

Selling yourself

Job-hunting has never been more difficult to succeed in today's labour market, you need to maximise your market potential and manage your time and effort with thoughtful self discipline

Looking for a new job is always a time of uncertainty whether you' are unemployed, facing redundancy or simply trying to further your career In any of these circumstances, your mental attitude is paramount Your morale will fluctuate with every minor success or setback, and this in turn can lead to inconsistency in your approach.

If you have the wrong attitude, everything you do may be just a shadow of its potential. It is easy to convince yourself that you are being positive and dynamic, but without a good yardstick you may be kidding yourself. Look at Table 1: are you a winner or a loser?

To take this positive attitude to the job market is no more than your responsibility as the full-time manager of your job-search business. Consider what that position involves: you must set clear goals, make important decisions, take required actions and monitor the results. You are competing in a very tough market, and although your product your qualifications, skills and experience may be ideal for a particular buyer, your sale will still depend on your packaging.

The business plan

At the start of any business you need a plan; job searching is no different. It does not have to be complicated, but it should include all

the normal business elements, starting with:

- Finance: It is a common mistake to regard finance casually, on an 'as and when needed' basis; you should look carefully at your income and out-goings, to check that your position is sustainable, and for how long. This will give you control over a vital aspect of your search.
- Human resources: The most important of these is, of course, you, but you are not alone: your family has a vested interest in your success, and they can (for example) take messages while you are out There is a host of others waiting to help, mostly absolutely free. Make a list of your human resources, with names, addresses, phone numbers and what service they can offer. It should include: local

librarians; librarians, information officers or careers advisers of your own institution or union; Citizens' Advice Bureau, bank manager; others.

- Marketing or sales: We shall be concentrating on marketing for the rest of this article.

To sell your product, you need to know and think about it from every possible point of view. Begin with a self assessment Start in a simple positive way, with nothing complicated, and work up to the difficult aspects of your career from the basics: full name, address with post codes, 'phone number with country code. Now carry on with your family background, education, training interests and career history.

Don't stop here: from now on carry a notepad and pen about, and whenever you think of a personal attribute or piece

Table 1: Are you a 'winner or a loser'?

Winner	Loser
I may be redundant, but I am healthy and with my experience I will succeed you'll see.	Gave them the best years of my life, and this is how they repay me thrown out on the scrap heap
These advertisements look promising; I shall check them out and apply. I stand a good chance of getting an interview.	I suppose I should try for some of those advertisements, but it will be a waste of time. The way things are I'll be lucky to get a reply.
Let's review why I am not getting as many Interviews as I should.	It's the recession' and people's prejudices they're keeping me from getting Interviews; there's nothing I can do about it
Let's be more flexible my profile suggests other areas of work to which I may be suited.	I've always thought that someone from my background would be very hard to place.

of information write it down,, even if it seems trivial It may act as a catalyst to the release of more important information later on

Personal attributes are the properties, qualities and features belonging to or representing you as a person. These are best produced as a list of statements related to your skills, experience and achievements, bound by your unique personality

You must be honest with yourself -write down everything, don't try to be selective. These are for your eyes only; you can decide later what to use, how, when and on whom to use it This part can be difficult to get started; job advertisements will give you some ideas, but try to include some that are unique to you. Remember, be honest only slight 'exaggeration is acceptable.

Documents

You are now in a position to start preparing the marketing documents. The first of these is your curriculum vitae (CV, or résumé in American). This is your 'sales brochure; like those for any other product, there are many different forms and few definite rules, except common sense and truthfulness. The length or number of pages will reflect your experience; three or four pages are plenty for most professional people, but some academic posts may want a longer document

The CV is an inventory of your experience, and this to a large extent will determine its shape and form. It should show what you have done and achieved in your career to date. You will be compared with others first on the basis of experience and accomplishments. Your CV should describe you as a saleable commodity taking you out of the 'surplus' category and putting you 'into the 'demand' or 'premium product side. -

It should also be as flexible and adaptable as possible. You may require two or three different layouts, with different emphases on various aspects of your career (remembering honesty).

One flexible version contains a 50-70 word profile of yourself simple factual information such as your address and

There's no point Sending a magnificent CV with a poor letter; the letter will drag the CV down to its own level.

phone number, and the barest outlines of your career on a single sheet. This can be used on its own or as a cover sheet for a full CV It gives the reader an instant mental picture of you, saving them time and selling you to your best potential.

