

Navigating the **21ST CENTURY** *Job Search*

By Karen Schuele, CPA, and Roland Madison, CPA

Whether you find yourself in the job market by choice or by happenstance, it's critical to recognize that the job search landscape has **changed dramatically**. In order to find success, job seekers must articulate to potential employers the value they can bring to an organization, demonstrate they have maintained currency in the field, expand their face-to-face networking reach, and take advantage of social media sites for online networking.

It's also critical to recognize that the job search space has been influenced dramatically, not only by the recent unprecedented economic change but also by the impact of the Internet on both job seekers and those seeking new hires.

What Do You Offer an Employer?

Success in your job search requires that you differentiate yourself from the pack. Today, potential employers are looking for candidates who can articulate how they can add value to their organizations. To this end, you should:

- ◆ Clearly identify accomplishments: “I did A, which resulted in B, C, and D.”
- ◆ Describe previous experiences rather than simply list previous job titles.
- ◆ Demonstrate career direction; know exactly why you’re in your particular field, and be able to articulate where you’re going.
- ◆ Position yourself as a discipline expert rather than an industry expert; demonstrate transferability of previous experience to new industries.

In addition, be prepared to outline activities you’ve undertaken to remain current. If you’ve already earned a graduate degree, consider certificate programs designed to gain additional expertise in a given area. Or if you haven’t obtained a pertinent certification, consider those that are relevant to your field. Obvious examples would be Certified Management Accountant (CMA®), Certified Public Accountant (CPA), or Certified Internal Auditor (CIA). If you earned your graduate degree a number of years ago when programs didn’t include the many concentration options that are available today, consider going back to take classes in a new concentration. If you live close to the university from which you earned your undergraduate and/or graduate degrees, investigate the possibility of reduced tuition for alumni.

If you haven’t participated in the job market in a long while, contact the career services area at your alma mater. A recent article in *The New York Times* notes that many schools, recognizing that their career counselors are trained primarily to serve *new* graduates, are expanding the expertise of their career services team to address the needs of mid-career professionals. Many schools now provide, through alumni relations or career services, assistance such as résumé critiques, job search and interview training, and information on how to navigate social networking sites.

Your Résumé

Customize your résumé for each opportunity. Avoid the temptation to send a generic one to every possible job posting. Instead, make use of two or three résumés that are highly tailored to the key positions you’re seeking. Eric Lombardo, a human resources executive at TripAdvisor (www.tripadvisor.com), told the *Boston Globe* last

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year, “Rather than just a list of roles you’ve held, we like to see metrics and accomplishments that correlate really well to the job you’re applying for.” If you’ve joined a job search support group, use the opportunity to have others review your résumé. Often these support groups use a “kangaroo court” format to suggest improvements. This approach can be brutal, but, in the end, it typically results in a much-improved résumé.

Identifying Opportunities

Networking is a critical part of the job search and can take many different forms. Basic networking includes identifying everyone you know who can help you with the job search process. This can range from serving as a sounding board in identifying strengths and weaknesses and what jobs best fit your skills, to keeping their ears to the ground to learn of new opportunities before they become public knowledge. In today’s job market, however, basic networking is just that—basic. Success in a job search requires an expanded networking effort that includes putting yourself

Raise Your Status

Every day, social media prove their usefulness in a new way. Amy Lynn Gourniak, who recently earned her MBA from John Carroll University, shares this remarkable account of how LinkedIn helped her jump-start her career.

While it may not be wise to share with your professional network what you ate for lunch, changing your LinkedIn status may land you a job.

After polishing my LinkedIn profile and bolstering my network, I decided to change my status to “looking for employment in marketing or supply chain.” I received an e-mail from a personal contact one day later: “I forwarded your LinkedIn profile to someone in my network. He will be reaching out to you for interviews.”

The next day, I received a LinkedIn message from a vice president at my current organization, asking about my interests and career aspirations. Our correspondence led me to the corporate headquarters by the end of the week. To my surprise, one of my interviewers carried a printout of my LinkedIn profile!

“I figured I’d try to get to know you a bit before meeting you,” he said.

I sat with a job offer the following week. The process happened so fast that it wasn’t until after I was hired that I could question my contact.

“What prompted you to forward my profile?” I asked.

His response: “Oh, I got an e-mail that you changed your LinkedIn status, so I thought I’d see what I could do.”

Who would’ve thought that changing your status could raise your status?

Amy Lynn Gourniak is a project coordinator for North America Tire Manufacturing at The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.

in situations requiring you to meet strangers and sell yourself, attending every professional associate or chamber of commerce meeting that seems relevant to your job search, and making contact with people who do what you do—or what you want to do.

If you go back to school, use the time to not only improve your skills but as a networking opportunity. Most graduate programs require students to complete group projects. Use this situation to learn about the organizations where your fellow students are employed. Make them aware of your areas of interest and that you’re open to new endeavors.

In addition, use volunteering as a networking opportunity. Volunteer activities provide a great way to demonstrate your skills. For example, active participation on a not-for-profit board could lead to a fellow board member thinking of you as a candidate for a job they become aware of. Similarly, you can demonstrate your leadership skills by taking on and being successful in leadership roles within an association. Writing articles for professional newsletters or trade association magazines is another way to become known as a content expert in a particular area.

