



INDUSTRY WHITEPAPER

Definitive Guide to Masonry & Concrete

Practical strategy for hiring, vetting, and retaining masons and concrete finishers in a small, referral-driven labor pool — for commercial contractors competing for scarce, specialized skill.

Nobody finds a good restoration mason by posting a job and waiting.

I'm Michael Carter, President of My Trade Talent. Masonry and concrete is one of the smaller, more specialized labor pools we recruit for — and it behaves differently from almost every other trade in this book. It doesn't show up as a search-volume problem. It shows up as a relationships problem.

Most masonry and concrete hiring in this country still happens the way it always has: through referral networks, trade contacts, and people who already know who's good. Open job-board search barely registers. That's not a knock on the trade — it's just an honest description of how this market actually works, and it's the reason a lot of contractors get burned trying to hire it like they'd hire anything else.

This guide lays out what we actually know about this market — real BLS wage data where it exists, an honest account of where it doesn't, the 10 roles we recruit for most, and a hiring approach built for a referral-driven trade instead of a search-driven one. I hope it's useful whether or not you ever work with us.

The five things to take away if you read nothing else.

- **This is a small, specialized labor pool, and it doesn't behave like a bigger trade.** Brickmasons/blockmasons, cement masons/concrete finishers, and stonemasons are each tracked as separate, comparatively small occupations by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- **It's a referral-driven hiring market, not a search-driven one.** "Hire a mason" and similar terms draw only around 50 combined monthly searches, versus roughly 900 combined for salary/pay-rate searches — people research this trade far more than they shop for hiring help online.
- **Restoration and tuckpointing work is its own, even-harder-to-staff specialty.** It requires masons who can match existing mortar, brick, and stone — not just set new material to a modern spec.
- **Several of the 10 roles we recruit for don't have a dedicated BLS occupational code.** We name that explicitly throughout this guide instead of forcing a number that doesn't exist.
- **A standing, referral-sourced pipeline outperforms reactive posting in this trade specifically** — because the candidates who matter most were never going to see a job board ad in the first place.

INTRODUCTION

Masonry and concrete hiring has a visibility problem, not a demand problem.

Every masonry and concrete contractor we talk to describes a version of the same thing: the people they need most are rarely the people applying to a posting. That's not because the work is going away — it's because this trade hires differently than almost every other vertical we recruit for.

This guide lays out what the search and labor-market data actually shows for masonry and concrete right now, the 10 roles commercial contractors recruit for most, and a hiring approach built around where this trade's talent actually surfaces.

"Masonry salary" draws roughly **390 searches a month** on its own, with pay-rate and job-salary variants adding several hundred more — call it roughly **900 combined monthly searches** across the salary cluster (SEMrush Keyword Magic Tool).

Certification and licensing terms ("masonry certification," "masonry license," "licensed masonry contractor") add another **~350 combined monthly searches**. Search volume for hiring help — "hire a mason" and similar — sits at a fraction of that: around **50 combined searches a month** (SEMrush Keyword Magic Tool).

That gap is the honest picture of this market: candidates and researchers are curious about pay and licensing; almost nobody is typing "hire a mason" into Google, because that hiring almost always happens through referral networks, trade contacts, and specialty staffing relationships rather than open search.

That doesn't mean the labor is easy to find — it means the shortage doesn't show up as search volume the way it does in bigger trades. Brickmasons and blockmasons, cement masons and concrete finishers, and stonemasons are each tracked as separate, comparatively small occupations by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and none of them are growing fast.

THE RESTORATION SPECIALTY

Restoration masonry is its own, harder-to-staff trade inside an already-small trade.

Restoration and tuckpointing work — historic masonry repair — draws from the same small pool of brickmasons and blockmasons, but it isn't the same skill set. A restoration mason has to match existing mortar composition, brick or stone color, and joint profile rather than setting new material to a modern spec. Get the mortar mix wrong on a historic facade and you can cause real, permanent damage — this isn't a specialty a general bricklayer can pick up on the fly.

Because it draws from the same limited BLS-tracked occupation with no separate classification of its own, restoration work is even harder to staff than general masonry — the pool is smaller inside an already-small pool.

There's no single universal license for a mason or finisher — here's what actually matters.

