

America's First Employment Newspaper Celebrates 25 Years

At a time when declining ad revenues have major newspapers struggling for survival, one of the original niche publications to challenge the dailies' dominance in classified advertising is celebrating the 25th anniversary of its first edition. Since the inaugural issue hit the newsstands in the first week of 1983, Sacramento-based California Job Journal has published over 1100 weekly editions and is currently read by more than 220,000 jobseekers a month throughout Northern California.

Classified advertising, and recruitment advertising in particular, has long been a robust revenue stream for news dailies. But this sector has been in freefall since the proliferation of Web-based services like Craigslist and Yahoo/Hotjobs. The industry has responded to the rising tide of red ink with mass layoffs, offshoring of jobs, and mergers.

While California Job Journal is not immune to the pressures facing the recruitment advertising industry, a corporate culture embracing innovation has served the small, woman-owned company well over the last quarter century.

"By ignoring the conventional wisdom of the newspaper industry, we've built a culture that fosters and quickly implements promising ideas. While not all of them work, overall those ideas have allowed our company to stay competitive despite limited resources," comments founder and publisher Kathy Masera.

Masera's background was in job placement, not newspapers, so from the beginning CJJ was created as an employment services company as opposed to an advertising publication. At the time the Job Journal was launched from Masera's Sacramento-area home, it was the first alternative employment paper in the country. Today, a variation on the Job Journal idea can be found in every major US city.

In 1983, newspaper recruitment ads were buried in the classified pages between garage sales and used cars. Masera's Job Journal compelled the newspaper industry to look at the recruitment market differently. Within a few years, newspaper employment ads

became stand-alone sections with employment-focused editorial content similar to that found in California Job Journal.

Masera's publication pioneered several innovative concepts that were adopted by many newspapers nationwide. These innovations became standards for virtually all recruitment websites by the end of the 1990's, including Monster and Careerbuilder:

- CJJ introduced the concept of charging a flat rate per job listing rather than pricing ads by the number of lines. This novel fee structure was designed to encourage employers to provide more details for jobseekers, leading to the expansive job descriptions that are now the norm online and in print.
- The Job Journal was the first to categorize jobs by skill set instead of simply listing them alphabetically as was the print advertising practice.
- CJJ was the first paper in the US to feature employer logos in their classified ads.

Recognition for the company, in the form of numerous industry awards and accolades, began in the '80s and continues to this day. But while California Job Journal's industry-changing innovations helped establish its reputation early on, the key to the company's longevity has been its ability to adapt to market and economic changes.

- In 1983, the ads in the Job Journal were free to employers, and jobseekers paid \$8.95 for the paper. When that business model proved unsustainable, Masera switched to distribution as a free insert in 20 Northern California newspapers (similar to Parade Magazine) building a weekly circulation of 375,000. However, the high cost of co-printing so many copies became burdensome during the recession of the early '90s, so the model changed again, this time to free distribution through street boxes and retail outlets.
- In 1987, after publishing the paper from her home for over four years, Masera secured millions in venture capital -- no small feat for a woman-run company at the time. Rapid expansion followed, and CJJ soon generated millions in revenue and employed 44. Overhead grew from \$25,000 to \$250,000 a month in less than two years.

- When a recession took hold in 1991, the venture capitalists believed CJJ would not meet their profitability timetable, so they pulled out. Masera was forced to secure private financing to keep the company from going under.
- In 1992, the company put together the Sacramento region's first job fair, attracting 8,000 appreciative jobseekers and 51 local employers. Recognizing the business potential, Masera created a new division to produce job fairs. To date, HIREvents has produced over 215 job fairs in Northern California.
- In 1998, Masera's company went online as JobJournal.com. The website's depth and exclusive 'CareerClix' functionality make it a favorite among career counselors and jobseekers, and it too has won numerous regional and national awards.

Equally important to the company's staying power is its small but fiercely loyal staff. Again, Masera's ability to adapt paid off: Staffers sometimes began their tenure in jobs that didn't always suit their skills. Drawing on her employment counseling background, Masera was able to analyze their strengths and switch their roles or create new ones that capitalized on those assets. Of her 16 full-time employees, eight have been with the company for 10 to 25 years.

When recruiting new employees, Masera looks for creativity and a strong work ethic, but not newspaper experience. "We have survived all these years by rejecting the status quo and promoting innovative thinking," she explains. "Newspaper people carry a mind-set that just doesn't work in this environment. They really don't understand recruitment, so they just don't last here."

One trait her employees share is a desire to make a difference, not just a living. "Knowing that the services you provide are actually being used by people to better their lives is a great feeling, and it helps carry you through the challenges," Masera confides. "My staff brings that feeling to work with them every day."

###