

# Business Development at JobTacToe.com

## Major Qualifying Project

Submitted by:

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Submitted to:

Project Advisors: **Prof. Frank Hoy, Prof. Jerome Schaufeld**

Sponsors: **Michael R. Neece, Founder, JobTacToe.com**

26 April 2012

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Next, we would like to thank our project advisors, Professor Frank Hoy and Professor Jerry Schaufeld. It was with their guidance that we were able to take our project in a direction we did not think was possible.

In addition, we would like to thank Professor Chickery Kasouf of the WPI School of Business. It was with his guidance that we were able to effectively complete our market research within the allotted timeframe.

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Jeanette Doyle, Director of Career Development, WPI

Constance Horwitz, Associate Director of Career Development, WPI

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## **Abstract**

Due to the recent economic crisis and the ensuing unemployment spike, many have found themselves struggling to rebuild their credentials in order to find their way back into the job market. In response, our sponsors have created a website that guides users through these documents while also utilizing social media and motivational aspects to make the job search less isolating. In order to propose appropriate marketing strategies to our project sponsors an analysis was conducted primarily via focus groups and administering surveys, and was supplemented by interviews with career development professionals. Our findings led to recommendations that we as consultants feel will bring the most value to both our sponsors and those who utilize the services on the website.

## **Executive Summary**

JobTacToe.com, an innovative job searching website, was founded in 2010 by Michael Neece, Caroline Meeks and Stever Robbins. The mission statement explains that JobTacToe.com was created “to make job search fun through the integration of career content, game functionality, and community through social media connections. The integration of game mechanics, social media and job search advice creates an interactive community where the users both compete and support one another. The goal is to get everyone hired as quickly as possible and have great fun doing it” (JobTacToe, 2010).

Our goal as an MQP group was to find the most effective marketing strategy for our sponsor company along with the age demographic most in need of their services. Our three major points of background research were to study current unemployment rates, the problems facing these current populations as well as current, popular job searching methods. We used our background research to study the most effective and appropriate age demographic for our website as well as how to best reach our targeted population. To further study our prospective customers we distributed dozens of surveys, conducted focus groups and interviewed both Worcester Polytechnic Institute professors and career development center employees. Not surprisingly, the face to face interaction with our peers in the focus groups and interviews with WPI professors and CDC employees proved to offer invaluable information.

Through our analysis of the information that was gathered information we were able to successfully generate four recommendations for JobTacToe.com. Our suggested age demographic has changed from when we first started this project but the fact that our website offers effective and necessary services to those who are alone in the job hunt still stands true. We believe that any one of our four recommendations provided would give this start-up website an effective business model for years to come.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

According to the WPI Projects Program website, the MQP is “A project in the major field of study... [and] should focus on the synthesis of all previous study to solve problems or perform tasks in the major field with confidence, and communicate the results effectively” (<http://www.wpi.edu/Academics/Projects/>).

Our project sponsors are the founders of JobTacToe.com, Michael Neece (a WPI graduate), Caroline Meeks, and Stever Robbins. JobTacToe.com is an online site that integrates social media and game mechanics to transform the difficult, universal, and isolating job search into an interactive job hunting game. The company founders are seeking to leverage this business into a thriving internet based company that helps people seeking employment.

We have established that our project’s objectives have the possibility to change based on our findings throughout the process. This MQP will be a great chance for us to experience the fast-paced, uncertain environment that we can expect in a professional setting. We feel that this project effectively reflects the application of concepts learned while being students of the WPI School of Business.

For Alex, the skills and concepts learned in Marketing Management and Industrial Marketing (3600 & 3651, respectively) will be tested over the course of this project as a bulk of the work is devoted to conducting meaningful market research in order to determine how to properly advertise our sponsor’s services to their target market. Also, the concepts taught in the entrepreneurship course cluster (3633, 3910, 3920 & 4930) will allow us to gain a better understanding of the challenges that our sponsor faces and that we will face, as they are introducing a service into an over-saturated marketplace.

For Kevin, The goal of our MQP project my group and I are conducting during the 2012 academic year is to solve a problem for an existing company, focusing on the synthesis of all

previous study. Throughout my academic career, I have accumulated knowledge about many different aspects of business. At Bryant University, my academic concentration was focused on marketing and business administration. After transferring to WPI, my studies shifted towards management and towards becoming an entrepreneur. I have taken numerous courses pertaining to financial accounting and management information systems, but have decided that working for myself is something that I have always wanted to do. Being in a management position is really attractive to me because of my athletic background. Leadership, organizing, and planning, to name just a few, are things that I have always taken pride in. The ability to manage a group of people in an attempt to reach a common goal is something I really want to do. I have written a few business plans over the course of my college career and have really enjoyed doing the market research, feasibility reports, and financial projections. Helping JobTacToe, the existing company that my group is working with, reach the most efficient target market, will be very beneficial for my group members and I to get some real life experience.

For Tom, It is my belief that when it was suggested to me that I join this MQP group back in September, 2011 I was quite lucky to receive the opportunity. There are not too many MQP's at this university that can truly encompass almost all of your core major courses while still giving you an insight into what it is like trying to build your own start-up company. For a management major such as myself, we are required to complete courses in finance, marketing, data analysis and computer science. This MQP has given our team an excellent understanding of the importance of data analysis and marketing while noting the importance of strong financing and computer science skills for a start-up website. Between meeting with professors, WPI employees and even WPI students I have learned a lot about how to market to consumer, businesses as well as academic institutions. While meeting with employees from the Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Career Development Center, Ms. Doyle and Ms. Horowitz gave our team excellent insight into creatively

developing a niche for your desired product which is one of the most important steps involved in marketing. I am grateful to be able to honestly say that this project has put the skills I've learned the past three and a half years into a real life perspective.

In addition, this project will provide an opportunity for our project team (along with the founders) to make a contribution to society as so many are facing the difficult problem of finding jobs both after graduation and after recent unemployment. If successful, this product, and this project, will result in a service that the unemployed population can utilize when they find themselves out of work and un-educated in the area of job hunting. This project will also allow future students to gain a better understanding of one of the most important pieces of starting their own business venture: analyzing the prospective target market to gain a better understanding of the business need.

Our project work will consist mainly of conducting market research to gather information on the search engine patterns of our target market through studies conducted and documented in scholarly and practitioner literature. We will also track target market searching patterns, conduct further market research via interviews and focus groups and analyze the information gathered to develop a proposal for a marketing strategy that would generate higher traffic on the website and lead the organization to critical mass.

Our background/ literature review chapter discusses the current unemployment situation and the obstacles that are faced by those who are unemployed, as well as effective job searching methods and the development of online resources as they all relate to our sponsor's target market. The methodology chapter outlines the steps that we will take to conduct our market research, which includes; gathering information from marketing professionals, practicing professors, career development staff and students and alumni who fall into the described target market via interviews, surveys and obtaining statistical information from official government resources. In the 'Findings and Analysis' chapter, we will reveal the results of our market research and explain in the

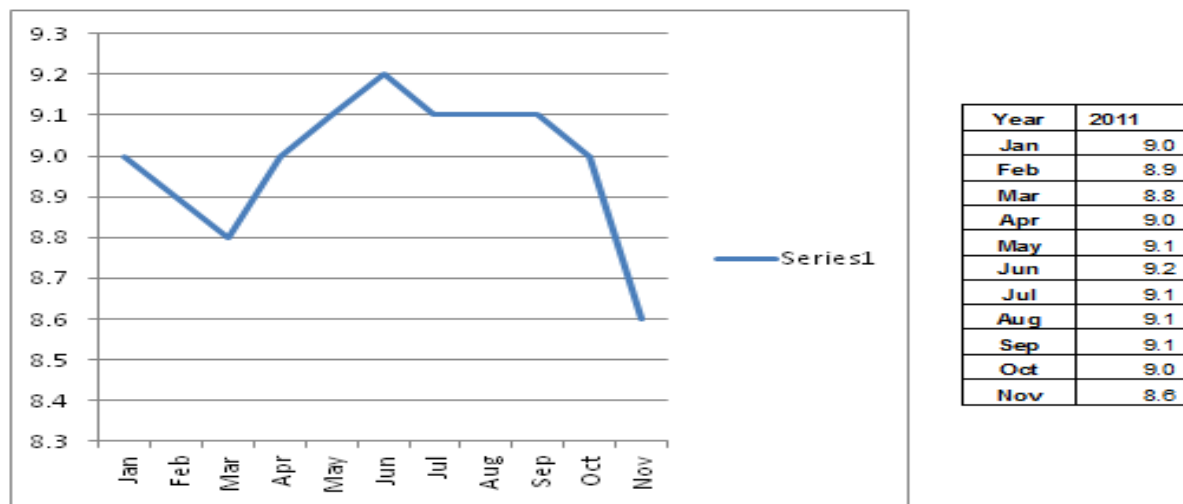
'Discussion' section how these results have helped to shape our recommendations. And in the final section, we will state and explain our recommendations.

## Chapter 2: Background/Literature Review

Our project goal is to propose effective marketing and business development strategies to our sponsors Michael Neece, Caroline Meeks and Stever Robbins at JobTacToe.com. In this chapter we will conduct an external analysis of their target market – establishing the foreseen need for their product, describe how the development of e-Commerce has impacted traditional methods of job searching, and discuss the effectiveness of current job searching methods.

### 2.1 Current Unemployment

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011a), the current unemployment rate in the United States is 8.6% (see Figure 1 below). Although the unemployment rate has reached its lowest point in almost three years (see Appendix B), Censky (2011) reports that close to 13.3 million people have yet to find work; and almost half of them have been unemployed for more than six months. Kuang & Valletta (2010) report that the job losses seen in the United States have generally been in industries that are ‘cyclically sensitive’, like construction.



**Figure 1: Current United States Unemployment Rate (Jan 2011 – Nov 2011)**

**Note: This figure was adapted from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2011a). Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey. Retrieved from <http://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet>; See Appendix B**



Although the information provided by the [U.S.B.L.S.] (2011a) shows an overall decline in the level of unemployment in the United States, it also shows that for the twenty to twenty four year old age bracket - JobTacToe.com's target market – the unemployment level is still very high (see Figure 2 below).