Finally, take advantage of any networking available through alumni associations. You don’t need to live in the city where you went to school to take advantage of this opportunity. Many schools have clubs in larger cities across the country. Attend alumni events and lectures that include the opportunity to mingle either before or after the event.

Social Networking

In addition to face-to-face networking, social networking via online professional social media sites such as LinkedIn (www.Linkedin.com) is a must. These sites provide an opportunity for professionals to develop connections, and they’ve become a critical resource for HR professionals in search of candidates for job openings. Currently, more than 40 million people use LinkedIn.

To gain the most advantage from social networking sites like LinkedIn, you must establish an appropriate presence and continually maintain it. The first step is the creation of a profile. When creating your profile, remember that anything in the profile will show up on a LinkedIn search. Therefore, include details about employment history, accomplishments, educational background, and areas of expertise. Include words for which human resource professionals will likely search in identifying qualified individuals in your field of interest. As opportunities in your field change, update your pro-

file accordingly just as you would customize your résumé to appeal to a particular employer. (For a real-life example, see *Raise Your Status* on p. 51.)

In addition to the general networking sites, it's a good idea to locate a field- or occupation-specific networking site. One example is the Institute of Management Accountants' (IMA®) www.linkupima.com, which you can also access through its general membership site, www.imanet.org. This is an excellent benefit IMA provides for its members in helping them locate positions available in either financial management or accounting. Another site is one provided by the American Accounting Association (AAA), which is located in Sarasota, Fla. AAA members may log on to www.AAAHq.org and follow the links to any postings for persons who want to search for available academic accounting positions.

The power of participation on a professional social networking site is in the connections you can make. Begin by connecting with those you know and trust who are members on the site, keeping in mind that all who access your profile are able to see your connections unless you disable this functionality. As you establish connections, you'll gain the opportunity to view your connections' connections and their connections (three degrees of separation). Lauryn Franzoni, vice president and executive director at ExecuNet (www.Execunet.com), a networking site for executives, advises social networkers to focus on quality rather than quantity in building their networks. "Networking is not about how many people [you're] connected to," she explained to *BusinessWeek*. "It's a matter of connecting to people who will help [you] get results."

Once you've established a presence on a social network, put it to work. For example, LinkedIn provides the opportunity to post and provide answers to business-related questions, join groups, make and receive recommendations and introductions, and research potential business partners or contacts. Responding to posted questions is a good way to establish your reputation as an expert in a particular area. Joining LinkedIn groups gives you the opportunity to "meet" individuals with interests common to yours. By participating in interactions within the group, you can make early impressions on fellow group members before any formal introductions. Recommendations from individuals who can attest to your professional expertise serve as validation of your profile and can open the doors for additional business opportunities.

Introductions through social networking sites can be extremely valuable but tricky. If you're asked to provide

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an introduction, make sure you understand and approve of the nature of the requestor's intentions. In the same way, if you're requesting an introduction, make the purpose of your request clear. Finally, use your social network to learn about persons with whom you'll be meeting. Read their profiles to determine common interests and connections.

Social networks also have become a key tool for HR professionals to identify leads in filling open positions in organizations. A recent survey by Jobvite (www.Jobvite.com) found that 72% of companies plan to increase their use of social networks for recruiting. In addition, HR professionals will often use social networking sites for the initial vetting of candidates for job openings. Not having a presence on sites such as LinkedIn could suggest to potential employers that your skills are stale or that you have something to hide.

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didate from consideration. In a 2006 survey of executive recruiters, 35% reported removing a job candidate from consideration based on information they had uncovered online, according to www.CFO.com. Rachna D. Jain, a psychologist and chief social marketer at MindShare Corp., a company that specializes in the psychology of social networking, suggests the following five “nevers” for social networking: Never leave negative feedback, never lie, never spam, never gossip, and never oversell yourself.

You’ve Landed the Interview. Now What?

The interview lets you elaborate on your expertise. During an interview, keep your answers to questions short and to the point—in general, no more than two minutes. According to an article titled “Common Job Search Errors,” which appeared in *Printed Circuit Design & Manufacture*, you should deliver your answers in “situation”—“action”—“result” format. Also, never make negative comments about a current or former employer or supervisor.

Often the interview process involves several interviews across multiple departments and multiple levels within the organization. Do your homework on the company prior to the interview. Interviewers want evidence that you’ve taken an interest in their company. Have questions ready so you can learn more about the company, but be careful not to ask questions that could be answered simply by going to the company’s website. Also, do research on salary because interviewers will ask. Give a specific amount instead of a range; if you give a range, the interviewer will only hear the low number. To close the interview, ask about next steps, then emphasize how much you appreciate the opportunity to have had the interview and how much you would like to join the organization. Finally, even with the explosion of electronic communication and social media, a written thank-you note as a follow-up to a face-to-face interview continues to be effective.

Taking the Plunge

The job search landscape is a rocky place. More individuals are out of work now than in any time during the last 60 years. And for those who haven’t kept abreast of job search strategies, the learning curve may be steep. Job searchers must articulate the value they can bring to an organization, demonstrate and maintain currency in their fields, and expand their networking horizon through both extensive face-to-face contact and online connections through social networking sites. According to HR

professionals, the effective use of the techniques we’ve described should enhance the job seeker’s likelihood of a successful job search. **SF**

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