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CAREERS GUIDE



The Marketing Job Search Playbook

Find, land, and start your first marketing role

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I hire and interview marketers for a living. I am the person on the other side of the table reading your resume, opening your portfolio, and grading your test task. That vantage point is the whole reason this guide exists. Most job-search advice is written by people who have never had to reject 200 applicants to fill one seat. I have, and I want you inside my head while you search.

This guide is about the search itself, not the craft. Learning to run ads or write emails is a different project. Here we cover how to actually find openings, get replies, survive the test task, handle interviews, and sign an offer you feel good about. It is written for the US market and for people early in their marketing careers. Read it once end to end, then keep it open as a checklist while you work.

Get search-ready before you apply to anything

The biggest mistake I see is spraying applications before there is anything worth applying with. A week spent getting search-ready saves you two months of silence. Getting ready means three things: knowing what role you are actually going for, having one page of proof that you can do it, and having your basic materials tightened so a hiring manager can say yes quickly.

Pick a lane first. Marketing is not one job. Paid acquisition, lifecycle and email, content, SEO, social, and analytics are different roles with different tools and different interview questions. Early on you can be a generalist, but your application needs to point at one specific thing per company. A resume that says you do everything reads as someone who does nothing yet.

- Write a one-line positioning statement: who you help, with what, and the proof. Example: entry-level paid social marketer who ran a real Meta campaign for a local business and cut cost per lead by a third.
- Build one page of proof. A single case study, a small project, a spreadsheet with real numbers, or a teardown of a brand's funnel. Something a stranger can open in 60 seconds.
- Clean up your LinkedIn headline and About section so they match the lane you picked, not a vague student summary.
- Set up a simple email address and a folder or tracker to log every application. You will apply to more roles than you think.

FROM THE HIRING SIDE

When I open an application, I am scanning for one clear signal that you can do the specific job I posted. If I have to guess what you are good at, I move on. The candidates who get replies made my decision easy in the first ten seconds.

Build proof that gets replies

You do not need a job to have proof. This is the part beginners underestimate. A portfolio for a first marketing role is not a slick agency website. It is evidence that you have done the actual work, even at small scale, and that you can think about results, not just activity.

The strongest proof involves real money or real audiences, even tiny amounts. A 50 dollar ad test on your own product, a newsletter you grew to 200 subscribers, a landing page you built and split-tested, or a documented campaign for a friend's small business all beat a certificate. Certificates show you attended. Projects show you can operate.

- 1 Pick one real or realistic scenario: a local business, your own side project, or a brand you use and understand well.
- 2 Do the work: run a small campaign, build a content plan, write the emails, or audit an existing funnel with specific recommendations.
- 3 Track what happened with honest numbers. Spend, clicks, cost per result, open rate, whatever fits. Include the misses, not just the wins.
- 4 Write it up as a short case study: the goal, what you did, what happened, and what you learned or would change.
- 5 Put it somewhere shareable with one link. A clean doc, a Notion page, or a simple PDF is plenty.

FROM THE HIRING SIDE

A candidate who shows me a 50 dollar campaign that lost money but explains exactly why, and what they changed, impresses me more than one who claims a huge win with no detail. I am hiring judgment. Honest numbers signal judgment.

Where the jobs are and how to find them

Openings live in more places than the big job boards, and the channel you use changes your odds. Public boards have the most jobs and the most competition. Communities and cold outreach have fewer listings but far less competition and much warmer intros. A good search uses several channels at once.

Where to find marketing roles and how to work each channel

Channel	Best for	How to work it
LinkedIn Jobs	Volume and easy filtering	Set alerts, apply within 24 to 48 hours of posting, and message the poster or a team member after applying
General boards (Indeed, ZipRecruiter)	Wide net, local roles	Use saved searches with specific titles, apply fast, keep expectations realistic on reply rate
Startup boards (Wellfound, YC jobs)	Early-stage roles that hire on potential	Great for first jobs since small teams value scrappiness over pedigree
Marketing communities and Slack groups	Warm, low-competition leads	Be active and helpful for weeks before you need a job, then watch the jobs channels
Company career pages	Roles not yet cross-posted	Make a shortlist of 15 to 20 target companies and check them weekly
Cold outreach	Roles that are not posted at all	Message hiring managers directly with a specific, useful opener

Cold outreach works better than beginners expect, because most people do it badly. The trick is to lead with something useful and specific, not a request. Do not send a resume and ask for a job. Send a short note that shows you looked at their marketing and had a real thought about it.

- Find the actual person: the marketing lead, growth manager, or founder at a small company.
- Open with one specific observation about their marketing, not a compliment. Reference a real ad, email, or page you saw.
- State clearly what you want in one sentence and attach your one link.
- Keep it under 120 words. Long cold messages get skimmed and dropped.

Tailor your resume and a short cover note

Your resume has one job: get you to a conversation. It is not your autobiography. For a marketing role, it should be one page, easy to scan, and heavy on outcomes. Every bullet should ideally answer what you did and what happened as a result. If you have no job experience yet, your projects and case study carry the weight, and that is completely fine for a first role.

- Lead each bullet with a strong verb and end with a result or a number where you honestly have one.
- Mirror the language of the job posting. If they say lifecycle marketing, do not only say email.
- List real tools you have touched, and do not pad the list with things you cannot discuss.
- Put your proof link at the top near your contact info so it never gets missed.
- Cut anything older or unrelated that pushes you past one page.

On cover notes: a long formal cover letter is dead for most marketing roles. What works is three to five sentences in the application field or the outreach message. Say which role, why you specifically fit it, and point to your proof. That is it.

FROM THE HIRING SIDE

I can tell in one line whether a note is copy-pasted. When someone references the actual role and one real thing about our product or funnel, I read the whole thing and usually open their link. Generic enthusiasm gets nothing from me.