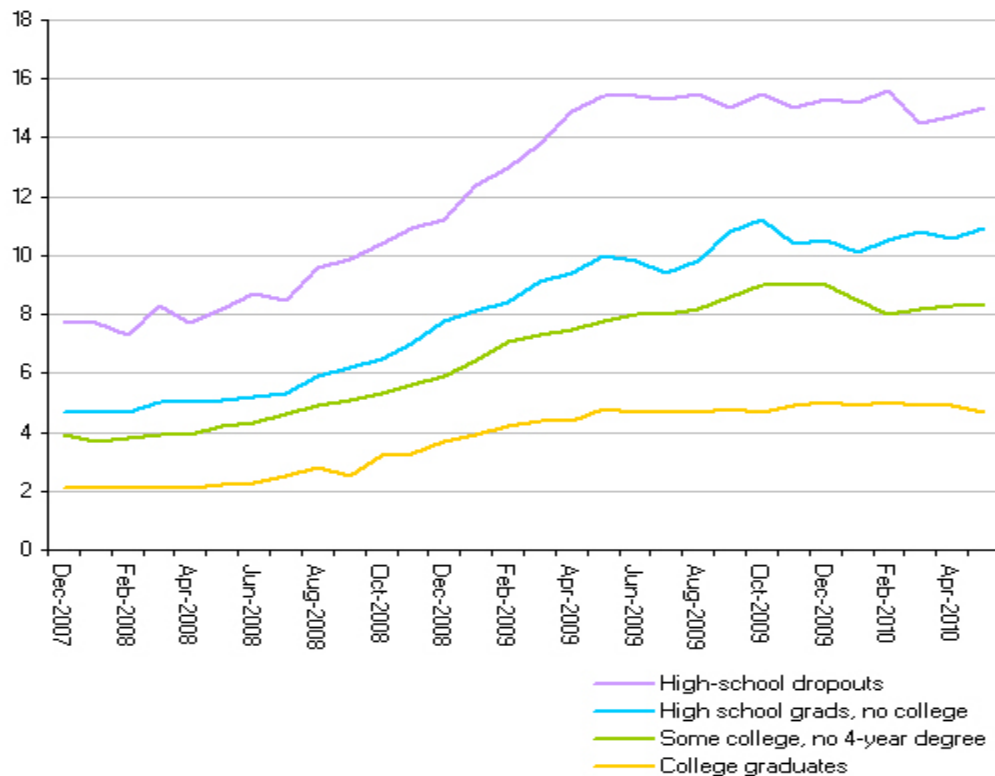


**Figure 2: Current United States Unemployment for Age Group 20-24 (2000 – 2010)**

**Note:** This figure was adapted from Google. (2011). Unemployment Rate – Seasonally Adjusted. Retrieved from [http://www.google.com/publicdata/explore?ds=z1ebjpgk2654c1\\_&met\\_y=unemployment\\_rate&tdim=true&fdim\\_y=seasonality:S&dl=en&hl=en&q=unemployment#ctype=l&strail=false&bcs=d&nselm=h&met\\_y=unemployment\\_rate&fdim\\_y=seasonality:S&scale\\_y=lin&ind\\_y=false&rdim=ages\\_code&idim=ages\\_code:20&ifdim=ages\\_code&tstart=947912400000&tend=1321333200000&hl=en&dl=en](http://www.google.com/publicdata/explore?ds=z1ebjpgk2654c1_&met_y=unemployment_rate&tdim=true&fdim_y=seasonality:S&dl=en&hl=en&q=unemployment#ctype=l&strail=false&bcs=d&nselm=h&met_y=unemployment_rate&fdim_y=seasonality:S&scale_y=lin&ind_y=false&rdim=ages_code&idim=ages_code:20&ifdim=ages_code&tstart=947912400000&tend=1321333200000&hl=en&dl=en)

A study conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [U.S.B.L.S.] (2011b) shows that while eventually a majority of those who are unemployed do indeed find work, the process of finding a job can be an extremely long and time – consuming process (see Appendix C). That same study revealed that during the last economic recession, “... the length of time it took for the jobless to be successful in their job search increased sharply... and a far greater share of successful jobseekers spent in excess of a year in their search for employment” ([U.S.B.L.S., 2011b], p. 2).

However, when this same information is broken down by level of education, the data is much clearer. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data (see Figure 3 below) those who received a college degree are at a much lower unemployment level than those who did not.



**Figure 3: Unemployment Breakdown by Education Level (2007 – 2010)**

**Note:** This figure was adapted from UsableMarkets (2010). **Unemployment Rates and Education.** Retrieved from <http://www.usablemarkets.com/2010/06/04/unemployment-rates-and-education/>

In comparing the unemployment rates from Figures 2 and 3, we see a drastic difference between the overall unemployment rate and the unemployment rate by education level. This will help to guide the direction of our research and the questions that we will try to answer during our examination of our sponsor’s target market. Although a high rate of unemployment is what made our sponsors design the website in the first place, it is important to note that although the current unemployment rate is still higher than normal, it will not remain stagnant for an extended period of

time. As conditions change, JobTacToe.com will need to change along with it. One way to minimize the risk associated with a volatile unemployment rate would be to focus on a demographic with more constant demand.

## **2.2 Obstacles Facing Unemployed Populations**

According to Kuang & Valletta (2010) the unemployment in the United States can be defined as ‘structural unemployment’ meaning that one of the major obstacles that the job-seeking labor force faces currently is the mismatch between the skills that the unemployed population have and the skills that the employers require to fill positions within their organization. Specifically for the target market of our sponsor, regardless of the level of education attained, they lack the experience required to fill the mid-level (and higher) positions that employers are looking to fill. Kuang & Valletta (2010) look at this obstacle from a different angle as well; for example, workers who were employed as construction workers will find themselves lacking the skills required to match the positions that companies are trying to fill.

Kuang & Valletta (2010) also argue that another ‘obstacle’ to unemployment is the insurance benefits that are available to those that are unemployed for an extended period of time. Although these benefits “[ease] the financial burden of long-term unemployment...”, workers have less motivation to search for jobs (Kuang & Valletta, 2010). Another obstacle that the unemployed population faces is that they might not have the financial flexibility required to relocate to an area where there are more jobs (Kuang & Valletta, 2010). This is a big issue for our sponsor’s target market in particular because at that point in their careers they will still be in the process of paying off their student loans. However, the rapid development of the internet has provided those who are unemployed with an opportunity to access outside resources to aid in their job search.

According to Lauren Weber, a writer for The Wall Street Journal, because companies are becoming so overwhelmed with job applications, they have begun to use screening software that

sorts through thousands of applications, targeting certain key, or ‘action’ words that will allow that candidate an opportunity for an interview in person (Weber, 2012). According to the figure shown in Appendix D, the automated system weeds out roughly 90% of all applicants before their applications even reach human hands.

For JobTacToe.com, this provides both positive and negative advantages and disadvantages as they are attempting to gain a foothold in the marketplace. Because internet users now have access to information around the world, JobTacToe.com’s services have the potential to be used and / or expand internationally (actual usage would vary by country as the world is seeing an unstable level of unemployment). In addition, the availability of internet resources on your smart phone or laptop computer makes using resources like the service that JobTacToe.com provides that much more convenient to the end users. Also, part of the services that JobTacToe.com offers includes a lesson on using the key, or ‘action’ words that the computer systems target when screening a resume.

One disadvantage that JobTacToe.com faces is that they are a new entrant in a job-hunting industry that is over-saturated. So given that internet access provides a prospective customer with access to job-seeking resources around the globe, JobTacToe.com has to provide value to their end user that surpasses what they might get out of an alternate resource.

## **2.3 Effective Job Searching Methods**

The top methods for job searching strategies include; newspaper ads, college placement offices, state employment agencies, applying directly to employers, private employment agencies and networking (Donald Sears, 2009). There are positives and negatives to each of these job searching method but some are highly more successful than the others.

### **2.3.1 Newspaper Ads**

According to the Ladders.com website, a United States based company which provides online job searches and resume building techniques to individuals seeking jobs fitting to each

poster's own, personal goals, newspaper ads were rated a 1.7 on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest (Donald Sears, 2009). Their information comes from the outplacement firm Challenger, Gray and Christmas which surveyed a number of human resource executives and asked these executives to rate the effectiveness of the multiple job searching techniques in use today. Newspaper ads were ranked second to last among job searching techniques along with sending direct resumes to employers (Donald Sears, 2009). However, the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management shows the positive aspects to newspaper ads even though there are very few positives and overall, they are quite insignificant. The Carlson school of Management lists the positives of newspaper ads as, "readily accessible (online or in print) and a fairly wide range of jobs" ("Carlson school of," 2007). The listed negatives heavily outweigh any positives and the negatives listed are, greater competition because a small fraction of job openings are advertised in the paper, only about 2-5 out of 100 applicants hear back in regards to an interview, a simplified impersonal screening process and the fact that some ads may be fake ("Carlson school of," 2007).

According to a Wall Street Journal article labeled, *Recruiters Use Search Engines to Lure Job Hunters* from March, 2009, the profits from newspaper ads are in steady decline. This decline was not concluded due to the fact articles were being read on the internet rather than newspaper form but because according to Advanced Interactive Media Group LLC, recruitment newspaper ads dropped 34% from 2008 to 2009 (Sarah E. Needleman, 2009). This decline has happened for good reason though. Reported by Baylor Health Care System, "a large Dallas-based nonprofit, began purchasing keywords on Google, Yahoo and employment-related search engines SimplyHired.com and Indeed.com. The search-engine ads generated more applicants, at less cost, than the other recruiting methods, says Eileen Bouthillet, director of human resources communications" (Sarah E. Needleman, 2009). Within the first six months of the program the newspaper and magazine ads had brought in 215 applicants with a cost of \$750 each, per ad. These numbers are compared to the

much more efficient search engine ads which supplied 5,250 customers with an average cost of \$4 per ad.

### **2.3.2 College Placement Offices**

At Worcester Polytechnic Institute, the college placement office, known as the College Development Center, can be found through the Worcester Polytechnic Institute website. Through the Worcester Polytechnic Institute website ([www.wpi.edu](http://www.wpi.edu)) it can be found under the section, *facts and figures*, that there is over a “90% placement in jobs or graduate programs for students who register with the Career Development Center” (Worcester Polytechnic Institute). The website also states that the “Class of 2009 graduates can be found at over 200 companies and graduate schools” and lists many companies used in the Dow Jones Industrial average as top employers such as, 3M Company, Bank of America, ExxonMobil, IBM, United Technologies Corporation and others (“CNNmoney,” 2011). The opportunities the Career Development Center offers for employers looking for potential candidates include: “posting job opportunities for free on WPI Job Finder, participating in on-campus career fairs, partnering with WPI by co-sponsoring or presenting a career-related program or workshop, hosting a student for job shadowing, participating in one of our resume critique events, sponsoring a project on campus, hosting an information session at WPI, or via webcast” (Worcester Polytechnic Institute). Under the Career Development Center’s website there is a *Students* tab to the left of your screen offering help with “STAR Mentor Program/ Job Shadowing, Resume & Letters, Graduate/ Professional School, Find a Job, Interview Skills, Campus Interviews and WPI Career Fairs and Off Campus Events” (Worcester Polytechnic Institute). According to the Career Development Center’s 2011 post-graduation statistical report 89% of the graduating class of 2011 who reported back to the CDC were either employed, enrolled in graduate school or enrolled in the military (CDC). This is an extremely high statistic for WPI and shows that

an ideal target market for a start-up, job searching website, may not be newly graduated undergraduate students with free access to job placement programs.

Bloomsberg weekly also backs the effectiveness of these college job boards by stating that, “job seekers say the three best methods to contact them are through career sections on employer sites, school career fairs and job boards”. Companies often specifically place their open jobs on specific college job boards rendering these college boards quite helpful.