Unlike some trades, there isn't one credential that tells you a mason or concrete finisher is qualified. The one credential worth checking is narrower and role-specific: for concrete testing and quality-control roles, look for an ACI (American Concrete Institute) Field Testing Technician certification — it's the standard most state DOTs and specs require for anyone testing fresh concrete on a job site.

For masons and finishers themselves, look instead at documented years in the *specific* work — flatwork, vertical brick, block, and restoration are different skill sets — and ask for references you can actually call. A resume that says "10 years masonry" tells you almost nothing about which of those skill sets someone actually has.

The positions commercial masonry and concrete contractors recruit for most.

Several of these roles are grouped under broader BLS occupational codes since the trade doesn't have a dedicated code for every specialty. We note that explicitly rather than force a number that doesn't exist. A full wage breakdown is in the companion Salary Guide.

ROLE	WHAT THEY DO
Bricklayer / Mason	Brick, block, and stone wall construction
Concrete Finisher	Flatwork, slabs, and surface finishing
Concrete Form Setter / Carpenter	Form-setting specialty within carpentry
Masonry Foreman	Crew supervision on masonry and concrete scopes
Concrete Pump Operator	Runs pump equipment for placement
Estimator	Masonry and concrete takeoffs and bid pricing
Project Manager	Bid-to-build oversight on masonry/concrete scopes
Restoration Mason	Tuckpointing and historic-restoration specialty
Precast Concrete Technician	Precast component fabrication
Concrete Testing Technician	ACI field-testing and quality control

HIRING PLAYBOOK

Recruit for a referral-driven trade like it's referral-driven.

- **Stop over-indexing on job-board volume.** Applicant count on a posting tells you almost nothing in a trade where the best candidates were sourced through relationships, not search.
- **Ask about specific project types, not years of experience.** Flatwork, vertical brick, block, and restoration draw on different muscle memory — years alone don't tell you which one someone actually has.
- **For finishers, ask how they handle a pour outside ideal weather.** Too hot, too cold, or too wet is exactly where inexperience shows up fastest.
- **For any restoration or tuckpointing candidate, ask them to describe how they matched mortar on a past project.** A real answer includes testing and adjusting the mix — not just "I made it look the same."
- **Build a standing pipeline before you need it.** In a referral-driven trade, waiting until a seat opens means starting your relationship-building from zero under deadline pressure.

A full interview framework — including specific questions by role — is in the companion Interview Guide.

Contingency fees reward speed. This trade rewards relationships.

Most staffing agencies work on contingency — a percentage fee, often 20-25% of first-year salary, paid only when a hire lands. That model gives an agency no reason to build the kind of standing referral network this trade actually runs on; it rewards filling one seat fast, not maintaining relationships over time.

My Trade Talent works on a flat monthly retainer instead:

- We're incentivized to build and maintain a real referral network in masonry and concrete — not just fill one seat and move on.
- Your cost doesn't spike with three open seats and doesn't disappear with zero — it's predictable.
- We stay accountable for fit over time, not just for a signed offer letter.

THE HIDDEN COST OF VACANCY

An open seat doesn't just sit empty — it moves work onto everyone else.

In a masonry or concrete crew, a vacant seat rarely shows up as a clean, isolated loss. It shows up as a foreman pulled off supervision to fill a trowel, as a bid you don't submit because you can't staff the scope with confidence, or as a restoration job you turn down because you don't have anyone who can match mortar on it. None of that is captured by "one open req" on a whiteboard.

Use our free **Cost of Vacancy Calculator** at mytradetalent.com/cost-of-vacancy to model what a specific open seat is costing your crew in overtime, coverage, and lost margin — by role and days vacant.

In a referral-driven trade, your reputation on the crew grapevine is your recruiting pipeline.

When candidates and hires almost always come through existing trade relationships, how your current crew talks about working for you determines who you get access to next. A handful of things matter most in this specific trade:

- **Whether the scopes are consistent, specialized work.** Masons and finishers who take pride in flatwork, brick, or restoration want to know they'll actually be doing that work, not general labor.
- **Weather and scheduling honesty.** Concrete work is weather-dependent by nature — crews notice fast whether a contractor plans around that reality or pretends it doesn't exist.
- **Whether restoration and specialty skill gets recognized and paid for as a specialty.** Treating a restoration mason like a general bricklayer is a fast way to lose one.

