FITGRID / ISSUE 03 / SEPTEMBER 2026

Recovery Without Relief.

A second monthly rise. A broader set of industries improving. Another record for application pressure. The recovery is becoming more visible, but its benefits remain unevenly distributed.

Nick Kellis / FitGrid · Published 15 October 2026

September gives August's early turn a second observation. SEEK reported job advertisements up 0.6%, with 20 of 28 industries improving. Applications per advertisement also rose 1.7% to a record. The opportunity picture is improving. The competition for it is not easing in the same way.

+0.6% Job ads month on month

September release estimate

20 / 28 Industries improving monthly

September industry chart

+1.7% Applications per ad

August applications, one-month lag

01 / THE DEVELOPING TURN

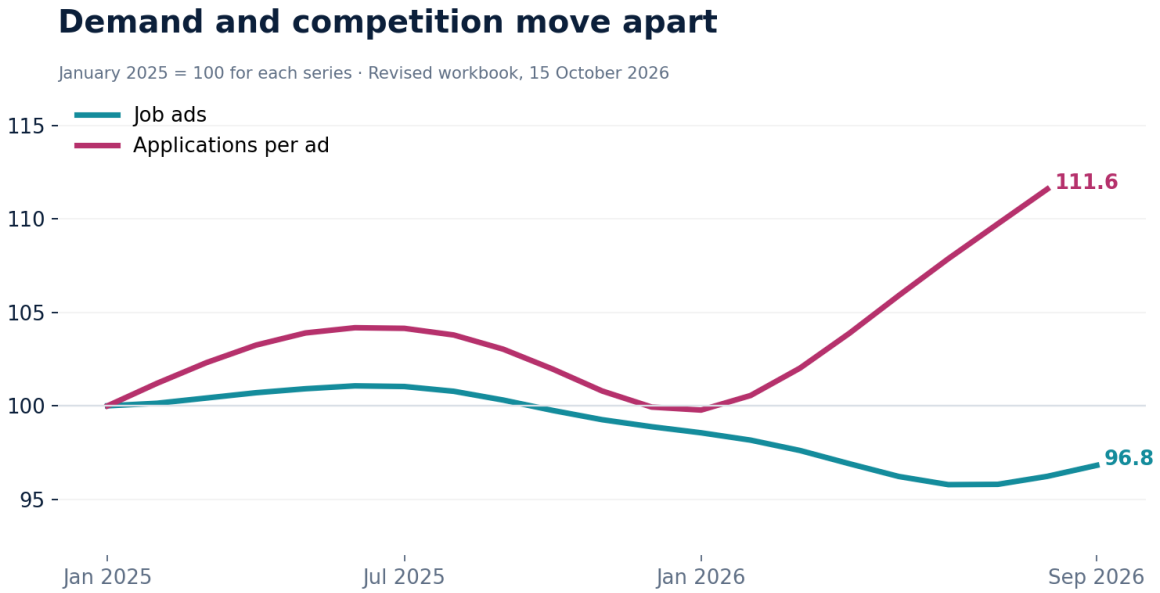
Two observations change the question.

July's public edition examined a tightening market. August introduced the possibility of a turn. September broadens the evidence for improvement: advertisements increased 0.6% in the month, following the rise reported for August, while annual decline narrowed to 3.5%.

This is more encouraging than another fall. It is not a return to the previous year's level. A narrowing annual decline tells us that the distance is shrinking, while the negative sign tells us that the distance remains. Both belong in the same reading.

The breadth also matters. Twenty of SEEK's 28 industry categories improved monthly. That is a wider opportunity signal than a headline carried by one or two large classifications. It warrants a fresh look at target lists that may have become stale during the earlier contraction.

Our judgment is to call this an emerging recovery in advertised demand, with qualifications. Two positive headline months are not a forecast, and smoothed trend estimates can be revised. The campaign question shifts from whether anything is improving to whether the improvement reaches the candidate's defensible lane.



Source: SEEK. National and state charts use the revised 15 October 2026 workbook. Industry and AI charts retain the monthly release estimates. Applications have a one-month reporting lag.

02 / THE UNRESOLVED PRESSURE

More openings can still mean a crowded contest.

Applications per advertisement rose 1.7% in the September release and reached a record high. This measure refers to August applications, not September. September demand and August competition are the latest observations published together, not two measurements of the same month.

Where the months do align, the October workbook places August ads up 0.44% and August applications per ad up 1.69%. Both can rise together. More advertisements do not mechanically produce a lower applications-per-ad ratio when application activity is also changing.