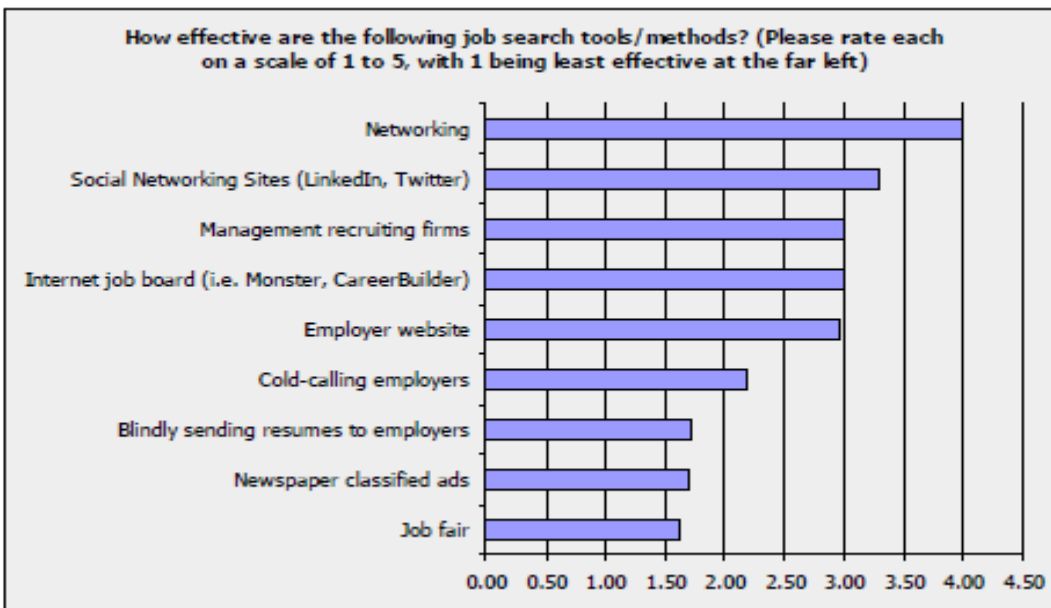
### **2.3.3 State Employment Agencies**

The official site of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has a category on their home website labeled, *Jobs & Education* listed at the top of the computer screen which serves as the Massachusetts state employment agency ("Mass.gov," 2011). The federally run agency equivalent, named the United States Office of Personnel Management, is put in place to help with the rising unemployment rate. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management states that their vision is that “the Federal Government will Become America’s Model Employer for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (opm.gov). In order to honor the Agencies motto to “Recruit, Retain and Honor a World-Class Workforce to Serve the American People” the numerous important goals listed throughout their website must be completed (United States Office, 2010). If the Office of Personnel Management has their strategy go as planned then sometime in the near future the United States citizens may be flocking to their website in hopes to find the job they desire. For job searching websites a newly found government program could mean stiff competition. A government funded program would obviously have distinct advantages over privately financed companies which could mean the end of the number of job searching websites on the internet.

### **2.3.4 Applying Directly to Employers**

According to the Wall Street Journal, reporting on a survey which a staffing company named ManpowerGroup conducted, 52% of United States employers say they have difficulty filling

positions because of talent shortages (Cappelli, 2011). According to the Moneyland section of Time Magazine there were nearly 14 million people out of work as of November, 2011 meaning there is an “average of 4.2 unemployed workers competing for each opening” (Schawbel, 2011). Referring to the survey detailed back in the Newspaper Ads section in section, 2.3.1, once again, HR executives rate applying directly to employers as a 1.7 out of a scale from 1 to 5, the same rate as responding to newspaper ads (Donald Sears, 2009). Applying directly to employers is extremely difficult for job searchers because the next step for the employer “most likely involves further screening of the selected candidates to determine the 10-15 individuals to bring in for a more formal interview at the company” (“Thousands flock to,” 2011).



**Figure 4: How Effective are Job Searching Methods**

Note: This figure was adapted from Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Incorporated. (2011). Thousands flock to job fairs in tight market.

Retrieved from <http://www.challengergray.com/press/PressRelease.aspx?PressUid=191>

This graph from Challenger, Gray and Christmas, Incorporated, 2009 ranks the effectiveness of job searching tools and shows that both blindly sending resumes to employers and cold-calling are at the



bottom end of the spectrum when it comes to job searching methods. Thus showing the importance of networking before applying to prospective companies.

### **2.3.5 Private Employment Agencies**

Private employment agencies, described by Sears (2009) as internet job boards and web-based job posting sites, rated very highly in contrast to other job searching methods. Private employment agencies received a rating of 3 in the 1 to 5 rating system with 38% of executives giving private employment agencies the second highest possible rating of 4. Private employment agencies are able to offer specialty knowledge “that an agency can acquire of the employment conditions and requirements in particular fields, objectivity of view and skill in conducting the selection procedure” (Kumar). Also, private employment agencies are able to process a large amount of applicants while these applicants detail their skills and past employment experiences. Private employment agencies are often able to create relationships with prospective employers and many private employment agencies help with “resume writing, interviewing skills, and presentation” (Wisegeek). However, Daniel Scawbel (2011) of Forbes.com believes that “job boards are becoming more irrelevant to the corporate recruitment process every single year”. He then explains why he believes job boards are becoming obsolete, “they are ineffective because of the sheer amount of competition on them and how they’re perceived by recruiters. Only lazy recruiters source candidates from them. The best recruiters build a strong network that they grow, nurture and tap into. Most companies hire based on referrals, and through their corporate websites, not job boards. They only use job boards in a last ditch effort to hire a candidate because the best people for the job are the ones that aren’t looking”. Wall Street Journal writer, Joe Light (2011), describes that through “analysis of hiring data by Jobs2web Inc.” it can be observed that companies, on average, look through 186 more applications on a job board before find someone to hire compared to job hunters who look through a company

websites. These facts show why websites such as Monster.com and other job searching websites are becoming less and less effective, thus opening the door to more innovative job searching websites.

Another type of private employment agency is private outsourcing employment agencies. Outsourcing agencies often provide their own, temporary workers to companies through their private agency. These outsourcing agencies often have great connections with proven companies helping their workers get their foot in the door. However, the New York Times states, “that temporary employees will become a larger, more entrenched part of the work force” meaning that those men and women with the goal of finding full time employment will fall short (nytimes).

### **2.3.6 Networking**

In the same study detailed in the newspaper ads section, the effectiveness of networking is on the opposite spectrum compared to the effectiveness of newspaper ads. The effectiveness of networking was rated a 3.98 out of 5 and nearly half of the responders in the survey rated the effectiveness of successful networking at the highest rating (5) (Sakina Rangwala).

Instead of laying out positives and negatives the Washington Post explains the dos and don'ts of successful networking. The dos of networking are; “know your goal and have a strategy, be confident; find a role model or a mentor you can emulate, say thank you often and smile, brag about your skills, make a good first impression, follow up with a new contact as soon as you can, send a Christmas or holiday card to re-establish contacts, learn to listen attentively, gain trust and learn to trust, in order to build friendships” (Sakina Rangwala). Smart networking involves strategic plans and goals, just as any business or organization would have. The Washington Post breaks up networking into two different strategies: “social networking and informational interviewing”. These strategies each include three separate components to each, developing, organizing and following up. An article in the Chicago Tribune labeled, *Creativity becoming a must in job searches*, tells college kids how they need to think like an entrepreneur, the college kids need to be able to sell the skills they have,

taking unpaid internships, writing posts for a blog or doing some freelance work on the side for a business (Carolyn Bigda, 2011). Bigda notes as, Lindsey Pollak, author of “Getting from College to Career”, explains “anything can be a career builder if you think of it that way...and because of the Web, it's so much more possible to find work that you can do virtually” (Carolyn Bigda, 2011).

### 2.3.7 Conclusion for Effective Job Searching Methods

As seen below, is a matrix put together based off of all the different resources found in this section which describes the positives and negatives to each job searching method. There are five different sections used to describe these different methods and each method has a listed either yes or no answer towards each category. As seen below, only networking receives a “yes” under each and every category.

Job Search Method	Low Cost - Employers	Low Cost - Job Searchers	Effective - Employers	Effective - Job Searchers	Separates from Competitors
Newspaper Ads	No	Yes	No	No	No
College Placement Offices	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
State Employment Agencies	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Applying Directly to Employers	No	Yes	No	No	No
Private Employment Agencies	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Networking	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

**Figure 5: Effective Job Searching Methods**

**Note: This matrix was completed on the basis of the multiple sources found throughout section 2.3**

The results of this survey show that a successful job searching website needs to move their customers towards effective networking to give their clients the strongest chance to land the job they covet. Job boards looking to give their customers an advantage will realize that their process is no longer effective for the prospective job seeker unless the customer is able to successfully network through their offered services.

## **2.4 Development of Online Unemployment Resources**

Many companies have taken advantage of the rapid growth of internet services to promote exponential growth in the number of customers who have access to their company, and enhance their image via advertisements. Many firms have invested in their company's web-image and focused marketing campaigns around social media. In many cases, e-businesses are cost-effective and manageable to maintain at a low price. It can eliminate many costs including a significant portion of the overhead costs, the salaries of people who need to interact with customers, and excess costs pertaining to the sales process. In addition, the internet provides an opportunity for companies to offer their services or products at a lower cost than if there was a physical store location.

### **2.4.1 Online Unemployment Services**

With the development of the internet, a surplus of information is easily accessible to the common job seeker. People can educate themselves on certain aspects of the job searching process using hundreds of various web-sites that may specialize in certain aspects of the overall process. Web-sites such as: Monster.com, Careerbuilder.com, Execunet.com and Pongo.com are a few examples of companies that offer assistance with the overall process. Some of the things that these web-sites offer are: insight about how to approach an interview, guidelines for writing professional resumes, current job listings, information on how to communicate with headhunters and employers, etc. Some of these web-sites are free to use, while others charge a fee to become a member. Some of these companies have an advertising platform built into the infrastructure of the site, which generates revenue, and some have other revenue streams that they offer to customers as optional and complimentary services. These companies try to differentiate themselves by specializing in certain facets of the process. Some target certain people, while some offer expert advice about a certain aspect, such as writing a professional resume. The table below lists the four web-sites that

were previously mentioned. They are all job searching web-sites, yet they specialize in different parts of the process.

**Table 1: JobTacToe.com Competition**

Web-sites	Resume	Interview	Job listings	Primary Target	Price
Executnet			X	Executives	Various Membership Options
Monster	X	X	X	Everyone	Free
Career Builder	X		X	Everyone	Free
Pongo	X	X		Everyone	Monthly Membership

“Execunet.com is a full-service, private membership organization tuned exclusively to helping senior-level executives attract rewarding new opportunities (even in this tough market); get "unstuck" and transition into gratifying new careers; maximize their leadership performance; and get better business results” (Execunet.com)” This site specializes in helping executive level people connect with local business leaders, gain daily insight from trusted mentors, and apply for privately posted executive level jobs. Monster.com is a popular tool used by job seekers and offers people the ability to upload their resume and send it to companies. It offers advice pertaining to writing a professional resume and has job listing information according to one’s current location.

