

Angry job seekers who ‘rage apply’ end up sabotaging themselves

Pause before mass-sending applications. The job hunt should be intentional, not reactive.

Sriram Iyer

In the workplace, 2022’s buzzphrase was “quiet quitting”, where employees just do the bare minimum at work and give higher priority to their private lives. This year, a new phrase has gained prominence: “rage applying”.

Rage applying shares a link with quiet quitting, espoused by an individual who feels disconnected from their job, whether because they were overlooked for promotion, unsupported by a supervisor or simply feel under-appreciated.

Rather than withdraw into zombie mode, however, he or she aggressively sends out a flurry of online applications for a range of roles in the hope of flipping the bird and walking away from the old job and into a new position.

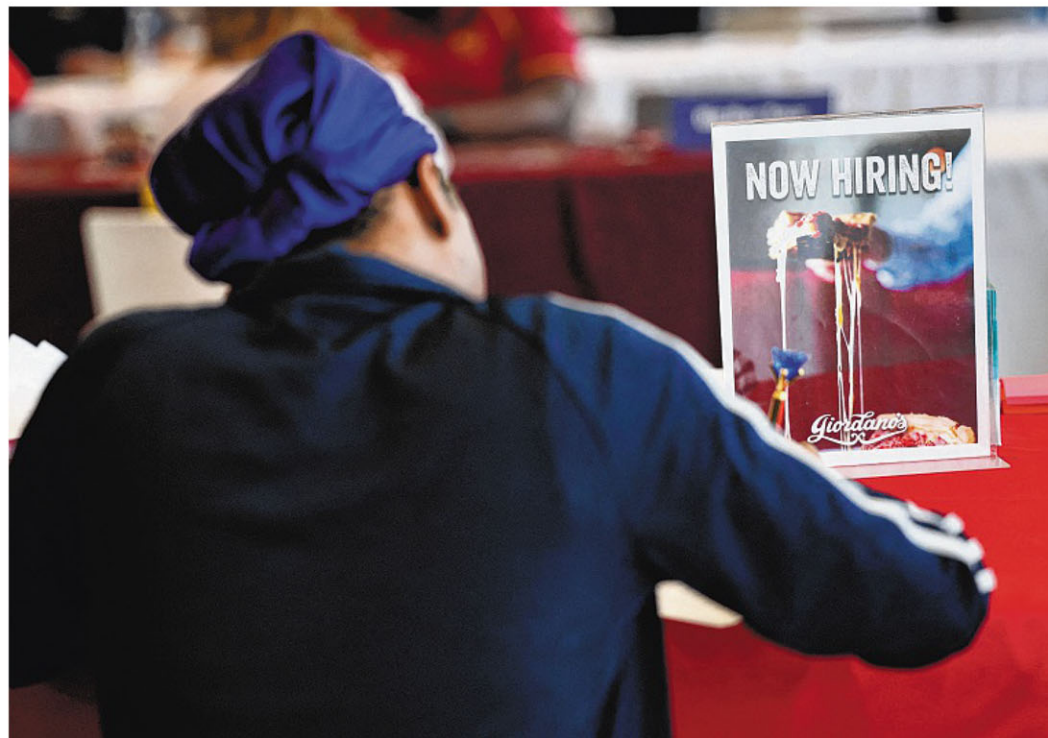
Young professionals on TikTok have been fuelling the craze, sharing the results of their rage-apply approach, and the trend has gotten quite a bit of attention.

“I got mad at work and I rage applied to 15 jobs,” said TikTok user @redweez in a video popularising the catchphrase. The subsequent US\$25,000 (S\$33,340) pay bump she received seemed to validate this strategy.

Those of us with more years of working experience might chalk this off as a fad making a mountain out of a molehill, thinking this is little different from the “spray-and-pray” strategy where first-time applicants send out a multitude of resumes hoping to score any job they can find. But while spray-and-pray may be driven by fear and job insecurity, rage applying is driven by the feeling of being deeply unhappy at work and the desire for some form of action to validate one’s value.

This sentiment may come into sharper focus after companies have dished out the annual performance bonuses and aggrieved employees who feel they deserve better search for better prospects.