Ace the test task

For marketing roles, the test task is often where the real hiring decision gets made. Companies use it to see how you think and whether you can produce something usable. This is your best chance as a beginner, because it rewards effort and judgment over years on a resume. Take it seriously and it can beat candidates with more experience.

- 1 Read the brief twice and restate the goal in one sentence before you start. Solving the wrong problem beautifully still fails.
- 2 If the brief is vague, ask one or two sharp clarifying questions. That is a plus, not a bother.
- 3 Time-box the work. If they say two hours, do not spend twelve. They are also testing how you scope effort.
- 4 Show your reasoning, not just the output. A short note on why you made each choice is often what wins.
- 5 State your assumptions and what you would do next with more time or data.
- 6 Proofread and format it cleanly. Sloppy presentation reads as sloppy work.

FROM THE HIRING SIDE

I am not looking for the perfect answer. I am looking for how you break down a problem, whether you can explain your choices, and whether I would trust you with a budget. A clear thought process with a modest output beats a flashy deliverable with no reasoning.

One honest note: if a test task looks like unpaid real work, has no clear scope, and would take days, it is reasonable to ask for a smaller sample or to decline. Good companies keep test tasks focused and short.

Interview prep and questions to ask

Interviews for marketing roles test three things: do you understand the fundamentals, can you think on your feet, and are you someone the team wants around. Prepare for all three. Do not just rehearse answers about yourself. Be ready to talk about their business and to reason out loud about a problem you have never seen.

- Research the company's product, audience, and how they seem to acquire customers. Come with one observation and one question about it.
- Have two or three stories ready that show a result, a failure you learned from, and how you work with others.
- Be ready to explain a metric simply. If you say you improved cost per acquisition, know exactly what that means and how you moved it.
- Practice thinking out loud on a made-up scenario, since many interviewers will hand you one.

The questions you ask matter as much as your answers. Good questions signal that you think like an operator and that you are evaluating them too. It also protects you from taking a bad job.

- What does success in this role look like in the first 90 days?
- How is the marketing team structured, and who would I work with most?
- What is the biggest marketing challenge you are facing right now?
- How do you measure the impact of this role, and what tools and budget would I have?
- What has caused people to succeed or struggle in this role before?

FROM THE HIRING SIDE

When a candidate asks what success looks like at 90 days, I lean in. It tells me they are already picturing themselves doing the work well, not just trying to get hired. Candidates who ask nothing feel passive to me.

Salary negotiation, rejection, and follow-up

Negotiation for a first role is not aggressive haggling. It is a calm, informed conversation. The single most useful thing you can do is know the market range before you talk numbers. In the US you can research typical pay by title, level, and city, and many states now require salary ranges in the posting itself. Walk in with a number backed by data, not a wish.

- 1 Before any offer talk, learn the realistic range for the role in that market and level.
- 2 Let them name a number first when you reasonably can. If pushed, give a researched range, not a single low figure.
- 3 When the offer comes, thank them, ask for a day to consider, and do not accept on the spot.
- 4 If you counter, anchor slightly above your target and tie it to your value, not your needs.
- 5 Consider the whole package: base, bonus, equity, benefits, remote flexibility, and growth. Get the final offer in writing.

You will get rejected, often with silence. That is the job search, not a verdict on you. The professional move is to keep the door open. A short, gracious follow-up after a no has landed people the next opening more than once in my experience.

- After a rejection, reply once and briefly, thank them, and ask to be considered for future roles.
- If you got far in the process, it is fair to ask for one piece of honest feedback. Some will share it.
- Do not argue a rejection. It never reverses the decision and it closes the door.
- Track who rejected you and revisit those companies in a few months. Situations change.

FROM THE HIRING SIDE

I keep a short list of strong candidates I could not hire this time. When a new seat opens, I message them before I post the job. A polite follow-up after a no is exactly how you get on that list.

Your weekly job-search routine

A job search fails when it is random. Some weeks you binge applications, then burn out and go quiet for ten days. A steady weekly rhythm beats sporadic bursts every time, because momentum compounds and follow-ups actually happen. Treat the search like a part-time job with set hours. Here is a routine that keeps volume up without wrecking your quality or your morale.

A sustainable weekly job-search rhythm

Day	Focus	Concrete actions
Monday	Find and sort	Review job alerts, add new openings to your tracker, shortlist 8 to 12 roles worth real effort
Tuesday	Apply with care	Send 4 to 6 tailored applications with a short custom note each, quality over volume
Wednesday	Outreach	Send 3 to 5 cold or warm messages to hiring managers and people at target companies
Thursday	Deep work	Do any test task, improve your case study, or prep for upcoming interviews
Friday	Follow up and learn	Follow up on last week's applications, reply to any threads, note what got replies and adjust
Weekend	Reset	Rest, learn one small skill, and review your tracker so Monday starts fast

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Get search-ready first: pick one lane, build one page of proof, and tighten your materials before applying.
- Real projects with honest numbers beat certificates and generic resumes every time.
- Use several channels at once, and remember cold outreach and communities have the least competition.
- Tailor every application, keep the note to a few sentences, and lead with your proof link.
- On test tasks and in interviews, show your reasoning, not just the output. That is what I am buying.
- Know the market pay range before you negotiate, and keep every rejection open with a gracious follow-up.
- Run a steady weekly routine instead of random bursts. Consistency is what actually lands the role.

Your next step

If this guide helped, go deeper with my free Udemy course on breaking into marketing, where I walk through the search and the craft with real examples. You can also read more tactical breakdowns in the careers articles on shenshin.co. Pick one action from the weekly routine and do it today. Momentum beats planning, and the search rewards the people who keep showing up.

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