Careerbuilder.com is similar to monster in the sense that it offers advice on the overall process and specializes in connecting people to companies in their current area. Pongo.com is a web-site that specializes in the writing of a professional resume. The site offers insight and assistance by professional resume writers that take people step by step through the process. It also offers assistance on how to approach an interview and how to go about networking with professionals in certain industries. These four websites are just a few examples of companies that help with the job finding process. They try to specialize in certain areas and target different people in order to increase their revenue. The internet has opened the door to a plethora of knowledge and an infinite number of resources that people have the ability to take advantage of. Entrepreneurs continue to try and

conquer the job searching process by innovatively offering new and fun ways to go about the stressful process of finding quality employment.

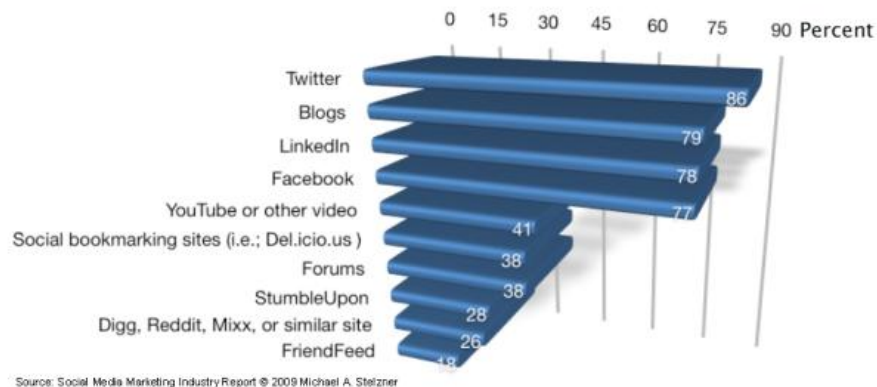
## **2.4.2 Advertising via Social Media**

Social media outlets have changed the way companies approach advertising and networking in numerous ways. Social media optimization allows companies to reach potential customers on an entirely new level. It allows companies to interact, communicate, and build relationships with people, while at the same time enhance their self- image and reputation to the general public. Every business' goal is to get their name out there and attract people to what they are all about. Their objective is to attract customers, build a relationship with them, promote trust and loyalty, and eventually make an impact on that person who can potentially promote their company to others by referrals. Currently, during the e-commerce boom, there are many social media strategies that allow companies to attempt to reach this goal. Established companies that have tons of traffic on their websites can sell advertisements and work on the appearance of their image and so forth, while new companies try and dissect the process and introduce new methods need to develop social media strategies. On order to promote a company, many things can be done. Having people blog about your company, including links to face book and other social media outlets can have a positive impact on the awareness of one's company.

Facebook has exploded throughout the country over the past 5 years. Due to the large amount of traffic on the face book network, there is a large opportunity for advertisements. Companies have even started to create their own "page" and interact with their customers that way. By being in contact with them, through social media, they can offer promotions, news about the company, and even create direct relationships with their customers. Twitter is another social media website that is similar to face book pertaining to its uses. Twitter allows companies to update their current status on a daily basis and offer promotional information. You-tube is considered one of the major social

media sites as well. This site allows companies to create videos and share them with the general public for no charge. All of these social media models can be used very effectively on a daily basis. By acquiring a large number of “friends” or “followers” a firm can gain popularity in the community and increase its range of customers. Being creative, spontaneous, and wild can lead to more views and more traffic. Companies now realize the importance of reaching their customers using social media outlets. Companies have even started to create positions within their respective companies to deal with such things. Building a reputation and being consistent and cool is a very big aspect of social media. Being fashionable, up to date with the current news, artistic, etc, is very important. Catering to all sorts of ages and target markets can only help diversify ones customer base.

### Commonly used social media tools



**Figure 6: Commonly Used Social Media Tools**

**Note:** This figure was adapted from Amanda Brooks Article entitled “Drop Ship News: Social Media Marketing Trends and Statistics” Retrieved from: <<<http://blog.dropshipaccess.com/bid/32487/Dropship-News-Social-Media-Marketing-Trends-Statistics>>>

This graph shows the most common social media tools that are used by people of all ages. (Brooks, Drop Ship News)

### **2.4.3 Marketing of Web-Based Businesses**

Most web-based businesses market themselves using the internet, email, and wireless media. The internet allows companies to try and reach potential customers using a plethora of different avenues. Search engine marketing (SEM), Search engine optimization (SEO), banner ads, email marketing, and mobile advertising are some examples of ways web-based businesses try and attract new leads (Tremblay, RT Design Group). Most web-based businesses do not have the resources, time, money, etc. to think about more progressive marketing techniques, so instead they try and grow their businesses by participating in online marketing activities, such as SEO, blogging, and social media management. They also rely solely on "traditional" marketing techniques, word-of-mouth marketing, and social networking in an attempt to boost sales and growth. Internet marketing is a low cost promotional strategy, it's the easiest way to reach a global market, and it reaches a specific target market directly. Some disadvantages include: online marketing does not build trust instantly and it is a tough competition amongst web-based businesses (nPresnce, 2007). Due to an overload of information and online companies, it is tough to stand out and make a direct impact on potential customers. Web-based businesses have the luxury of using the vast internet to reach potential target markets.

### **2.5 Summary**

The background analysis we conducted gave us a clear picture of the overall problem that JobTacToe.com's target market faces, the services that are currently offered as resources to the target market, and how the founders of JobTacToe.com plan to position their service against their competitors.

Our next step, after studying all of the material that we had discovered, was creating a methodology where we could practically apply our research into meaningful results. Our goal was to provide an objective marketing proposal that would generate higher traffic on the JobTacToe.com



website. Using our newly found information, we started the process of formulating a study that would allow us to provide effective strategies to our sponsor.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Our objective was to track target market searching patterns, conduct further market research via interviews and focus groups and analyze the information gathered to develop a proposal for a marketing strategy that would generate higher traffic on the website and lead the organization to critical mass. In order to make any recommendations, our team gathered information to determine the size of the target market and the difficulties that they face in becoming employed. To achieve the goal of our project, we developed the following methodology to obtain information; including interviews with marketing professionals, career development office staff, as well as gathering information from surveys and conducting focus groups.

### **3.1 Methodology Guideline**

After consulting with Professor Chickery Kasouf of the Worcester Polytechnic Institute School of Business on the best approach to conducting market research, he recommended that the most effective method for the type of research that we were conducting would be to replicate Alan R. Andreasen's "Backward' Market Research" model, documented by the *Harvard Business Review*. According to his article, "research should be designed to lead to a decision". And in order to make the most effective decision, one needs to start at the end and work backward (Andreasen, 1985). Per the Harvard Business Review Article, the steps of 'Backwards' Market Research are as follows;

- “1. Determine how the research results will be implemented (which helps to define the problem).
2. To ensure the implementation of the results, determine what the final report should contain and how it should look.
3. Specify the analyses necessary to 'fill in the blanks' in the research report.

4. Determine the kind of data that must be assembled to carry out these analyses.
  5. Scan the available secondary sources and/or syndicated services to see whether the specified data already exist or can be obtained quickly and cheaply from others.
  6. If no such easy way out presents itself, design instruments and a sampling plan that will yield the data to fit the analyses that you have to undertake.
  7. Carry out the field work, continually checking to see whether the data will meet your needs.
  8. Do the analysis, write the report, and watch it have its intended effect.”
- (Andreasen, 1985).

## **3.2 Research Steps**

Using the model described in section 3.1 as a guideline, we used the following sections to detail our methodology.

### **3.2.1 Information Retrieval from JobTacToe.com founders**

Direct contact between Michael Neece and our group takes place through the use of conference calls approximately once a month. At the start of the project we would ask Mr. Neece numerous questions pertaining to the structure of the company’s financials and overall operations. During the conference calls we would have a primary orator and two scribes. We would also record the conversations so that we could go back and listen to them again. E-mail was also an important line of communication that allowed us to ask Mr. Neece questions as they came up throughout the completion of our project.

### **3.2.2 Determine how the research results will be implemented.**

Per our groups initial conversation with our project’s sponsor (Michael R. Neece, President & COO of JobTacToe.com), the findings from our market research and analysis

will be used to shape recommendations that will allow our sponsor to effectively market their services to their target market using the funding allocated for that purpose.

### **3.2.3 Specify the analyses necessary to ‘fill in the blanks’ in the research report**

As Andreasen writes, “As is usually the case with segmentation strategies, there are quantity and quality decisions to make” (Andreasen, 1985). After consulting with Professor Kasouf, our team has decided to utilize focus groups as the primary source of information gathering. In doing so, we will be able to obtain more detailed responses on how individuals make these kinds of purchasing decisions. The responses that we gather from the focus groups will help us to better understand the results of our quantitative research (Burns and Bush, 1998).

### **3.2.4 Determine the kind of data that must be assembled to carry out these analyses**

In order to carry out the focus group method of gathering information, we will also need to supplement it with the use of information gathered from the surveying of various members of our sponsors target market, and interviews with marketing and career development professionals (see Appendices E, F & G for interview protocols). By administering these surveys, we will be able to use the information gathered to mold the discussions that take place when we conduct the focus groups. Burns and Bush (1998) describe this as ‘pluralistic research’, where both “qualitative and quantitative research methods [are used] in order to gain the advantages of both” (p. 210). In addition, administering these surveys will give us an opportunity to both view any skewed findings that occur and also to provide figures for our sponsor to reference.

Because our recommendations to our sponsor will not be founded solely in the feedback from the questionnaires (as they serve more as guidelines for our focus groups), we do not have to place any sort of sampling restrictions on our study. However, the main constraint placed on our project is the limited amount of time that we have to administer the surveys and conduct the focus groups (which are all done based on response rates). Because of this constraint, we decided to select a ‘sample area’ that could be thoroughly investigated over the course of our seven week research period. We decided to focus on the Worcester County region of Massachusetts because of the county’s high population density along with the relatively high number of colleges and universities that are located within it.

Each group of people we have decided to interview serves a specific purpose to help our project team generate the most effective recommendations for our sponsor. Our goal is to interview the most diverse group of people possible throughout Worcester County to provide us with the information required to make informed recommendations to our sponsor.

According to Andreassen (1985), steps five through eight of his ‘backward’ research method “revert to a traditional forward approach that applies the research decisions and judgments made earlier” (p. 5).

### **3.2.5 Establishing a Marketing Budget**

Because the founders of JobTacToe.com are self-funding this venture, our team decided that it was prudent to establish a marketing budget for our project. We felt that by doing so we could ensure that our final recommendations were not based on the false premise that the company had access to the financial capital to undertake our proposed strategy. After consulting with Michael R. Neece (President & Chief Operating Officer, JobTacToe.com), we were able to determine that our yearly budget was not to exceed \$2000.

### **3.3 Summary**

After we conclude our research period, we will use the information gathered using the methods detailed above to generate recommendations that will not surpass our sponsor's budget mentioned in section 3.2.5. In comparing the information gathered, we will gain a better understanding of our target market which will allow us to propose more effective recommendations. Our findings and analyses are detailed in the following section.

## **Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis**

This section details the results from the surveys that we have developed and distributed over the course of our research period, as well as the findings from the focus groups that we have conducted. In addition, we will discuss the impacts that our findings have for our sponsors. In order to obtain the most useful information from our sponsor's target market in the time allotted, our team focused on the eight colleges and universities in Worcester. The next step was contacting the schools for their permission to survey students on their campuses. Focus groups and surveys were conducted based on response rates. Our findings will be analyzed further in depth in the discussion section at the end of the chapter.

