



1. Historical Hiring Trends Probably Won't Apply

In years past, we've typically seen hiring surges at the start of a new year and again in the fall, while the summer and holiday seasons have tended to be slower. But this may not be the case in 2021.

"We probably won't be able to depend on past hiring patterns across the board," says Charlette Beasley, Workplace Analyst at Fit Small Business, a digital resource for small business owners. "Some industries that haven't been affected as much by the pandemic may still experience similar hiring trends as they have in previous years, but we should anticipate a downward trend at the start of the year for industries that struggled to adapt to [COVID-related] restrictions."

On the bright side, Beasley expects hiring to pick up again in the second or third quarter of the year on the heels of a widely available vaccine and lifted restrictions on travel, dining, and socializing.

How to Adapt

Keep an eye on trends. In a slower hiring market, the more you know about who is (and isn't) hiring, the better. To stay on top of what's happening, check out news and industry sites that monitor business and hiring trends (sign up for their newsletters if they have them), follow companies you're interested in on LinkedIn, and pay attention to the types of job postings you're seeing on job boards (and the types of companies posting them). If you aren't sure where to start, reach out to people in your network who also work in the space you're targeting to ask them how they stay on top of industry trends.

Adjust your job search accordingly. "You may need to consider applying for positions you wouldn't have considered in the past," Beasley says. This could mean branching out into a new industry, taking on some freelance work, finding creative ways to update your skill set, or trying out different job search strategies.

Stay in touch with your network. "Job seekers sometimes think that when hiring slows down, they can too. But that's actually the perfect time to reach out to your network to tell them how grateful you are for their advice, provide a seasonal update, or let them know where you are in your job search," says Neepa Parikh, Career Services Manager at Springboard, an online learning platform for students looking to transition into software engineering, data science, machine learning, and UI/UX. "It's important to keep your contacts warm so that you can hopefully leverage their support when hiring picks up again." (Full disclosure: I'm a career coach at Springboard.)

2. Key Industries Will Be Booming

"Hiring trends are likely going to vary depending on industry and company size," Parikh says. "Bigger companies that have enough cash flow and booming industries like tech and healthcare may see hiring surges at the beginning of the year, while smaller businesses or those in impacted industries like service and hospitality may hold off hiring until summer."

That means that 2021 may be the year to step out of your industry comfort zone or take the leap into a career pivot—especially if you want to increase your chances of landing a job more quickly or if you were already considering a career change.

Here are some key industries to watch, according to experts:

Tech: 2020 was a big year for tech companies, largely because they don't rely on physical storefronts for business and can often operate almost entirely online, as most of their employees can work from home. And "the technology industry will continue dominating the market" in 2021, says Cristina de la Cruz, Regional Vice President of Robert Half Technology, a Bay Area-based human resources consulting firm.

Healthcare and health tech: "The healthcare and tech industries will continue to expand as the pandemic continues to make society more health-conscious and reliant on technology," Beasley says. Look for hiring across a wide variety of healthcare-focused organizations, including frontline providers and virtual medical care. We should also start gaining back some of the preventive care jobs that were lost in 2020.

Fintech: "Even before the pandemic, the financial services industry was trending toward online banking. COVID accelerated the transition away from a brick-and-mortar presence, so we'll likely see more jobs in the online banking and fintech sectors," Parikh says.

E-commerce: You know all of that online shopping we've been doing? It's had an impact. "We're going to see an increased focus on e-commerce and consumer goods, as there's been a rise in people buying products rather than services," Parikh says. Companies that were already online or were able to navigate the transition to selling almost exclusively through the web will likely continue adding headcount to meet demand into 2021.

Customer service: "There's going to be a lot of demand around anything involving customer service," says Todd Baval, CEO of Integrity Staffing Solutions, an agile recruiting and staffing firm. This should translate into increased demand for customer service representatives across a variety of industries, but most notably software (as companies continue to rely on virtual business and remote work) and retail (as consumers continue to do the majority of shopping online).

Renewable energy: This industry has been trending upward for a while as we've become increasingly aware of the climate crisis. And it looks like climate change will be a top priority for the new presidential administration, so it's likely that we'll see growth in the green energy space.

While these are some of the larger industries to watch, this isn't an exhaustive list. De la Cruz also pointed out that a variety of leading industries across the finance, accounting, and legal spaces will continue hiring in 2021.