Doing so can appear costless. Features on many online job platforms allowing people to just drop a CV to complete an application can give the false impression that a job search is a simple click away. In a hot job market, offers may even come fast and furious. Forty-two per cent of



In a fiercely competitive job market, possessing a stronger mastery of one’s work can help a candidate stand out from others with comparable qualifications, says the writer. PHOTO: AFP

employers in Singapore surveyed by Manpower Group say they plan to hire more people in the second quarter of 2023.

IT’S NOT JUST THE CV, IT’S YOUR SKILLS

But my advice to both young and experienced job seekers is to pause before you hit the send button on your job application blitz list.

Little good can come out of reacting and hitting hiring managers with the same standard application. Worse, it can backfire and kill your chances of securing a decent position aligned with your long-term career goals.

Recruiters in Singapore tell me they have noticed an overwhelming number of applications from the same candidates for various posts in the past year. Many have blacklisted those haphazardly applying for multiple roles – a red flag suggesting such candidates are not genuinely interested in a specific job but are applying out of desperation to get out of the one they have.

The use of artificial intelligence in applicant tracking services to screen out resumes also means carpet-bombing recruiters with generic CVs instead of spending time to build a persuasive case that makes you stand out is a sure-fire way to get rejected.

What hiring managers look out for is competent talent with good

fit and can show relevant experience for the role even if they come from a different job family. A public relations officer might have portable skills for a range of roles in advertising, editorial or public policy. An investment banker might pivot to consultancy or fund management. But signalling seriousness about the role and fit requires tailoring the CV to highlight specific projects, professional achievements or responsibilities demonstrating certain skills, savvy and seniority.

CAUGHT OUT

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Rage applying might be successful for entry-level roles where most applicants have similar qualifications and skill sets. But in roles requiring more experience, employers look for people who can bring to the table the skills and competencies suitable for the role and show they are excited about the post – signals that a generic application will fail to convey.

A customised approach drawing out their specific industry expertise, tenure of experience and seniority level on the corporate ladder is more likely to produce positive outcomes and secure a good match.

NETWORK EVEN BEFORE YOU WANT ANOTHER JOB

I suggest job seekers take the long route and seek out suitable opportunities through networks and personal contacts who can vouch for your credibility and fit.

More companies are relying on employee referrals to fill open roles. Hiring managers may be more cautious and risk-averse if Singapore heads into a technical recession as forecast.

This is a vital strategy requiring upstream investments in active networking even when you are gainfully employed to foster trust, find opportunities to demonstrate competence and seek useful advice from insiders.

By strengthening their network, individuals can acquire entry to

unadvertised job positions, enhance their personal branding and obtain new insights on business trends and employment prospects. Almost half of those polled in Singapore by the Institute of Policy Studies in a January 2023 study say they are building contacts in areas where they would like to work.

Yet most people engage with contacts only at the point where they seek employment, which often fails to produce positive outcomes.

INVEST IN YOUR SKILLS

You can also maximise your chances of securing your dream role by consistently investing in your professional development. The reality is that employers are constantly on the lookout for candidates who can not only perform their current job responsibilities, but are also capable of adapting to new roles and challenges as their organisation evolves, even before a role is created.

I cannot emphasise how critical it is to put yourself through training and upskilling to keep ahead of change in the industry you want a role in. This is partly the reason why many job candidates hoping to pivot take up a master’s degree or sign up for classes focused on developments in their sector.

Even more need soft skills to do well in an economy undergoing restructuring. Employers here say they value digital, analytical and soft skills, according to a Google and Economist Impact study released last month.

Such learning and development opportunities can also unlock new career possibilities, leading to more advanced positions or specialisation within their areas of expertise. In a fiercely competitive job market, possessing a stronger mastery of one’s work can help a candidate stand out from others with comparable qualifications.

The bottom line: job seekers should avoid relying solely on oft-used scattergun job search approaches like rage applying. Instead, they should focus on customised and innovative job strategies that align with their career goals to increase their chances of finding meaningful employment that meets their career aspirations.

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