

Search function job boards reviewed (part 2):

# The search interface on job boards

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This article describes the Search Interface of 9 job boards: how well do they comply with our checklist, what improvements can be made? It is the second article in a series of 5 about our study on the search function of job boards.

## Previous article

In the first article we presented the study. We evaluated the keyword search function of 9 job boards with a group of 30 students<sup>1</sup>: [www.monsterboard.nl](http://www.monsterboard.nl), [www.nationalevacaturebank.nl](http://www.nationalevacaturebank.nl), [www.jobtrack.nl](http://www.jobtrack.nl), [www.intermediair.nl](http://www.intermediair.nl), [www.stepstone.nl](http://www.stepstone.nl), [www.academictransfer.nl](http://www.academictransfer.nl), [www.werkenbijdeoverheid.nl](http://www.werkenbijdeoverheid.nl), [www.jobs.ac.uk](http://www.jobs.ac.uk) and [www.indeed.com](http://www.indeed.com).

For practical reasons we only inspected the keyword search function, although most job boards offer key word search and category search.

The first article is available on: [www.2useit.nl/usabilityupdate/searching-a-job-online-part1.php](http://www.2useit.nl/usabilityupdate/searching-a-job-online-part1.php)

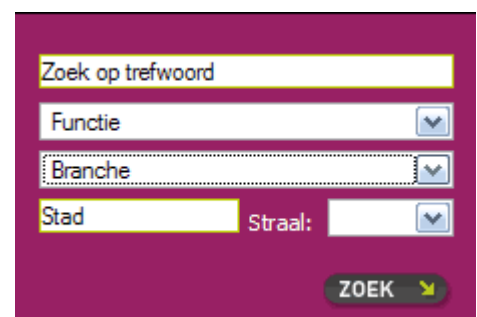
## 1. What is the Search Interface?

A Search Interface is the place where you start your search. It is made up of at least a text input field and a search button. Below you see the Search Interface of Indeed.com with 2 input fields and one search button with the text "Find jobs".



A clear search interface on Indeed.com

Most job boards have a more sophisticated interface. Intermediair<sup>2</sup> ([www.intermediair.nl](http://www.intermediair.nl)) provides dropdown menus so you can combine your keywords with certain categories.



Search Interface Intermediair.nl

1 from the Academy of Digital Communication of the Hogeschool Utrecht (School of Higher Education, the Netherlands)  
 2 Zoek op trefwoord → Keyword search, Functie → function, Branche → trade, stad → city, straal → radius

## 2. The perfect Search Interface for job boards

We describe an ideal Search Interface for a job board as follows:

1. It has a wide search text box (minimum width of 250 pixels, that is at least 40 characters)
2. There is a clear visible and clickable action button with the name "Search".
3. If filters are offered, they are adequate, easy to use and not too extensive. If the job board does not offer a filter at all, the score is OK.
4. Boolean search is supported.
5. It is directly available on the home page.

## 3. Search Interface: Research Findings in short

Based on the checklist above we checked the functionality on the 9 job boards. In the table below we present the findings.

|                           | Wide text box (> 250px) | Clear visible Search button | Limited filter | Support for Boolean Search | Overall Performance |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. AcademicTransfer       | n.a.                    | ✗                           | ✗              | n.a.                       | 0 %                 |
| 2. Indeed.com             | ✓ (250)                 | ✓                           | ✓              | ✓                          | 100 %               |
| 3. Intermediair           | ✗ (207)                 | ✓                           | ✓              | ✗                          | 50 %                |
| 4. Jobs.ac.uk             | ✓ (284)                 | ✓                           | ✓              | ✗                          | 75 %                |
| 5. Jobtrack               |                         | <i>no keyword search</i>    |                |                            | -                   |
| 6. Monsterboard           | ✗ (183)                 | ✓                           | ✓              | ✓                          | 75 %                |
| 7. Nationale Vacaturebank | ✗ (200)                 | ✓                           | ✓              | ✗                          | 50 %                |
| 8. Werken bij de Overheid | ✗ (200)                 | ✗                           | ✗              | ✗                          | 0 %                 |
| 9. Stepstone              | ✓ (288)                 | ✓                           | n.a.           | ✓                          | 75 %                |

One site met all the requirements we set: Indeed.com. More details in the next section.