Obviously the profile must be a good one. Think of it as a tribute — or if you are still thinking negatively, an obituary would have sprung to mind. It is the first item on the sheet, appearing just below your name; it must make a punchy and dynamic first impression, like a good newspaper story

The later sheets of your CV will be the details of your personal history outlining your responsibilities and achievements in each of your previous posts. Consider using bullet points for each item for the list.

There are many books on the market that tell you how to write a CV Look at them, of course, but try to be as original as possible, in content and layout; you are, after all, unique.

Letters

There's no point sending a magnificent CV with a poor letter; the letter will drag the CV down to its own level The same is true of any enclosures: they must be, to the highest standard. Each is an opportunity to put yourself on the 'to be interviewed' pile. It is a waste of time to send your CV with a brief note: 'With reference to your advertisement in the *Sunday Times* of the ..., I enclose my CV for your consideration.' An opportunity lost!

A good letter will take a lot of thought, regardless of how you produce it. Consider the content carefully with the aim clearly in mind. Handwritten letters are normally acceptable, but they must be neat, easily legible and written

with good quality pen and paper.

Content is of course very important, but it must be highlighted by the overall presentation. In general, spelling mistakes will not be forgiven, whereas minor grammatical slips will be, unless written communication is a central part of the job. Use a spell check if you are using a computer, and a dictionary if in any doubt; there is no excuse.

Advertisements

When replying to an advertisement, the first step is to read it through carefully and satisfy yourself that you are suitable for the job and it is suitable for you. Now pick out all the attributes, skills etc mentioned in the advertisement, these are usually important to the employer.

Check these against your own personal inventory of attributes. Each should have a close match if you are to stand a realistic chance.

Start the letter directly, e.g.:

'I read with interest your advertisement in *The Times Newspaper*, 17 March 2000, and would like to make a formal application'

Then, using your selected matching attributes, compose the second paragraph, which could start:

'I believe I match your requirements, the key aspects being:'

Then the bullet points matching the advertisement: -

- worked on all aspects of...
- experienced in the use of...
- etc, etc

Finish the letter with something like:

'I enclose my CV for your interest, and look forward to meeting with you to discuss my details further.'

You should not mention the CV before the last paragraph, because you want the reader to finish the letter before moving on to it; otherwise you risk losing the impact of your front-line selling document.

Speculative letters

Apart from replies to particular job advertisements, there are two circumstances where you may wish to write letters on a speculative basis. The first of these is writing to a recruitment consultant or agency~ These can be very helpful if they think you have potential again, your letter and CV must be of the highest standard.

The letter takes a slightly different form. Remember you are seeking their help to find a new, challenging and rewarding position, not matching yourself to any set template. Give some brief detail to start with.

'My career to date has been mainly in an industrial process environment, most recently in the production of polymers.'

Continue to bring up to date.

'I am a Chartered Engineer and a Member of the Institution of Electrical Engineers. I have had good progressive throughout my career, leading to my position as Director of Engineering Services, which I held for three years. Unfortunately the company has gone into receivership and we are all on notice'

Then show them your positive and realistic attitude:

'I am sure this story is all too familiar to you. But I am being positive and hope that you may be able to help me in my search for a new and challenging position in a similar environment.'

Continue the positive thrust; give them something to sell.

'I have, I believe, always made a positive contribution to whatever industry I have worked. Being results oriented I have actively sought to reduce costs while maintaining the quality of service to the group.'

If the chief executive passes letter down to a subordinate, it will receive due consideration; without that endorsement it may meet a more casual and, possibly, less informed approach

Finish as with an application letter with the positive view that you will meet them to discuss your career history and opportunities further.

The other type of speculative letter is sent direct to companies. You may have seen newspaper advertisements that claim to access the 'unadvertised' job market; most of these services are based on Speculative letters.

First consider the target. The person you write to should be a senior executive, a decision maker who can authorise your employment. The logic is that, if the chief executive passes the letter down to a subordinate, it will receive due

consideration; without that endorsement it may meet a more casual and, possibly, less informed approach. Enclosures tend to give the game away to the secretary; a CV says 'I am looking for work'.

To combat this, there is a style of letter that Carl R. Boll, in his very useful book 'Executive jobs unlimited' calls 'the broadcast letter'. This has a four-paragraph structure that conveys the desired message and is sent without a CV

- 1 Attention: grab the reader's interest immediately
- 2 Intention: show your purpose
- 3 Develop your career in terms of skills, experience and achievements
- 4 Say what you want; a meeting

It is difficult to give concrete examples, but perhaps the following will give you some ideas.

