on a job board.

However, the impact on the candidate experience is negative and will hurt a recruitment marketplace in the long run. Moderating ghost posts is challenging, but a gradual move to performance-based models is set to limit their impact.

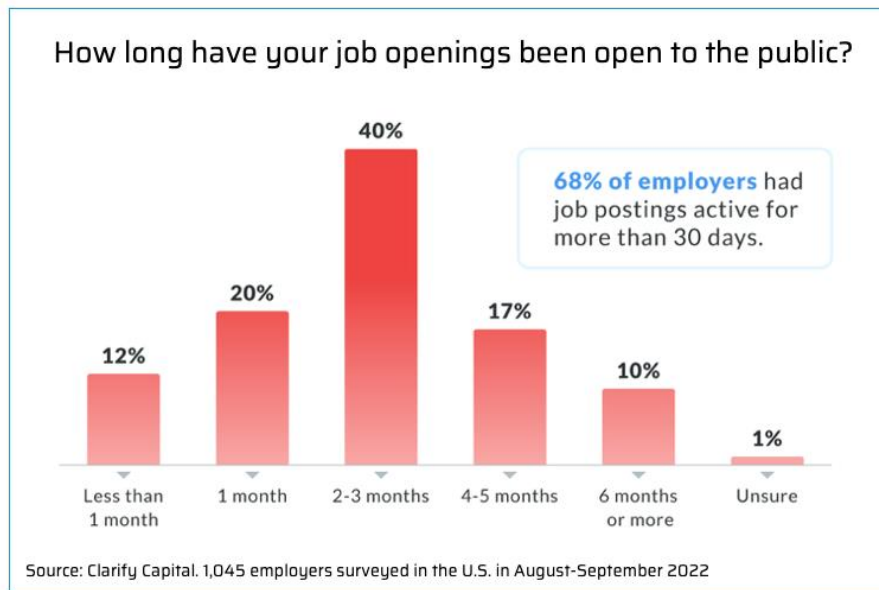
Hiring managers like evergreen ads

Clarify Capital, a New York-based provider of business financing, [conducted a survey](#) of 1,045 managers involved in the hiring process about ghost jobs last year. The responses showed that:

- 68% of managers had job postings active for more than 30 days
- 50% of managers kept job postings open because they're "always open to new people"
- 1 in 10 managers had a job posting open for more than 6 months

But these survey results should not be surprising because ghost jobs are not a new phenomenon, according to **Ken Shafer**, co-founder and CPO of [Job Hub Central](#), which helps brands, job boards and ATSS drive applications via Google Jobs. Shafer also spent nearly eight years at hourly gig site SnagAJob.

"This is a very old problem," Shafer told the AIM Group. "As long as I've been in the jobs space, employers have always had evergreen postings. These are roles for which they're always accepting applications but aren't necessarily hiring at the moment. They believe they are helping themselves by building a pool of candidates they can always tap into at a later date."



Alex Paterson, CEO of London-based job search platform [WhatJobs](#), agreed.

“Ghost job listings have existed as long as job boards have,” Paterson told us. “The issue has, however, gained increased attention with the rise of data-driven recruitment and an enhanced focus on the user experience in the digital age.”

Creating a false narrative

“Like it or not, this is part of the recruitment reality,” he added. For employers and companies, evergreen ads can provide multiple perceived benefits.

According to **Shelley Billingham**, president of Canada-based [Hire Value Inc.](#), a recruitment marketing and advertising company, there are three major reasons why companies leave postings hanging:

- They save on payroll expenses while giving the perception to overworked, current employees they are doing “something” to ease the workload.
- To give shareholders, investors and rivals the impression a company is growing.
- To extend the chance that one day a perfect application may come through if the ad is out there long enough.

The impact on recruitment marketplaces

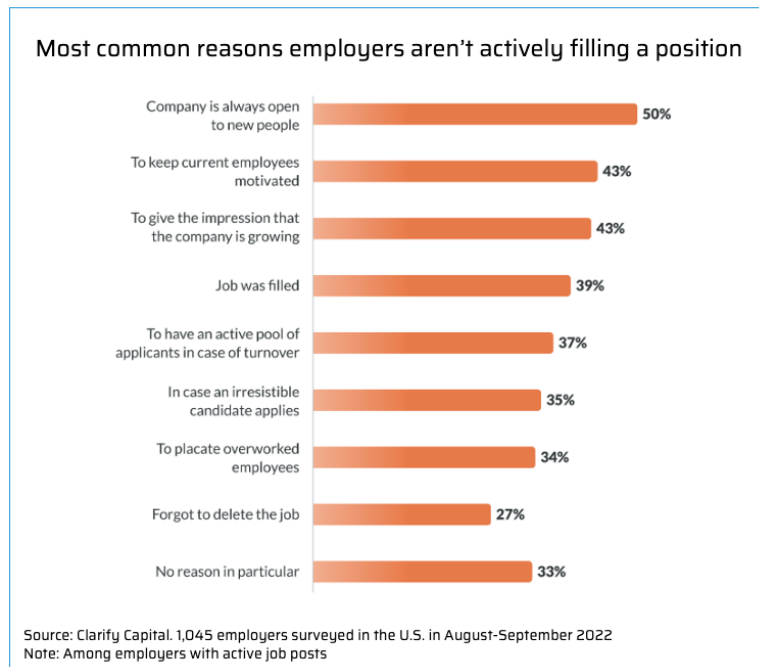
For job boards and recruitment marketplaces, ghost jobs create somewhat of a dilemma. How much resources should they dedicate to an issue that does bring in some tangible benefits?