### **4.1 Survey Results**

Because we could not require students to fill out our surveys, we contacted Worcester area schools for their permission to survey students on their campuses. Based on response rates from those institutions, our team was able to conduct 67 surveys in the time allotted for gathering information. Our surveys were completed by students from Worcester State University, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Holy Cross, and Assumption College, as well as alumni from those institutions that we were able to contact. We ended up gathering information from 50 participants who were still considered 'full-time students' and 17 participants who were not enrolled in undergraduate education at any university. These results will be displayed in the order that the questions appeared on the survey (see Appendix E for survey protocol).

#### **Question One**

The first question in the survey gave participants a number of activities related to job searching and asked them to rank the activities in order of importance. This question allowed us to gain better insight on how the JobTacToe.com target market views the importance of the services

that they offer. In order to properly assess the results from this question, all of the rankings for each service were tallied and the average rankings were calculated. Our results are depicted below.



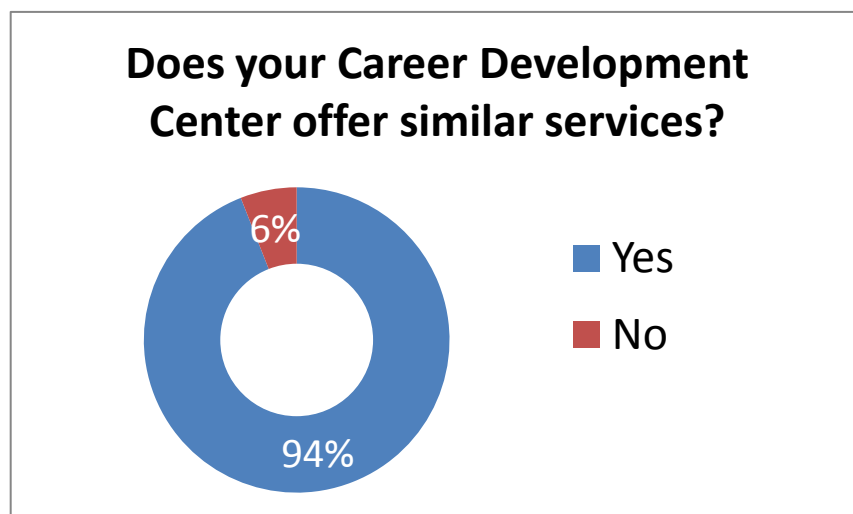
**Figure 7: Job Searching Service Services**

**Note: Although these three services are the only options that are ranked, survey participants were also given the option to add in other services that they saw to be important.**

As shown in Figure 7 (see left), we have determined that 34% and 36%, respectively, of members of our sponsor's target market felt that resume crafting and interviewing techniques are the most important among job searching services.

## Question Two

The second question that was asked of participants was if their college Career Development Center provided any of the services mentioned in question one, both during and after graduation.

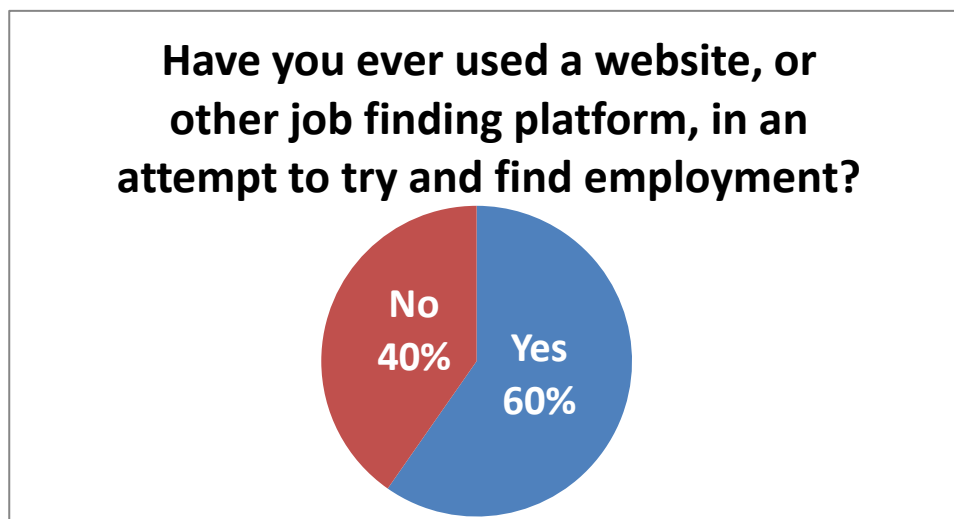


### **Figure 8: Does your Career Development Center offer similar services?**

As shown in Figure 8 above, only 6% of the participants that were surveyed attended institutions whose Career Development Centers did not offer any sort of assistance in the job searching process.

### **Question Three**

The third question in the survey asked participants whether or not they had used internet-based job searching resources in the past, and if they were able to, to name the websites. The results for this question are shown in Figure 9 below.

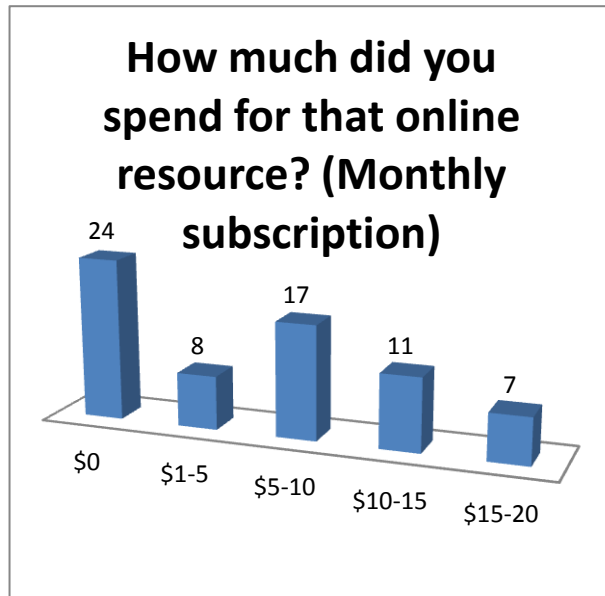


**Figure 9: Have you ever used a website, or other job finding platform, in an attempt to try and find employment?**

As depicted in the figure above, 60% of JobTacToe.com's target market has used internet-based resources in some capacity in the past. The most commonly used resources were; Monster.com, LinkedIn, Execunet, CareerBuilder.com and the WPI JobFinder (for Worcester Polytechnic Institute students only).



As a follow-up to question three, those who participated in the survey were asked how much they would be willing to spend or have spent in the past on these internet-based resources. The results are shown in Figure 10 below.



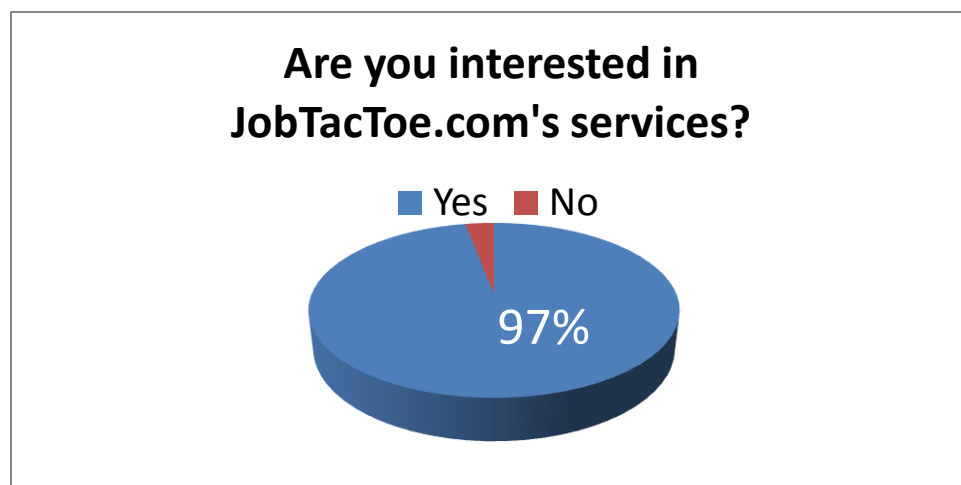
**Figure 10 (Left): How much did you spend for that online resource? (Monthly subscription)**

**Note:** Those who had not used an online job searching resource were marked as having spent \$0

Based on the surveys conducted, our team found that members of our sponsor's target market who had utilized other online resources spent – on average – between \$5 and \$15 for their services.

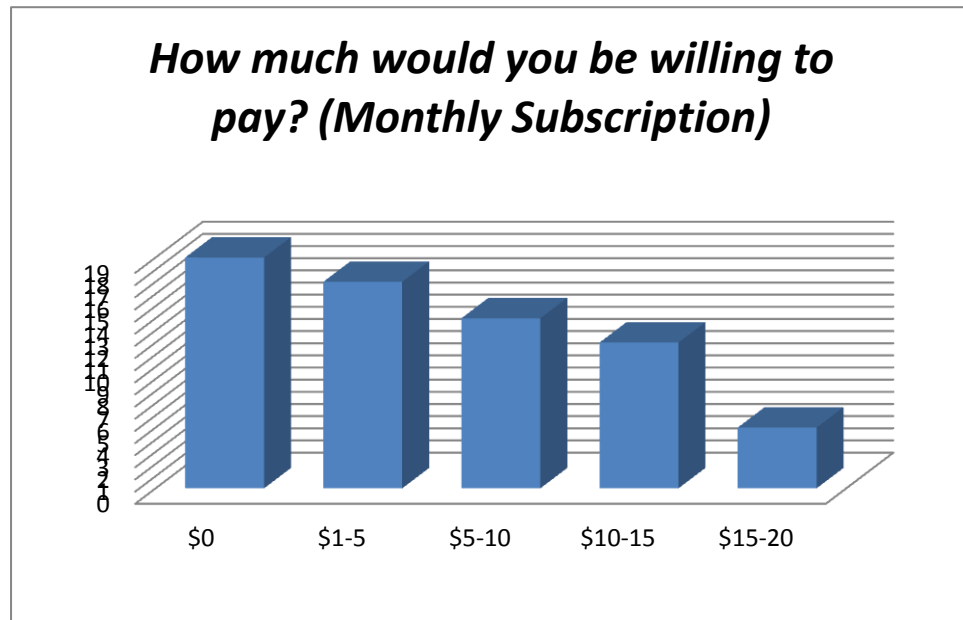
#### **Question Four**

The fourth question that was asked to survey participants described the layout of JobTacToe.com and the services that it offers in an attempt to determine whether or not their target market would be interested in such a service.



