

# Classified Information

Defense contractors rarely fill their job openings through recruitment advertising. So why do they spend millions of taxpayer dollars on all those ads?

by Hal Plotkin



**O**ne of Ronald Reagan's first official acts as president back in 1981 was to hold up the enormous classified ad section of a major metropolitan daily. Were the critics carping about a recession? Staggering unemployment? No way. "Just look at all of these jobs," he said with a smile.

It played well on television, but most of the unemployed who rushed out and bought a paper were in for a big surprise. They might have seen how fat the classified sections had actually become. And they might even have seen a lot of job opportunities. But unless they had graduate degrees in fluid mechanics or electromechanical engineering, the president's boast rang a little hollow.

Critics pointed this out, but they had to admit that job prospects did look pretty good in the defense and aerospace industries. There were *a lot* of ads for scientists and engineers. Unfortunately, even that conclusion was misleading. When defense and aerospace firms look for new recruits, the last people considered are those who respond to the classified ads.

Make no mistake: The hundred pages of classified ads in the average Sunday edition of the *Los Angeles Times* are not an illusion. All segments of classified

advertising have posted phenomenal growth rates in recent years, and employee recruitment ads are a prime example: Revenues from these ads are up more than 525 percent since 1975. Much of that increase comes from defense and aerospace firms, which compete fiercely for a limited number of qualified engineering, marketing and computer professionals.

The unemployed engineer, marketing director or computer programmer should think that he or she could easily land one of the many jobs advertised by these companies. But that's not how it works.

When positions open up at Lockheed, for example, the company first looks to fill them internally. Next it goes through the banks of résumés the company keeps on file. Only if these sources

fail to provide the recruits does the company advertise. According to Dee Imazeki, Lockheed's advertising coordinator, advertising is not the most effective tool for recruitment. "We find that our employee referral system, where employees refer their friends or classmates to us, actually works best," she says.

At McDonnell Douglas, there are similar sentiments. "The vast majority of the time, we get our employees from personal referrals, headhunters or by word of mouth," says Barry Waller, who has worked in the personnel department for twenty-two years. "Many of these disciplines are so specific that you could advertise in every paper in the country and not get a single qualified applicant."

**Why do the firms** continue to place these ads if they generate such a small number of new recruits? Defense industry critics point out that classified advertising now generates 36 percent of all income at daily newspapers; it is the new driving force behind newspaper revenues. Are defense and aerospace companies simply doing their part to ensure the survival of a free press, or might these companies be attempting to subtly affect the editorial coverage of the