The ratio does not reveal a candidate's probability of success. It contains multiple applications by individuals and says nothing about the quality of each field. Nor can it establish that employers are screening faster, using particular software or rejecting qualified people for a specific reason.

What it does justify is discipline about interpretation. An unsuccessful search should not be explained solely by a recovering headline, and a crowded market should not become an excuse to stop inspecting the candidate's own evidence. External conditions and campaign execution need to be examined together.

The recovery is in the advertisements. Relief has to be tested in the candidate's actual market.

The annual map still divides Australia.

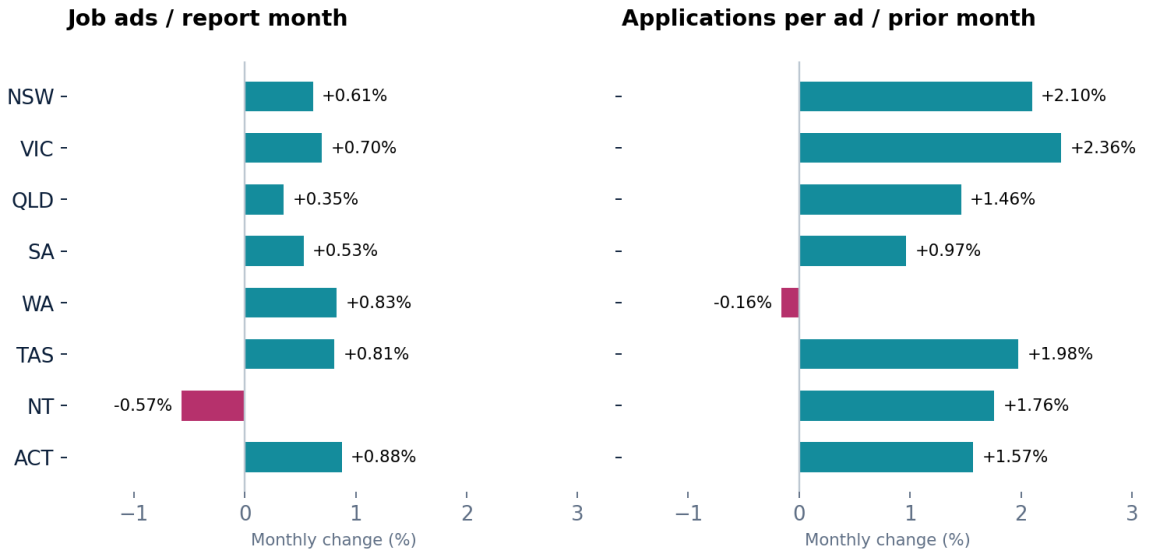
In the 15 October workbook, September's monthly advertisement growth ranges from +0.88% in the ACT and +0.83% in WA to −0.57% in the NT. Seven of the eight state and territory series are positive. The annual map is much less uniform.

WA stands at +4.43% year on year and SA at +1.21%. NSW remains −6.90%, the ACT −8.11% and the NT −13.47%. A monthly lift in the ACT therefore coexists with a substantial annual shortfall. That is improvement from a lower base, not proof that the earlier weakness has been erased.

Application pressure tells a different geographic story. August applications per ad increased 2.36% in Victoria, 2.10% in NSW and 1.98% in Tasmania. WA was slightly lower at −0.16%. These are within-state growth comparisons, not a comparison of absolute applicant numbers between states.

For an experienced professional, the decision is not simply to follow the strongest state. It is to ask whether suitable employers are accessible, whether the role matches the evidence, and whether relocation or remote work is realistic. Geographic demand is one input to that decision.

One country, different conditions



Source: SEEK. National and state charts use the revised 15 October 2026 workbook. Industry and AI charts retain the monthly release estimates. Applications have a one-month reporting lag.

