



## Blind Box Advertisements

[Ken Kelly]

Job advertisements that direct you to a P.O. Box sound fishy? There's a way around applying to the unknown, and it could actually benefit you more than a standard ad.

Dear Career Doctor:

A few weeks ago, I saw an interesting ad with a post office box address and no company name but was afraid to respond. Is there a way to reply to this kind of ad without risking the good job I already have?

Dear Fearful:

Surprise, there is a way to find out if you might be about to jeopardize your position. Even though it's unlikely your present employer placed the ad, there is no point in asking for trouble. In the least, your gratitude, loyalty, and overall attitude could certainly be subject to serious question.

The identity of organizations using post office box addresses in advertisements is no secret. To find out, call or write the post office associated with the ZIP code shown in the ad. Tell them box number so and so was in an ad in a certain publication and you'd like to know who holds the box. If you want more information, the post office is also required (USPS Administrative Support Manual 353.321) to give you the company's street address and telephone number.

You won't be able to access other types of "blind ads," newspaper box numbers and response service addresses because these provide far greater security for advertisers desiring anonymity. Few companies waste money running ads intended to "trap" current employees but there are some good reasons for using blind ads.

A company may want to keep competitors unaware of an expansion or new product line or quietly fill a vacated key position. A recruiting firm may be conducting a search or be expanding its prospect list. An advertiser may not want to entertain "walk ins" or telephone calls or reply to everyone who might respond to an ad because preparing and sending rejection letters is both time consuming and costly. Knowing fewer will reply, a company can limit the number of responses it must evaluate by using blind ads; some ads produce hundreds, even thousands of replies.

Since these ads produce fewer responses, there's a competitive advantage to the job seeker in answering them. As a general rule you should answer blind ads if the position fits your background and aspirations and there's no chance regardless of how remote, that the ad was placed by or on behalf of your employer.

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