**Figure 11: Are you interested in JobTacToe.com's services?**

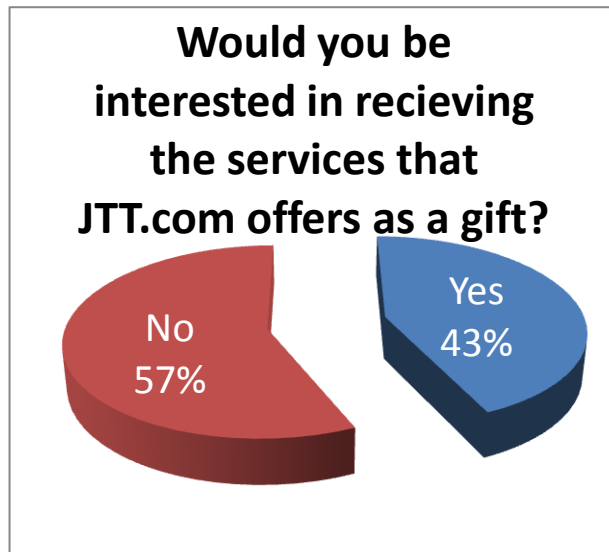
As shown in Figure 11 above, 97% of participants responded that they are interested in such a website. As a follow-up to the previous question, those who took the survey were then asked how much they would be willing to pay for a monthly subscription to this website. The results for this question are shown in the figure below.



**Figure 12: How much would you be willing to pay? (Monthly Subscription)**

Based on the chart shown in Figure 12 above, we found that 74.6% of the target market population that was surveyed responded that the ideal price range for this service would be between \$0 and \$10.

## Question Five



**Figure 13: Would you be interested in receiving the services that JTT.com offers as a gift?**

The fifth question that our survey asked participants whether they would be interested in receiving the services of JobTacToe.com as a gift from a friend, family member, co-worker or colleague. Interestingly enough, only 43% of those who participated from our sponsor's target market thought that this would be a good idea for a gift that they would like to receive.

## 4.2 Focus Group Results

*Similar to the situation involving administering our surveys; focus groups were conducted based on the number of response rates over the course of our research period. Although our team reached out to several different groups, we were only able to conduct one focus group with consisting of 5 college students (ages 19-22), 3 members of the job force (2 employed, 1 under-employed), 5 males and 3 females..*

Unlike the results from the surveys listed above – which gave our team useful insight as to what our sponsor was doing correctly to reach their target market – our findings from the focus group that was conducted was successful in illustrating the exact opposite information. In order for our team to administer the focus group, we consulted Alvin C. Burns and Ronald F. Bush's *Marketing Research, Second Edition*, provided to us by Professor Chickery Kasouf (See for focus group protocol).

The questions that were asked of the focus group participants were similar to those asked in the questionnaires. However, those questions were also tailored based on the feedback from the surveys in order to receive more in depth responses. In addition, participants in the focus groups were given the ability to go online and explore the website during our conversation. The responses that we received from our participants gave us good insight as to what our sponsors could be doing differently to reach their target market.

For example, one of the first questions that we asked our focus group was if they had used internet-based resources for any job searching services – and to explain their decision. Many of the responses from participants indicated that if they did use an outside resource, it was because not only did that service provide tools to craft their documents, but it also aided to increase their exposure to companies (i.e. Monster.com, WPI JobFinder, etc.). In addition, some participants noted that they were drawn to the convenience of being able to post a resume and cover letter on a website – like those named above – and be contacted when an organization was interested in interviewing them.

As a follow-up to the previous question, we then asked the focus group participants if they had paid for the services that they used, and what would determine how much they would be willing to pay. Most participants responded that the amount that they would pay was directly correlated with the effectiveness of the website. Simply stated, the more effective the service was at placing their customers, the more the customers would be willing to pay for it. In addition, participants in our focus group revealed that if there was going to be a fee associated with JobTacToe.com's services, they would not be willing to use the site.

To finish the focus group participants were asked what they would change about the website so that they would be more willing to pay a fee to use it. We received several different kinds of responses on what to change about the website, including;

- “The website needs to be more professional and easier to navigate.”
- “I like the idea but not the way that it is designed.”
- “I feel like I am being talked down to.”
- “It needs to establish its credibility before they charge a fee.”

(verbal communication with focus group, 16 Feb 2012)

Our focus group was successful in allowing us to obtain the information needed to qualify our findings from the surveys. The following section details the implications that our findings have for our sponsor.

### **4.3 Discussion**

*As seen in the sections above, our findings from those who participated in the surveys contradict the findings from those who participated in our focus group. Those differences and the implications for our sponsor will be analyzed in this chapter.*

Based on findings from the first and fourth questions from the survey, our team has found that members of our sponsor’s target market do find value in the services that JobTacToe.com is offering to those who subscribe. However, the feedback obtained from the focus group that was conducted indicated that those participants felt like the user interface utilizing game mechanics implied a certain level of simplicity below their level of comprehension – thus eliminating their interest in using the site. In addition, during our interview with one institution’s Career Development Center’s directors a flaw in the revenue model was addressed; if a subscriber to the website could complete their resume and cover letter within the first month, there was no longer any incentive for them to continue their subscription unless they found more value in the motivation aspect of the website than the other pieces.

The second question in our survey revealed that 94% of participants attend institutions that offer the same services that JobTacToe.com offers. In addition, these services are offered free of

charge to students and alumni. During our focus group discussion, participants noted that their Career Development Center went as far as offering career placement services for their students both before and after graduation. This is a problem for our sponsor because from the beginning, they are out-positioned by their largest competitors, college Career Development Centers.

Based on the feedback from our focus group, we have found that if members of our sponsor's target market do choose to go with an outside resource for job-searching instead of the services that are made available to them for no charge; it is because of the reputation that these resources carry with them. In addition, these websites offer services that go beyond the basics of resume and cover letter design, and offer motivation for subscribers continued use by providing easy access to employers. To begin to compete in this area, the founders of JobTacToe.com need to find a way to establish the website's credibility.

Another important finding from our research was that our sponsors need to find another approach to marketing their product aside from positioning it as a 'gift' that parents can give to their unemployed children. This finding is founded by both the surveys that were administered – showed that only 43% would want to receive this service as a gift from someone – and the focus group that was conducted – participants questioned how useful the site would be in helping them actually obtain employment.

#### **4.4 Summary**

Our research has helped us to better understand how our sponsor's target market views their services. The previous section illustrated both strengths and weaknesses of JobTacToe.com. With these in mind, the following section will conclude our research and propose recommendations to our project sponsors that will maximize the value to both the founders and those who subscribe to the website.

## Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

As a group, our goal in completing this project was to offer our sponsors at JobTacToe.com recommendations to help them develop a marketing plan based upon our research and findings through the use of surveys and focus groups. After the compilation of all of the data and information we gathered and the feedback we received from our focus groups, we had to take a step back from our initial goal to truly determine the viability of the existing website.

In today's weakened economy, the job searching process is a task that many individuals are currently struggling with, and it is a challenge where even the most educated people need assistance. Throughout our research, we came across many businesses whose objective is to assist people find employment by facilitating services pertaining to: resume building, interview protocol, cover letter format, the development of networking skills, providing local job-listings, etc. These companies act as direct competitors to JobTacToe.com. The majority of the sites that we discovered were cost free. One competitive advantage that we observed throughout our research that set JobTacToe.com apart from its competition involved the game dynamic aspect of the website. Due to the fact that there is an immense job searching market on the internet, we concluded that it would be critical for JobTacToe.com to possess a large amount of customer value in order for them to charge a subscription fee. After careful analysis of the information gathered we agreed that the existing website does not provide enough additional value compared to the competitors currently in the market.

Based on our analysis in chapter four, we will present the following recommendations to our sponsors at JobTacToe.com. Our primary recommendation for our sponsors at JobTacToe.com is to use the game dynamic aspect of the site to its advantage, and to create a new game that targets a younger demographic. It will require the most amount of time and work, although we believe

undergoing this drastic change will create a desirable and marketable product that will provide our sponsor and those who subscribe to the website with the most value.

## **5.1 Recommendation #1**

**Change the entire philosophy of the web-site to cater to a younger demographic. By doing this, the target market will be the parents of the kids whom the game is catered to. We believe if JobTacToe.com specializes their service to cater to this younger demographic, the company has more potential to turn a profit and utilize first-mover advantage.**

**To see more of our analysis pertaining to this recommendation and a proposed marketing plan to this recommendation see Appendix I.**

The following recommendations deal with changes to the existing web-site. If recommendation #1 is something that our sponsors do not think is feasible, then undergoing the following changes is essential to the success of JobTacToe.com as it currently exists.

## **5.2 Recommendation #2**

**Change the design of the website to have a more professional appearance.**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the major factors that our research found was deterring potential subscribers from the JobTacToe.com website was that it is visually unattractive to users. Many participants in our focus groups noted that they did like the idea of working step by step through unemployment. However, when shown the website, our participants commented that the design of the website was not something that was appealing to them. Others commented that the website did have some quality information that would be very useful, but felt like they were almost being talked down to. Also, in our meeting with career development professionals we discussed the idea that those who are currently searching for jobs do not take the task lightly. Given the gravity of the situation, the idea of playing a game might be a bit inappropriate in their opinion.

By designing the website so that it has a more clean-cut and professional look to it (while still integrating the achievement and motivation factors from the game-dynamic), we feel that



subscribers would be more likely to take a closer look at the website, and that the founders would have an easier time charging a fee for their services.

### **5.3 Recommendation #3**

#### **Link JobTacToe.com to a proven Resume Building web-site or job board.**

After our extensive research and study into the most effective business approach for JobTacToe.com our group has concluded that while the start-up website has a number of redeemable qualities while standing as an independent website we believe that this business venture would be most effective if coupled with a proven resume building website or job board. We believe that coupling the multiple innovative aspects of JobTacToe.com with a proven, pay for use website would booster the use and effectiveness of the services JobTacToe.com. Ideally, JobTacToe.com would be combined with a website in which Mr. Neece has connections in order to maximize profits and control of the websites services.

After holding focus groups and meeting with the CDC employees our group concluded that JobTacToe.com would be best served to be used as an affordable alternative to PongoResume.com, a resume building website in which Mr. Neece is a co-founder. Just like the services JobTacToe.com offers, PongoResume.com also assists in the “essential steps to job search success – resume and letter writing, interviewing, salary negotiation, and job offer acceptance” (Pongo resume). However, unlike JobTacToe.com, PongoResume.com is currently a pay for use website. In tough economic times such as these a pay for use site may have trouble bringing in new users so coupling the pay for use site with a free service such as JobTacToe.com may be extremely beneficial to both websites. All in all our group believes that if JobTacToe.com is left as it currently is it could not possibly stand alone as a website and still bring in more customers. Our findings show that the services JobTacToe.com are highly sought after but the internet user-face is just too simplistic and

unprofessional. However, we believe, that being able to combine JobTacToe.com with an established website would give this upstart a professional setting along with highly effective services.

## **5.4 Recommendation #4**

**Scrap the original YouTube video, and re-make a much more professional and informative video that contains a concise overview about what the web-site can do for its users. Also, creating a name for the video that has key words is essential to utilize search engine optimization.**

The original video located on YouTube has got to go. When potential customers see a video about a company they are interested in, they want to learn about the services the company can offer along with develop a sense of comfort pertaining to the company itself. Based on the fact the company is a web-based product, maybe having cool graphics and/or enticing visuals would be a cool thing to have. Having an interview with the founders is interesting, yet the background and overall feel of the interview must be much more professional. Promoting confidence and insight is a must. By changing the title of the video to include key words such as; job finder, resume builder, and game dynamics, it will help optimize the number of views that the video will receive.