You can get the reader's attention in two ways something topical or an accomplishment. In the former case the interest of the reader may have little to do with the job, but it can still get you an interview ('I have just returned from Chechnya, where I helped in accessing war damage and repair needs on microwave satellite equipment on behalf of the national PITT')

You may not have such a topical opening but you will have an accomplishment that would interest the company ('As Director of Research I developed programmable logic devices as an aid to system design.') Make sure that the company is interested in your area of business.

Next you must show your true colours: your intention. 'If your company is considering expanding its research base, you may like to review some key aspects of my career.'



In the third paragraph, you must develop the theme of why your reader should be: interested in you. Select attributes from your personal list that will sell you to the company. Spend time on the selection: quality is more important than quantity.

Finally, you need to meet them to continue the selling process. So say it! 'I should be pleased to discuss the details of my business/research /whatever experience with you further in a personal Interview'

There is much more to be said about the broadcast letter; if you want to explore it further read Bolls book.

Interviews

Now, if your marketing documents have worked well, you will have an Interview. This is the golden opportunity; you will be on a high, somebody wants to see you. So many people reach this point only to blow away all their good work with a lacklustre performance, which belies the professional package of documentation.

The most important principle to understand is that you must be fluent with what you are selling, namely yourself. From that base with much practice and careful preparation you should have little trouble with the questions.

Prepare and rehearse your presentation. This is a fluent run through your personal history in a response to a question such as 'Tell me about yourself. It is a great opportunity to sell all your positive points. Avoid trivia and don't use people's names; concentrate on your own positive attributes.

What the prospective employer wants to get out of the interview is to explore your career and personality further to see if you meet their needs. They want to know what you can do for the company

Ultimately, they want to know your effect on their profits, however indirectly. You must offer a solution to their problem.

Some questions are predictable; a selection of these will usually crop up:

1. Where does your main experience lie?
2. What were the main responsibilities of your last job?
3. What were the main problem areas in that position?



4. What are your career aims?
5. Why did you leave your last job?
6. What are your strengths?
7. What are your weaknesses?
8. Why should we employ you?

Questions 1 to 3 should be treated as opportunities to sell your package again and again. The answer to question 4 must show ambition without threatening the Interview. Question 5 you must answer as positively as possible: remember you were not redundant, it was the job.

Question 6 is yet another chance to sell yourself. Question 7 requires more care: you cannot say you don't have weaknesses. The best approach is to pick a lesser strength and demonstrate how you learnt to manage this, turning it into one of your strengths.

Question 8 is simply another chance to run through your selling points. You don't have to make up new ones; don't feel embarrassed if this is the fifth time you have given them. They will want to hear consistency; put them in a different way if you can, add points or give them a different priority if you now have a better feel for what the company wants.

Both presentation and interview technique improve with practice, so record, video even watch yourself in a mirror, and ask yourself honestly; 'Would I employ this person?'

Strategy

Make sure that 'all your friends and acquaintances know that you are looking for work. Never ask them for a job, this will just cause embarrassment but ask them to let you know if they hear of anything suitable.

Roughly 20% or so of all jobs are advertised; to maximise your opportunities, look in as many papers and magazines as possible. Target those you know have positions from time to time in your field, but do not exclude the 'others; 'you may be surprised where advertisements can end up. Use public libraries.

It is worth writing to recruitment consultancies on a speculative basis; if they like your sales package they will help you: by contacting their network. You can find their details in the reference library. On average there should be over 200 that you should contact.

Speculative letters, the 'broadcast' letter; are normally sent direct to companies; this area accounts for over 75% of all jobs, so it is important. First make a list of all the companies that could have opportunities in your field. Research the companies in your reference library, in 'Dun & Bradstreet's key British enterprises', 'Kompass register of British Industry', 'The Times 1000' and 'Kelly's manufacturers', to name 'a few. There are thousands of companies listed under SIC (Standard Industrial Classification) codes; look up the appropriate ones and note down the details you need. Another good place to look is the telephone directory. Then prepare a suitable 'broadcast letter' for each of those selected; you should aim to send at least 10-12 per week.

Effective job searching is a full-time business; it is hard work and probably the most important task of your career. All that is needed is skilful preparation and a plan; those who need it most in job searching are those who do not use the basic rules and apply them vigorously.