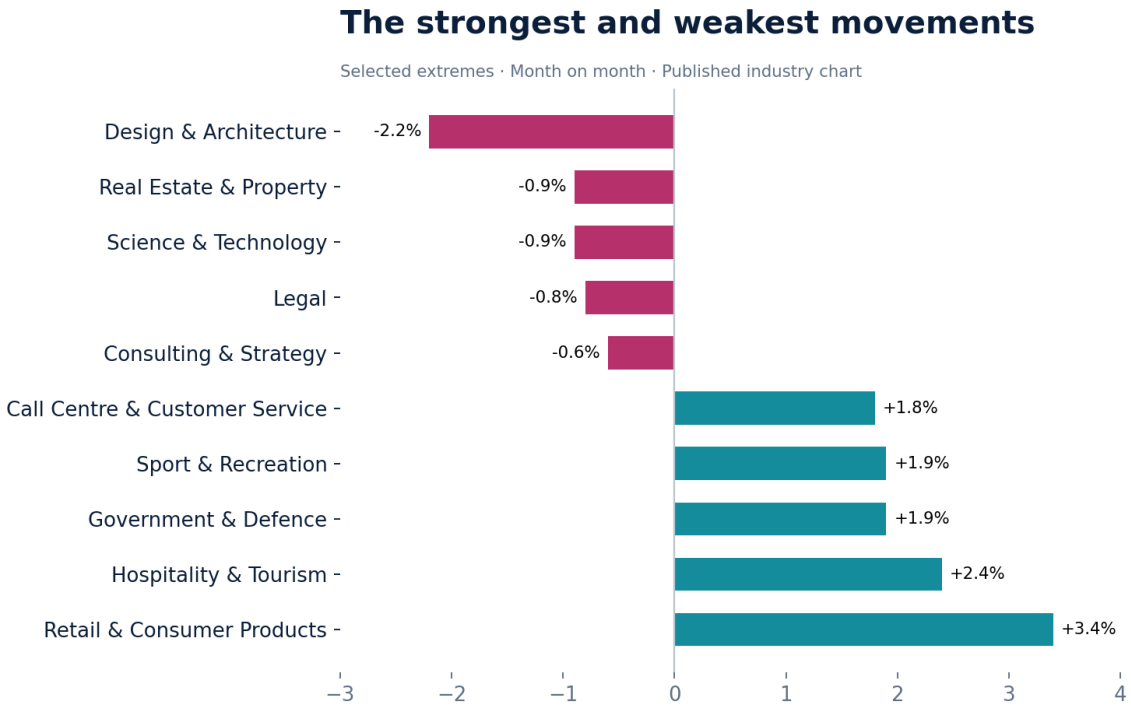
Consumer activity joins the story.

Retail and Consumer Products rose 3.4% in September. Hospitality and Tourism rose 2.4%, following August's 3.6% increase. Manufacturing, Transport and Logistics increased 1.5%, Mining 1.6% and Government and Defence 1.9%. The monthly improvement reaches beyond the industrial categories that featured prominently in July.

There are also limits. Design and Architecture fell 2.2%, Real Estate and Property 0.9%, Science and Technology 0.9%, and Legal 0.8%. HR declined 0.1%. A broadening recovery is not universal growth.

The difference between direction and level remains essential. A category can rise after a long decline and still provide fewer openings than a year earlier. The September monthly chart shows momentum; it should not be used to imply that each improving category has recovered its previous annual position.

The candidate implication is a refreshed opportunity inventory. Revisit suitable employers and role clusters rather than merely repeating the same keyword search. A broader market can create adjacent openings, but adjacency still needs proof: comparable problems, appropriate scope, credible achievements and a transition story an employer can evaluate.



Source: SEEK. National and state charts use the revised 15 October 2026 workbook. Industry and AI charts retain the monthly release estimates. Applications have a one-month reporting lag.

05 / AI IN PROPORTION

The signal grows without becoming the whole market.

SEEK reported AI skills in 2.4% of September advertisements and annual growth of 70.2% in AI-related ads. August's corresponding figures were 2.3% and 66.2%. The share increased by 0.1 percentage points between the published releases.

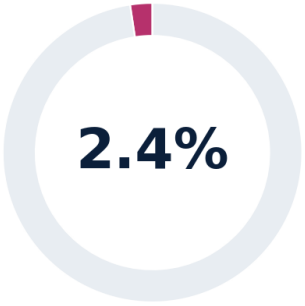
A 70.2% annual growth rate is attention-worthy. A 2.4% share is equally important context. Neither figure establishes what proportion of all work is being automated or whether an individual role is safe. Advertisement language and the work actually performed are related but different observations.

For candidates, applied evidence matters more than a universal AI identity. Read the role: is the employer asking for technical development, responsible governance, workflow adoption, analysis or simply familiarity? The answer determines what needs to be demonstrated.

For FitGrid, this supports targeted interpretation and rejects a fear-based promise. A credible campaign can make relevant capability visible. It cannot promise immunity from technological change or manufacture competence through phrasing.

Read the growth rate beside the share

Share of ads mentioning AI skills



+70.2%

Annual growth in AI-related ads

Rapid growth does not mean universal demand or displacement.

Source: SEEK. National and state charts use the revised 15 October 2026 workbook. Industry and AI charts retain the monthly release estimates. Applications have a one-month reporting lag.