## **5.5 Summary**

JobTacTom.com is currently a website without a confirmed market. Due to the fact that there are an abundance of other companies that offer similar services for free, we believe that the company does not create enough value for its customers in order to charge a fee, and needs to take a different approach. The main component of JobTacToe.com's competitive advantage is integrating quality information with the game dynamics. We believe that the game dynamics could attract a younger demographic and be a far more marketable product in doing so. If taking this different approach is something our sponsors do not think is feasible, there are a few things we believe the current website can do to attempt to gain new customers, such as: changing the layout and appearance of the game to have a more professional look, linking the website with other established

job searching websites, and attempting to create a viral video. We believe drastic changes have to be made in order for JobTacToe.com to survive. By changing to game to cater to younger individuals to be a re-occurring motivational tool for them throughout their high school career, we believe charging a subscription fee is feasible and the site could create enormous value for this entire demographic.

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## **Appendix A: Sponsor Description**

### **JobTacToe.com**

Our MQP group is doing a study pertaining to the modern day job searching process. The company that we are advising is JobTacToe.com. What differentiates JobTacToe.com from other job listing web-sites is that it is designed as an interactive game that educates people about designing resumes and cover letters, preparing for the interview process, and offers insight about how to make the overall job searching process easier through motivation. The idea to start this website came from Michael Neece's experience in the employment services industry, as was previously the co-founder of the successful resume builder, Pongo.com. In teaming up with Stever Robbins and Caroline Meeks – who brought website design and coding skills along with business experience – they created JobTacToe.com. Their vision for this website is to offer it as a gift that parents can give to their unemployed children who are having trouble finding a job after graduation or after recent unemployment. As it stands, the website has not been as popular among the job searching community as one would hope, despite being references in several online blogs and discussions. As an alumnus of Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Mr. Neece is familiar with the Major Qualifying Project system and wanted to provide a challenging and insightful marketing problem to the students of the WPI School of Business. As consultants to the sponsors of JobTacToe.com, our objective is to develop a marketing strategy that JobTacToe.com can use in an attempt to optimize the number of subscriptions using the projected \$2000 resource budget provided by our sponsors.

### **Michael R. Neece – President & COO, JobTacToe.com**

Michael Neece, a WPI graduate, has created several start-up companies in the career field over the past 20 years, including founding and authoring [www.InterviewMastery.com](http://www.InterviewMastery.com), which is currently being used in over 70 countries (JobTacToe, 2010). His experiences in the corporate world allowed



him to realize the needs and obstacles that the unemployed face, and were the inspiration behind JobTacToe.com

### **Stever Robbins – CEO, JobTacToe.com**

Stever Robbins has extensive experience in career coaching over a wide range of experience levels.

Stever “holds an MBA from the Harvard Business School and a BS in Computer Sciences from MIT” (JobTacToe, 2010). After receiving our completed proposal for a marketing strategy, Stever will utilize his coding expertise to expand JobTacToe.com’s marketing platform.

### **Caroline Meeks – Chief Game Master, JobTacToe.com**

Caroline Meeks holds degrees from MIT and University of Massachusetts at Lowell in Materials Science and Environmental Engineering, respectively. In addition, Caroline is “the founder and CEO of Solution Grove, Inc.”, a company that produces internet-based solutions, with a focus on education (JobTacToe, 2010). As Chief Game Master, Caroline is responsible for coding (along with Stever Robbins), and designing JobTacToe.com’s graphic user interface.

## Appendix B - Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey

<http://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet>

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Annual
2001	4.2	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.3	4.5	4.6	4.9	5.0	5.3	5.5	5.7	
2002	5.7	5.7	5.7	5.9	5.8	5.8	5.8	5.7	5.7	5.7	5.9	6.0	
2003	5.8	5.9	5.9	6.0	6.1	6.3	6.2	6.1	6.1	6.0	5.8	5.7	
2004	5.7	5.6	5.8	5.6	5.6	5.6	5.5	5.4	5.4	5.5	5.4	5.4	
2005	5.3	5.4	5.2	5.2	5.1	5.0	5.0	4.9	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.9	
2006	4.7	4.8	4.7	4.7	4.6	4.6	4.7	4.7	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.4	
2007	4.6	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.4	4.6	4.7	4.6	4.7	4.7	4.7	5.0	
2008	5.0	4.8	5.1	4.9	5.4	5.6	5.8	6.1	6.2	6.6	6.8	7.3	
2009	7.8	8.2	8.6	8.9	9.4	9.5	9.5	9.7	9.8	10.1	9.9	9.9	
2010	9.7	9.7	9.7	9.8	9.6	9.5	9.5	9.6	9.6	9.7	9.8	9.4	
2011	9.0	8.9	8.8	9.0	9.1	9.2	9.1	9.1	9.1	9.0	8.6		

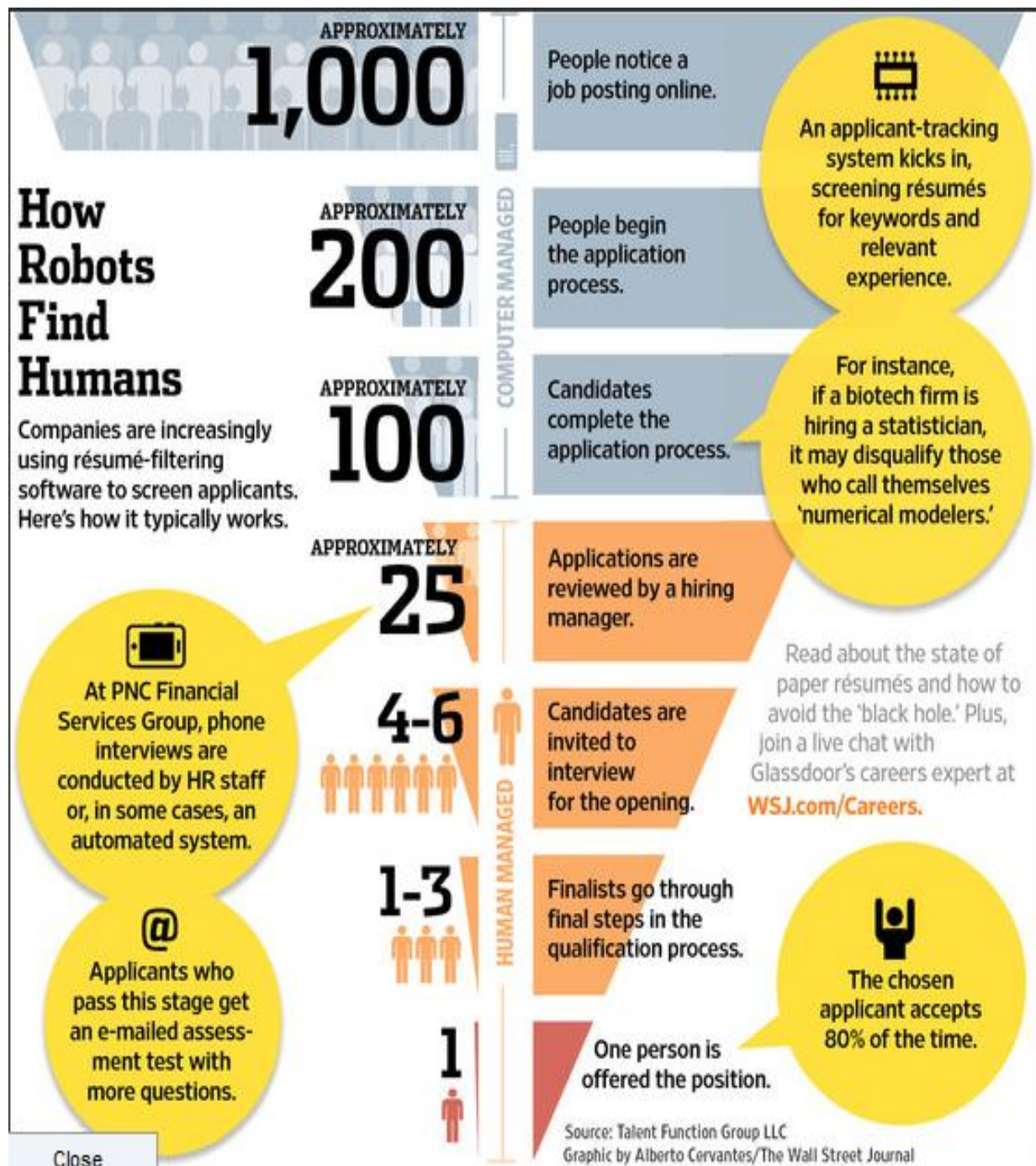
## Appendix C – Share of the unemployed who found jobs by weeks of duration of unemployment, annual averages (1994–2010)

<http://www.bls.gov/opub/ils/pdf/opbils89.pdf>

<b>Table. Share of the unemployed who found jobs by weeks of duration of unemployment, annual averages, 1994–2010</b> (Percent distribution)						
Year	Transitions from unemployed to employed (In thousands)	Less than 5 weeks	5 to 14 weeks	15 to 26 weeks	27 to 52 weeks	53 weeks and over
1994	2,208	47.3	29.0	11.4	8.3	4.0
1995	2,072	50.5	28.6	10.7	6.6	3.5
1996	2,035	52.1	28.8	10.1	6.5	2.6
1997	2,003	52.3	28.9	10.3	6.0	2.5
1998	1,909	54.5	28.5	8.9	5.8	2.4
1999	1,874	55.6	28.3	9.2	5.0	2.0
2000	1,839	56.5	28.2	8.1	4.9	2.1
2001	1,952	55.7	29.0	9.2	4.6	1.6
2002	2,111	47.4	29.8	12.1	8.1	2.6
2003	2,085	44.7	29.1	12.8	9.3	4.1
2004	2,065	45.5	28.6	12.3	9.3	4.3
2005	1,985	47.3	28.7	12.0	8.0	3.9
2006	1,967	49.5	28.5	11.7	7.5	2.8
2007	1,930	49.0	29.7	11.4	7.1	2.8
2008	2,064	47.2	30.4	11.9	7.3	3.2
2009	2,402	38.9	29.1	14.9	12.1	5.1
2010	2,517	34.0	25.9	13.8	15.3	11.0
NOTE: Duration is based on the number of weeks unemployed in the month before becoming employed and, therefore, is somewhat understated.						
SOURCE: Research series from the Current Population Survey.						

## Appendix D – New Company Applicant Screening Process

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204624204577178941034941330.html?KEYWORDS=You+r+resume+vs+oblivion>



## Appendix E – Interview Protocol for Students/ Potential Job Seekers / Alumni

### Questionnaire for Students/ Potential Job Seekers / Alumni

Our Major Qualifying Project group is doing a study pertaining to the modern day job searching process. The company that we are advising has designed an interactive web-site that educates people about designing resumes and cover letters, preparing for the interview process, and offers insight about how to make the overall job searching process easier. The results from our study will allow us to make recommendations to our sponsor that will make this service more beneficial to their subscribers during the job searching process. **Please note that we will not ask you for any personal information or disclose your identity at the completion of this survey.**

**Directions:** Please circle what choice is most appropriate. Please respond as thoroughly as possibly on questions that require a response.