## 4. Search Interface: Results in detail

### 4.1 Wide search box

People need a wide text box because they usually type in several keywords. It is important that one sees the input to avoid typing errors or other mistakes. We therefore advise a search box that is wide enough to see all the entered keywords. A job seeker might use "phd molecular micro biology". These keywords add up to 27 characters. And phrases could be longer. Accordingly to Nielsen (Prioritizing Web Usability, 2006) we recommend a text box with space for at least 40 characters (or a text box of at least 250 pixels).



Six job boards offer a too tiny search box. Widening this is quite easy for the job boards as there is enough space in the layout of the sites.

## 4.2 Clear search button

It seems obvious but there are sites that do not perform a clear search button. Of course this must be the number 1 button on the page. It must have a clear text (preferable "search"), it is big enough (only a small arrow will be too small) and it must work independent of JavaScript as this unnecessarily restricts disabled people.

"Werken bij de Overheid" chooses "Toon vacatures" (in English: Show vacancies) instead of "Zoeken" (search). It seems to be a negligible difference, but it will make people think for a while. And we know from Steve Krug (Don't make me think) that users don't want to think.

The button "Toon vacatures" (Show vacancies) on [www.academictransfer.nl](http://www.academictransfer.nl) (see image below) was also hard to distinguish from the other buttons, so it takes you some milliseconds to find the right one.

Search button is not instantly clear  
([www.werkenbijdeoverheid.nl](http://www.werkenbijdeoverheid.nl)) "Toon gevonden vacatures" means "Show selected vacancies"

Where is the "action"-button? This advanced search function on [www.academictransfer.nl](http://www.academictransfer.nl) shows several buttons in the same layout, which makes it difficult to find the search button (It is the button with "Toon vacatures").

This search interface offers you two buttons to start two different searches. A mistake is easy made. (on [www.nationalevacaturebank.nl](http://www.nationalevacaturebank.nl))

### 4.3 Limited filtering

All sites use filters in the default search function. The greatest disadvantage of filters is that people tend to use them so rigorously that they find no jobs at all where adequate jobs might be available in other categories.

One or two limited filters ought to be enough. An adequate filter restricts the user from filtering all the results, at least it is not likely to happen.

For example: the site [www.werkenbijdeoverheid.nl](http://www.werkenbijdeoverheid.nl) offers keyword search with three filters. The number of options of the filters are 7, 12 and 27. That means there are 2268 possible refinements, assuming you leave the input field for keywords empty. Combining it with a keyword will further diminish the chance of getting any result. The risk of finding no vacancies is fairly high.

Filters on Werken bij de Overheid

Maybe (probably) filtering is not necessary at all. A very limited filter like the one on jobs.ac.uk (see picture below) or on Indeed.com could be sufficient for almost all the users. If not, they can use advanced search or category search.

Limited filter on jobs.ac.uk

### 4.4 Supporting Boolean search

In users research Nielsen (Prioritizing Web Usability, 2006) found that Boolean search is still a wanted functionality in search engines. With Boolean search you can use operators to combine keywords in different ways. For example: a search for "phd AND chemistry" will display all the jobs that have both keywords. Using "chemistry NOT phd" will return all the jobs on chemistry, but no PhD jobs.

Boolean search is supported by only 3 of the 9 vacancy sites. Adding boolean search should be easy to add for job boards and it bothers no one (for it is not visible). So job boards: pick this

low hanging fruit to improve your site and add Boolean search to your search function!

## 5. Conclusions

When we compare the Search Interface from the job boards with our check list we can recommend some improvements. And all these improvements we consider as low-hanging fruit; they are easy and low cost to implement:

- Widen the text box to at least 40 characters
- Provide a clear visible Search button
- Keep the filter limited.
- Support Boolean Search

Job boards: grab the fruit!

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### Next articles

In the next articles we will discuss the Search Engine Results Page (SERP), the detail page (result page), personalisation and the overall functionality of the boards.

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