Need a New Job? Check Out a Blog.

By EILENE ZIMMERMAN

ARY FELDMAN was vice president of strategic planning at 141 Worldwide, a Manhattan marketing and advertising agency, when he received an e-mail message last spring from HotJobs.com listing opportunities that might be of interest to him. Although he rarely gave such notices a second glance, he said, a position as director in the New York office of the marketing research and consulting firm Cheskin caught his eye. He followed a link to the company's Web log, or blog, and read the job description.

"It wasn't typical, it was cool," Mr. Feldman said. "It sounded like the person who wrote it really knew what the job was and understood the business. It was written by someone you would want to talk to."

The blog entries of others at Cheskin intrigued him. "I got the sense this was a company where the employees really enjoyed their work," said Mr. Feldman, who was hired in June. "If I had not read the blog I doubt I would have applied."

Five years ago, few people had heard of blogs — online journals that are commonly used to chronicle the lives and opinions of their authors. Now, more than two million Americans are blogging, according to a study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project — and blogging is spreading in the job market, said hiring managers and experts who study blogging.

There is no conclusive data on the spread of blogs to the job market, largely because they are difficult to track, said Michael Gartenberg, a vice president and research director at JupiterResearch in New York who covers blogs. But based on anecdotal information, he said, people are using blogs on both sides of the job search process.

"It's a trend on the rise right now," Mr. Gartenberg said, "especially for employers, who get a much better sense of a person this way. Résumés and interviews are a very scripted process; read someone's Web log and you get a good sense of that person's thinking and perspectives."

Alexander C. Halavais, a professor in the School of Informatics at the State University of New York at Buffalo who studies blogs, also expects blogs to play a larger role in the job market. "Right now," Professor Halavais said, "recruiting this way is invisible, it's not institutional yet. But I would be surprised if, fairly soon, we didn't see blogs become a much bigger part of job searching and recruiting."

Job seekers use blogs to establish a strong online presence, display their skills and advertise their availability. For many just out of college, the blog is an essential networking tool because it is common for bloggers to link back and forth to others with recent posts. Corporate recruiters, in turn, use blogs to draw in qualified candidates, and they search for potential hires by reading bloggers who write about topics relevant to a particular industry.

A driving factor behind job market blogging is the search engine Google, said Elizabeth Lawley, associate professor of information technology at the Rochester Institute of Technology. "If you are thinking of
interviewing someone, it's almost standard now to Google them online and see what you find," Ms. Lawley said. "If that person has a blog, it's usually the first thing that comes up."

Official corporate blogs are still rare, said John Palfrey, executive director of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at the Harvard Law School, largely because "corporate marketing and branding is often an exercise in hypercontrol of a message, and that doesn't work well in a blogging context."

Some businesses do allow their employees to blog individually, however, provided they make it clear that they are operating independently of the company.

About 50 of 600 employees blog at ThoughtWorks, a Chicago-based company that builds business software systems, and any industry-related topic — other than the core intellectual property of clients — is fair game. Its employee blogs have attracted a dedicated readership — and some job applicants. "It's a little like a prescreening," said Roy Singham, the company's chief executive. "We're looking for needles in haystacks, and the blog is like a massive magnet."

Carl Ververs became one of those needles when a friend suggested that he look at the ThoughtWorks Web site, and Mr. Ververs came upon the blog of the company's chief scientist, Martin Fowler. "I started reading Martin's blog and saw a posting where he admitted he didn't know what was going on with something related to database programming," Mr. Ververs said. "He wrote that he was always looking to better himself and learn new things and so questioned his previous assumptions. I thought, 'If this is the chief scientist's attitude, I want to work there.' Reading his blog was a critical turning point for me." Mr. Ververs was hired as a software integration architect in July.

At Microsoft, several hundred employees blog using a portal hosted by Microsoft Communities. The company has no official blog or blogging policy, but the unofficial practice has been a boon to the company's recruiters.

"I have great candidates in process that have resulted from blogging," wrote Heather Hamilton, a senior marketing recruiter at the company, who posted her note in May on Heather's Marketing at Microsoft Blog. "Personally I think blogging is going to change the way companies recruit."

Gretchen Ledgard, a recruiter for technical jobs at Microsoft and the creator, with Zoe Goldring, of the Technical Careers @ Microsoft blog, called job candidates' entries in her blog "living résumés." Ms. Ledgard said she also kept a file of interesting bloggers and read them regularly, expecting that some will become job candidates.

For unemployed job seekers, there is little risk in announcing a return to the job market through a blog. But for those currently working but searching for a new job, there are risks. "The rule of thumb is, if you don't want anyone at the company to know you're looking, don't post it on your blog," Professor Halavais said. "It's one of the biggest mistakes employed job seekers make."

Job seekers who prefer to look at others' postings can find blogs relevant to them using search engines, or Web sites like Bloglines.com.

Another approach is to simply blog intelligently about your work or industry, Professor Halavais said. "Those looking to hire will notice you through your blog as a passive candidate, and that's often a much better way to find a job."

That is the approach taken by Hugh MacLeod, creative director at Alcazar, an advertising agency in Newcastle, England. Mr. MacLeod's blog, gapingvoid.com, contains his cartoon work and blogs about the advertising industry and other topics.
"The blog has started lots of conversations about jobs," Mr. MacLeod said. "It's like flypaper, and now I'm in the midst of one of these conversations with a large advertising firm in Manhattan. They saw my site and blog and contacted me."

He added: "That's the advantage of blogging — if you do it well and have interesting things to say, people pay attention."