06 / WHAT TO DO WITH A RECOVERY

Refresh the strategy before increasing the effort.

A market turn creates a specific risk: old assumptions survive after conditions change. A role family dismissed during a contraction may deserve another look. A search allocation built around last quarter's openings may be lagging the current opportunity set. Updating the market view is therefore part of campaign maintenance.

Start with the actual bottleneck. If applications do not become screens, inspect eligibility, role fit and the visibility of relevant evidence. If screens do not become interviews, inspect the proposition and transition story. If interviews do not become offers, investigate the concerns raised, proof used and alternatives the employer considered. These are hypotheses to test, not universal rules.

Choose a small set of role clusters and review current advertisements for recurring problems. Record which requirements are essential, which are preferences and which are genuinely evidenced by the candidate. A rising industry does not rescue a weak case for an individual role.

Then run a bounded campaign test. Track applications, screens, interviews and offers with dates, channel and role cluster. Review completed decisions rather than treating every unanswered application as a final rejection. Retain contradictory evidence. A useful campaign becomes more intelligent even before it produces an offer.

Do not let a better headline become a substitute for a better decision.

07 / THE ARGUMENT AFTER THREE ISSUES

What survives, and what has to change.

July's warning about application pressure survives. September's record makes it harder to argue that a modest demand recovery automatically creates an easy search. The uneven-market thesis also survives the state and industry evidence.

The narrative of relentless contraction does not survive. August and September require a different account: advertised demand is improving, the improvement is broadening, and competition remains intense. An intelligence publication should be able to say all three without forcing them into a simple mood.

'More applications cannot fix the wrong market' still needs careful use. The claim addresses misallocation of effort. It does not establish that volume is irrelevant, that every unsuccessful candidate is targeting badly, or that a diagnosis guarantees success. An appropriate strategy can still encounter timing, competition and employer uncertainty.

The next evidence to watch is whether the demand improvement persists, whether annual weakness narrows across more categories, and whether applications per ad eventually stabilise. For the individual, the more immediate evidence is whether the refreshed strategy improves the quality and progression of real opportunities.

08 / THE FIELD GUIDE

Turn the evidence into a better next decision.

FIND

Locate the campaign bottleneck. Distinguish market, lane, role, evidence, application and conversion hypotheses.

KNOW

Match real role requirements to verified achievements, scope and constraints. Keep missing evidence visible.

CHOOSE

Pursue where fit, proof and access justify the effort. Investigate uncertainty. Pass on unsupported essential requirements.

SHOW

Lead with relevant, retrievable proof in the application and interview. Clarity must preserve the truth.

GROW

Record employer responses, objections, decisions and the next test. Retain contradictions and revise the hypothesis.

A recovery creates room to reconsider. The advantage comes from turning that room into a clearer choice, a stronger case and a campaign that learns.

Read the full series at fitgrid.com.au/insights. Connect the evidence to your campaign at fitgrid.com.au/book.

Sources and reading discipline

Primary release: https://au.seek.com/about/news/article/seek-employment-report-september26

Historical workbook: https://au.seek.com/about/news/article/seek-employment-data. Vintage 15 October 2026. SEEK is the source of employment figures. FitGrid is responsible for charts, interpretation and candidate implications.

Applications per ad are reported one month later than demand. The September release pairs that month's ads with the preceding month's applications. The national chart aligns observations by actual month and independently rebases each series to January 2025 = 100.

The release headline and the latest historical estimate are different vintages. August ads were published at +0.5% and are now +0.44%. July applications per ad were published in August at +0.4% and are now +1.73%. September ads are +0.62%; August applications per ad are +1.69% in the current workbook. Industry release figures have not been retrospectively revised here.

SEEK moved headline reporting to trend estimates from August 2025. Do not splice trend and seasonally adjusted headline movements. Trend smoothing revises observations and can change a recent direction.

Company listings enter the reported series from November 2025, affecting composition and comparability. The January 2016 applications series break and COVID trend breaks limit long-run continuity. No growth rate is inferred across those older breaks here.

Industry categories and state series do not supply precise occupation, seniority and location cross-tabulations. State indices are not comparable absolute applicant counts. AI mentions do not measure displacement or actual adoption.

Applications are not unique people. SEEK activity does not describe the entire labour market, vacancy quality, screening reasons or individual offer probability. The evidence does not establish causation or guarantee an employment outcome.

This publication builds on July's Fewer Jobs. More Competition. and should be read alongside the other monthly edition. July retains its original release figures; later revisions are explicitly identified in this issue.