

Why AI is making it harder to get a job and what to do about it

By [Mark Germishuys](#)

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As the candidate pool fills up through rampant job cuts, more companies are relying on artificial intelligence to screen potential hires.



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In 2012 the Department of Higher Education and Training launched the [on Skills Supply and Demand in South Africa March 2019.pdf Labour Market Intelligence Partnership](#) project which intended to provide reliable scientific data indicating the skills needs, skills demands and skills supply in the South African labour market. This project was spearheaded by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and included a consortium of academics from the likes of UCT and Wits. Data would be used to fulfill national government's skills planning needs which establishes the framework guiding academic course development to produce the needed competencies which would help grow the economy.

The local job market in 2020 paints a different picture than the data projections made even as little as five years ago – which was the date of the first annual report on skills supply and demand in South Africa. Then only about 14% of South Africans over 20 had some form of post-school education or were considered functionally literate. That number has almost doubled with a major government focus on reducing barriers which prevented access to higher education. Universities are now churning out degrees at a historically high rate.

Economic recessions spurred on by global pandemics and corruption have driven unemployment numbers to historic levels as companies downsize to stay financially competitive. There's currently an oversupply of certain skills and employers are being overwhelmed by potential candidates for the few vacancies and the recruitment market is turning to AI to automate the screening process.

Refining those algorithms to have a better human touch is easier than ever with the sheer volume of personal information generated through social media. The machines are learning everything from the same social graphs advertisers are using to better predict behaviour.

Just as mobile phones have changed our lives, we are going to change the way all individuals and businesses make informed business decisions with smarter insights. AI engines scour the billions of blogs, posts and other digital breadcrumbs to piece together strategic associations between companies, people, locations and social data that directly impact a client's industry. These powers have thus far only been used for good to stamp out fraud and secure our food supplies, but similar tools are on the receiving end of the thousands of job applications that get received by South African recruiters every day.

Having poured over two decades of data science experience into our AI engines, we are able to use a tool called SocialListener to score each research target. The AI tool very quickly amalgamates all the positive and negative coverage, which is then analysed by language tone and vocabulary to arrive at a score. While there isn't a way to cheat the system, because these machines are learning all the time and any anomalies will immediately be reported to the system custodians, humans can take certain steps to enhance their digital personas to be more appealing to the hiring algorithms. It's like dressing for the job you want, but on the internet.

To better refine your look online, we suggest the following:

Drown out the noise

Like it or not, you're in the content game when you're posting anything online. Celebrate your victories vocally through case studies across all the micro blog platforms like LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook. You want the first posts that the AI finds to be in the industry vernacular and showcasing your skills. It's your work and if there aren't any NDAs broken or company secrets exposed, own it on social media.

Cleanse, don't sanitise

Allocate some time every day to go back through your social timelines and clear out the clutter of old thoughts and outdated opinions – just one or two every day because doing too many will alert the algorithms of anomalous behaviour. Focus on the posts that don't suit your current personal style and world view.

Spread the love

Social media has altered the way we relate to each other with near-direct communication only a tag away. If there are people or organisations you admire in your industry, why not tell them when they do something great? The worst thing that can happen is they will ignore you, but most likely they'll at least acknowledge your existence. All you need is a toe in the door, but a little online recognition doesn't hurt either.

Be constructive

There's always the temptation to bemoan the state of the industry, but how does that advance the narrative or actually bring about positive change? The world doesn't need more complaints, it needs thoughtful discussions highlighting the negative factors, but also giving actionable solutions to the industry problems. If you're going to complain, at least know what you would do if you had the power and influence to make decisions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Gerrishuys, CEO of NGA (Data Science Experts)

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