Possible advantages of ghost jobs include:

- Increasing the volume of jobs on a site, thus creating the perception of a bigger reach and vacancy pool for candidates.
- Extended paid listings will bring in monthly revenue for job boards, even if they’re neglected by the hiring manager.
- Evergreen postings, particularly those from big-name and high-volume employers, can drive clicks and applications.
- Ghost postings “can be used to guide applicants to other recommended jobs that may be relevant and have an even more attractive cost-per-hire for the job board,” **Shafer told us**.

However, there is a flipside: the quality of the hiring experience for the job-seeker will be negatively impacted. Ghost postings are usually entirely inactive or poorly managed, meaning that applicants will rarely get a response.

“When a job seeker spends upwards of 45 minutes per application, and then doesn’t hear



back from the employer / brand, this becomes a major source of frustration,” Shafer said.

The information in such posts (salary, job description, location, and so on) can also become outdated quickly, thus creating a perception of inaccuracy or, worse, falsification.

“Ghost listings might inflate the number of listings on a job board temporarily, but in the long run, they can lead to user frustration and potential loss of engagement,” Paterson told the AIM Group.

According to Billinghamurst, associated ghost listings can damage a hiring company’s brand and impact traffic to a job board.

“This is a business decision by each job board,” he told us. “If they don’t represent quality, job-seekers will go elsewhere. Without job-seeker traffic, companies will take their business to where the traffic is.”

In China, for example, fake job postings have been [a massive issue for the leading recruitment marketplaces](#), even [leading to murder in one highly publicized case](#).

An ethical recruitment business that is striving for the best job-seeker experience should aim to

remove ghost listings. But how easy is it to do that?

The challenges of removing ghost jobs

There are several challenges.

The biggest task is separating a ghost post from a legit vacancy. This is a particular challenge for aggregators, which have no in-depth understanding of the post’s origin or account.

Even for a traditional job board, the only clear telltale sign is the period of time that a post has been up for. Yet in cases where a post has been up for many months, employers can change job titles and descriptive text, thereby continuing to create the perception of relevancy.

Joe Meyer, CEO of New York-based [ExecThread](#), a curated marketplace of crowdsourced career opportunities with more than 700,000 registered users, said his company has a human curation team that goes through and removes any job postings older than 90 days. It’s a grueling process that is sometimes assisted by the job-seekers themselves.

“Our members are our last line of defense and if they see what appears to be an inactive or dated

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post, they let us know and we appreciate that," Meyer told the AIM Group. "It's part of our efforts to be a trusted, reliable platform providing a premium service."

Paterson told us that WhatJobs promotes the prompt removal of filled roles and provides tools to assist companies in managing their listings effectively. The site also uses verification procedures and AI algorithms to detect and remove outdated, fraudulent or filled roles.

Paterson added it's important to note that ghost job listings aren't always indicative of ill intent. Companies may post roles to assess available talent or keep their pipeline active, or simply forget to remove a position once it's filled.

Switch to performance-based model may be long-term solution

Ghost listings may eventually be phased out by the continued growth in performance-based business models, such as cost-per-application or cost-per-click.

"In a cost-per model, employers would, theoretically, be less likely to blast out job listings for which they don't need or want applicants," Shafer told us. "It would be a waste of money. In a subscription model, employers can generally send

everything they have, and it usually doesn't cost them any extra."

By leveraging data deep into the hiring process, job boards can prioritize responsive employers, ensuring that applicants receive timely feedback and attention. Implementing measures such as application timeframes can incentivize responsiveness and reduce the prevalence of ghost job postings.

Indeed, the recruitment giant owned by Japan-based Recruit Holdings, is currently transitioning to a cost-per-applicant (CPA) model. Under the model, employers pay only for applications they accept. However, customers who don't reject unsatisfactory applications within 72 hours are automatically billed. [The transition has not been a smooth one](#), but the world's leading recruitment business taking this approach demonstrates to where the industry is likely heading in the future.

Moving away from traditional pay-per-post models and adopting pay-per-results strategies encourages employer accountability.

While ghost jobs can offer some minor benefits to both employers and recruitment sites, promoting transparency, accountability and responsible hiring practices ultimately benefits job boards, job-seekers and the employer brand, leading to a more efficient employment funnel.