None of this replaces competitive pay. But in a trade where the next candidate almost always comes from someone already on your crew, reputation compounds in a way it doesn't in a search-driven trade.

RETENTION

The same relationships that source your next hire keep your current crew.

Because this trade runs on referral networks and trade relationships rather than open search, retention and sourcing are more connected here than in most trades: a mason who leaves on bad terms doesn't just cost you that seat — it costs you the referrals that mason would otherwise have sent your way.

Recognizing specialty work — restoration, precast, testing — as genuinely different from general labor, and paying and scheduling accordingly, is one of the more concrete levers available in a trade that doesn't have much else in the way of formal certification ladders to promote people through.

BUILDING THE PIPELINE

What a "standing pipeline" actually means in a referral-driven trade.

In masonry and concrete, a standing pipeline isn't a bigger applicant pool sitting in a database — it's an actively maintained set of trade relationships. In practice, that means:

- Ongoing outreach through the trade contacts and networks this labor pool actually uses, not just job-board postings that draw a fraction of the real search volume in this trade.
- Candidates tagged by actual project-type experience (flatwork, vertical brick, restoration, precast) rather than generic "years in masonry."
- The pipeline stays warm between openings, so a seat filling today doesn't leave you starting your next search from zero.

Four questions worth asking any recruiter before you sign with them.

- **"Do you actually have masonry and concrete trade relationships, or are you posting the same generic ad you'd post for any other trade?"** In a referral-driven market, generic postings surface a very different — and usually weaker — candidate pool.
- **"What happens to the pipeline if I don't have an open seat this month?"** Contingency recruiters have no incentive to maintain trade relationships between placements. Ask what stays warm.
- **"How do you tell the difference between a general bricklayer and a restoration specialist?"** A specific answer here usually tracks with a specialist recruiter who actually understands the trade.
- **"What's your fee structure if a placement doesn't work out in the first 90 days?"** Get this in writing before you need it, not after.

FINAL WORD

This market won't start showing up in search volume. The process can adapt to it anyway.

Masonry and concrete isn't going to become a search-driven hiring market — the data doesn't suggest that's coming, and the nature of the trade makes it unlikely. The contractors who build their hiring process around how this trade actually works — relationships and referrals, not job-board volume — will simply spend less time and money on this problem than the ones still waiting for applicants who were never going to show up.

A flat-rate recruiting partner built for commercial trades.

My Trade Talent recruits for commercial trades contractors nationally on a flat monthly retainer — no per-hire contingency fee, no incentive to rush a placement that doesn't fit. We maintain live candidate pipelines across masonry and concrete and nine other commercial trades verticals.

Get in touch: mytradetalent.com · (314) 886-7975 · staffing@abstraktmg.com

This pipeline runs through trade relationships, not job boards.

Given how thin the "hire a mason" search cluster actually is — around 50 combined monthly searches against roughly 900 for salary research — it's clear this trade's candidates aren't primarily job-board shoppers. Most movement in this labor pool happens through existing crew relationships, subcontractor networks, and word of mouth between contractors who know each other's work.

That matters for sourcing: a posting-only strategy is fishing in a pond most of the real candidate pool never visits. Outreach built around existing trade relationships and referral networks consistently surfaces stronger candidates than a generic job ad in this specific trade.

Restoration masonry concentrates where the historic building stock is.

General bricklaying and concrete finishing demand tracks with commercial construction activity broadly. Restoration and tuckpointing work is different — it concentrates in markets with a meaningful stock of older, historic commercial and institutional buildings, where matching existing mortar, brick, and stone is a recurring, specialized need rather than an occasional one.

Contractors operating in or near markets with significant historic building stock are competing for an even smaller pool of qualified restoration masons than the general masonry numbers above suggest — which is exactly where a maintained set of trade relationships matters most.



Every hire from zero is a *tax* on your team.

My Trade Talent maintains a live, credential-verified pipeline of trades talent on a flat monthly retainer — so open seats fill with qualified people, not guesses.

Schedule a Discovery Call

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