

What Says to Employers, "Hire Me!"

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After several long months of unsuccessfully posting his résumé and applying to jobs online, Alex Ballin, 24, decided to take his job search into his own hands. The 2008 graduate from Radford University planted himself at a busy intersection in downtown Roanoke, Va., sporting a white sign that read, "Talented B.A. Needs Career" along with his business suit.

He wanted to get employers' attention and it wasn't happening from simply submitting applications online. One employer thought Ballin's efforts showed drive and ambition and tossed a business card out of his car to Ballin. He got an interview a week later.

While Ballin's tactic was a more extreme -- and literal -- way to grab an employer's attention, with such uncertainty surrounding the economy, these intense and creative approaches are a must for today's job seeker.

In today's competitive job market, freelancers and applicants need as much leverage as they can muster to land their next gig. The résumé needs to stand out above all the rest, without being unprofessional. The samples need to be presented in such a way that is easily accessible to the employer -- waiting around for a slow Web page to load or using a MySpace page as the portfolio site is not going to make the cut.

When Linda Jay Geldens, a freelance copyeditor, went to a computer conference and received the internal newsletter for Apple, she saw that it was "riddled with errors."

"I wanted to be the freelance copyeditor of the Apple Computer internal newsletter," she says. "I circled all the mistakes in red pen, made an appointment with the newsletter's editor, walked into his office, threw the newsletter on his desk and said with a smile, 'You need me!' He hired me instantly."

Do you want to be hired instantly, too? Here are some standard and creative tactics that will say, "Hire me!" to employers during your next job search.

Throughout the job search

- **Apply at companies that aren't seeking candidates.** "Read the business pages to find out what businesses are growing," says Laura George, author of "Excuse Me, Your Job is Waiting." "Send such companies a résumé and a letter explaining what you can bring to the organization. If they have a need and see talent, you may be saving them the time and trouble involved in a talent search."
- **Pick up the phone.** "What gets my attention is a phone call and real live voice. Most communication is done via e-mail and you don't get the total picture of a person without that verbal communication," says Barbara Zaccone, president of BZA LLC, a strategic design company. "A perfect example would be a follow-up phone call after the interview. No one ever does that. And I mean no one."

On your résumé

- **It's never one-size-fits-all.** "Don't try to sell what you are selling; sell what the employer is buying. Make sure your résumé fits the position and the organization where you are seeking employment," George says. "Hiring managers look at skill set, education, experience and where you got that experience. They want to make sure you are going to be able to do the job and fit into the corporate culture."
- **Make it easy on the eyes.** "Envision a hiring manager looking at a résumé like a driver going by a billboard. Try to make it absorbable at high speeds," says Gwen Martin, managing partner of NumberWorks, a Minneapolis-based staffing firm. "Use bullet points and leave white space so it's easy on the eyes to read. Give the bird's eye view -- you can give the story behind the résumé in the interview." Wendy Enelow, author, trainer and career consultant, strongly suggests using a typestyle other than Times New Roman. Stay conservative and use fonts like Georgia, Tahoma, Bookman or Verdana.
- **Include success stories.** Write down several career achievements of which you are most proud, suggests Joanne Meehl, author of "The Résumé Queen's Job Search Thesaurus and Career Guide." "Choose one or two of these career success stories to go on the résumé, in very brief form, near the top of page one," she says. "These examples of what the candidate has done and can do, grab the employer's attention."
- **Analyze keywords.** Analyze several job postings in the field for which you are looking for a job, says Cheryl Palmer, certified executive career coach and résumé writer. "Develop a list of keywords from those postings that you incorporate into the résumé under a subheading entitled 'core competencies.' Employers search their database of résumés by keyword, so having these terms on your résumé increases your chances of your résumé being selected for further review."

In the cover letter

- **Lose the "To Whom It May Concern."** That went the way of the 20th century, says Lynda McDaniel, a business writing coach. "Try to get the person's name. If not, simply say 'Greetings' or 'Hello.'"
- **Forget the "This letter is in regards to your ad..."** "People reading these letters are already bored with the reams of pabulum they have to read. Do you really want to make them comatose?" McDaniel asks.
- **Show, don't tell.** "Share a good story about what you've accomplished. Stories show why you're the best candidate. They also show you've got a head on your shoulders," McDaniel says.

During the interview

- **Identify why you are a good fit.** "Often people peruse a job for no other reason than it is available," says Danielle Weinstock, author of *"Can This Elephant Curtsy on Cue? Life Lessons Learned On A Film Set For Women In Business."* "Until you can determine why you and the company are a good match, you can't sell yourself."
- **Keep your responses job-related.** Many job seekers start off the interview on the wrong note when they respond to the statement, "Tell me about yourself," Palmer says. "Job seekers give a personal response instead of a professional response. Your response will say, 'Hire me,' if you tailor your responses to the position you are applying for. Review that job announcement the night before the interview and write out some bullet points for yourself to speak to the employer's needs."