**1. In your opinion, what is the most important aspect of the job finding process? (Rank 1-4; 1 being the most important)**

\_\_\_ Writing a professional resume and cover letter (including receiving professional feedback)

\_\_\_ Learning interview etiquette

\_\_\_ Networking with potential employers or professional mentors

\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Does your Career Development Center provide any of the services above to students both while enrolled and after graduation? (If you have been out of college for more than five years, do they still provide access to employment resources?)**

Yes     No

**2a. Do they charge a fee (not included in tuition) to utilize their services?**

Yes     No

**2b. If yes, how much do they charge?**

\$0     \$1.00 - \$5.00     \$5.00 - \$10.00     \$10.00 - \$15.00     \$15.00 - \$20.00     N/A

**3. Have you ever used a web-site, or other job finding platform, in an attempt to try and find employment? If yes, what web-site and/or platform?**

No     Yes     \_\_\_\_\_

**3a. How much would you be willing to spend on a subscription to the web-site described in the previous question?**

\$0      \$1.00 - \$5.00      \$5.00 - \$10.00      \$10.00 - \$15.00      \$15.00 - \$20.00

**4. Would you be interested in a web-site that is designed as an interactive resource where you could improve your resume and cover letter writing skills as well as well as interviewing techniques?**

Yes      No

**4a. How much would you be willing to spend on a subscription to the web-site described in the previous question?**

\$0      \$1.00 - \$5.00      \$5.00 - \$10.00      \$10.00 - \$15.00      \$15.00 - \$20.00

**5. If a subscription to this website was free, but additional services (such as connections with potential employers, resume promotion, and interactive assistance) was available for a fee, would you be more likely to use it?**

Yes      No

**5a. How much would you pay on a monthly basis to use it?**

\$0      \$1.00 - \$5.00      \$5.00 - \$10.00      \$10.00 - \$15.00      \$15.00 - \$20.00

**6. Would you ever consider buying or like to receive a subscription to JobTacToe.com as a gift for/from a family member, friend, co-worker, or colleague?**

Yes      No

**7. What age bracket do you fall into?**

18-20      21-23      24-25      26-28      29-30      31-35      36-40      41-50      50+

**8. What gender are you:**

Male      Female

**9. What institution do you / did you attend?**

WPI      HC      Becker      WSU      Assumption      Quinsigamond      Anna Maria      Clark

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:**

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We really appreciate your feedback! Go online to learn more about what we are doing @

***www.JobTacToe.com***

## **Appendix F – Interview Protocol for Career Development centers**

### **Questionnaire for CDC**

**Preface:** Our MQP group is doing a study pertaining to the modern day job searching process. The company that we are advising is JobTacToe.com, an interactive web-site that educates people about designing resumes and cover letters, preparing for the interview process, and offers insight about how to make the overall job searching process easier. What differentiates JobTacToe.com from other job listing web-sites is that it is designed as an interactive game, where potential job seekers can advance their writing skills while avoiding the isolating feeling that accompanies the job searching process at the same time. Our objective is to develop a marketing strategy that JobTacToe.com can use in an attempt to optimize the number of subscriptions using the projected resources allocated by our sponsors (\$2000 per year).

**Directions:** Please respond thoroughly

1. What is the Career Development Center's primary goal?
2. What steps do you and your co-workers do in an attempt to find student's employment?
3. Do you use any job listing web-sites to help students find employment?
4. Do you offer programs to help students write professional resumes?
5. Do you offer insight on the interview process?
6. What area, pertaining to the job finding process, should Jobtactoe.com focus its efforts on?
7. Do you think a job finding web-site designed as a game is a good idea?
8. In your opinion, how would you market a website that offers people help finding employment?

## **Appendix G – Interview Protocol for Marketing Professionals**

### **Questionnaire for marketing professionals**

**Preface:** Our MQP group is doing a study pertaining to the modern day job searching process. The company that we are advising is JobTacToe.com, an interactive web-site that educates people about designing resumes and cover letters, preparing for the interview process, and offers insight about how to make the overall job searching process easier. What differentiates JobTacToe.com from other job listing web-sites is that it is designed as an interactive game, where potential job seekers can advance their writing skills while avoiding the isolating feeling that accompanies the job searching process at the same time. Our objective is to develop a marketing strategy that JobTacToe.com can use in an attempt to optimize the number of subscriptions using the projected resources allocated by our sponsors (\$2000 per year).

**Directions:** Please respond thoroughly

1. Please state your background and relevant experience
2. Given the nature of the service that our sponsor is trying to provide, would you recommend using an inbound marketing platform rather than attempting an outbound strategy?
3. What would you recommend to help the company better utilize search engine optimization?
4. Do you believe that integrating social media into this interactive job hunting website adds to the value of what the founders are trying to accomplish?
5. Our sponsors initially had a subscription fee ranging from \$9.99 - \$14.99 as their sole source of revenue. For a service of this nature, do you think that integrating advertisements into the website and lowering or eliminating the subscription fee would be an effective way to attract more traffic through the site?
6. Would you recommend a possible partnership with a major service provider (like monster.com, etc.) so that our service complements that of our partners?



## Appendix H – Worcester Area Colleges and Universities

Note: This table was adapted from City of Worcester. (2011). Colleges & Universities. Retrieved from <http://www.worcesterma.gov/living-working/sites-sounds/colleges-universities>

<b>School</b>	<b>Location</b>
Anna Maria College	88 Prescott St.
Assumption College	500 Salisbury St.
Becker College	61 Sever St.
Clark University	950 Main St.
College of the Holy Cross	1 College St.
Mass College of Pharmacy	25 Foster St.
Quinsigamond Community	670 W. Boylston St
Umass Medical School	55 Lake Ave North
Worcester Polytechnic	100 Institute Rd.
Worcester State	486 Chandler St.

## **Appendix I – Recommendation #1 and Marketing Plan**

Based on our analysis, we believe, as a group, that the entire philosophy of JobTacToe.com has to change. The website has a lot of valuable information that is essential to know when undergoing the job searching process, yet the site lacks credibility. One of the most crucial pieces of feedback that we received from our focus groups was that the idea of integrating game dynamics with the process of finding a job is a very innovative technique that is capable of attracting a specific market, yet professionals and college kids are not it. We believe that the site has potential to be profitable by changing the target market to junior high and high school students. There are an infinite number of websites and organizations that help college kids and middle aged people try and find jobs, by helping them with their personalized resumes and helping them develop interview skills. The internet has created an immense job searching market, a lot of which is cost free. On the other hand, the amount of services that focus on adolescents and high schools kids is much smaller, and therefore, we believe if JobTacToe.com specializes their service to cater to this younger demographic, the company has more potential to turn a profit and utilize first-mover advantage. In 2012, The National Center for Educational Statistics reported that there are approximately 364,000 High School students in Massachusetts (highschools.com). There is a large potential market of young kids who could benefit from the information JobTacToe.com could offer them. By creating a site, designed as a game, which based on our findings is way more enticing to adolescents who have not had significant amounts of exposure to web-based services, that interacts with young minds helping them to create a template where they can assess their accomplishments and introduce them to the world of job searching, the web-site would be a far more marketable product. An idea that was proposed during a networking forum, was that we could customize the game to cater to each individual student. Once the subscription was paid for and the game was about to start, we could

introduce the potential client to a personality questionnaire, such as the Meyers Briggs Type Indicator Survey. In addition, they could input their likes and dislikes pertaining to their education, so that the game could almost begin to understand the student's life direction and goals. We also believe that creating a web-site that caters to a younger demographic will open the door to potential partnerships with high school guidance counselor offices, SAT preparatory instructors, adolescent growth organizations, etc. The idea of creating goals and striving to reach them is a concept that is undervalued in today's society. By creating a company that focuses on the development and intellectual growth of young scholars, the main target market will be the parents of young kids who want their children to begin to transition into thinking about their professional careers. When interviewing Connie Horwitz and Jeanette Doyle, the directors of the WPI's Career Development Center (CDC,) one of their biggest concerns about the current web-site was that a lot of the information on the site is accessible to people for free. They thought that the game aspect of the site was innovative, yet they were concerned it would not be attractive to professionals looking for employment. When the idea of catering the web-site to a younger demographic came up, a conversation ignited pertaining to focusing the web-site's philosophy to try and penetrate the high school market. After all of our research, we concluded that the current web-site does not contain enough value to potential job seekers to pay a subscription fee. The overall feel of the website is too frivolous to appeal to professionals and college kids experiencing the job searching process. Keeping the "cave cash" aspect of the site, while integrating new phases of the game pertaining to assessing past accomplishments, time management skills, leadership, and setting new goals, we believe a new market can be created. Parents of high school kids will jump at the opportunity to better the future of their offspring, and once this product catches on, referrals will be the most beneficial marketing strategy.

## **Marketing Plan for Recommendation #1**

The marketing plan is the heart of any business plan. The need to gather real-time information that helps the entrepreneur continuously shape what is offered to the customer, how it is communicated to the customer, and how it creates value and is conveniently delivered to the customer is essential to sustain business growth (Cornwall, Pg. 108). After conducting our market research and analyzing our data, the next step was for us to translate this information into a marketing plan by figuring out how JobTacToe.com would carry out the operational aspect of the business and how the company will manage their financial resources with the goal of trying to sustain a strong client base. With the proposed budget of \$2000.00, an extravagant marketing strategy is highly unlikely. As previously stated, by creating a company that focuses on the development and intellectual growth of young scholars, the main target market will be the parents of young kids who want their children to begin to transition into thinking about their professional careers. In order to try and get the attention of “soccer moms,” various marketing techniques can be used to try and establish a client base. We believe that a strong initial push in the early phase of the business would be a valuable idea, but once the name starts to emerge in various communities, the majority of the growth phase will be referral based. Taking advantage of free media coverage in the community through strong public relations would be a must to jump start the company. Paying to appear in school newsletters, community newspapers, and magazines whose main target market is women with children, all might be great ways to market the company’s name. Paying a well known, established individual to be the spokesperson for the site may create buzz about the company and get people interested in at least checking out the web-site. One reference that kept coming up when conducting our research on finding good marketing strategies is getting in with the “yoga mom” crowd. All lot of middle aged women in today’s society are beginning to try yoga, and are doing so in groups. The women are usually between the ages of 25-45 with one to two children. By focusing on

these types of women, if the word gets out to one of them, all of them will hear about it one way or another. Also, once a little capital is made, maybe spending money to create a professional commercial would be a good idea. Another approach in attempting to enter a specific adolescent market would be to offer a trial of the games services to an individual school district. In doing so, our sponsors would be able to test the product. One example would be to offer a trial run in a vocational school, where students would be less likely to receive career development assistance. We believe creating a web-site that caters to a younger demographic will open the door to potential partnerships with high school guidance counselor offices, SAT preparatory instructors, adolescent growth organizations, etc.

Lastly, if our sponsors do not think they can effectively carry out the proposed marketing strategy catered to this younger demographic, they could try and license the rights to the game to an educational learning organization such as Scholastic or even individual school systems themselves.