

The Interview, Part 2: Taking Charge of Your Campaign

Based upon my conversations with many of you, the slow job market is causing most of us to send our resumes to nearly any lead that comes up. I'm dating myself, but this may be the job hunter's version of the old Crosby, Stills and Nash song, "If you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with". I don't blame anyone for doing this, especially now, but it may be the cause of some of your frustration. More than one member has commented that the name of the game now is survival. In the past, I have always cautioned people not to accept a position if it doesn't feel right. Nowadays, if you're lucky enough to have an offer, and you need to put food on your table, you probably should take the job, as the next offer may be a long way off. Even if you know that the job will only last a year or eighteen months, at least it pays the bills and gives you a chance to catch your breath. I am choking on these words because I am a long-term thinker and I have always advised candidates not to confuse long and short-term priorities. One member, who has been a long-standing and valued client said, "In the future, when you're interviewing and someone sees that you were unemployed in 2002, and then had a brief stay in a lesser job, they will understand". I have to agree with this. Many of us are out of work and we have to eat today. We can deal with future career strategy in the future.

Virtually everyone is telling me stories of sending out scores of resumes with little or no response. Your actual cost is low to send an Emailed response to any job listing, but your emotional cost may be higher than you think. I would not ignore the listings that we share within The TENG, the on line boards and whatever else you use. But you may derive greater benefit by planning and executing a focused campaign with specific targets and goals. You then become more proactive than reactive.

I am suggesting that you do some research based upon your skill set, industry specialty and geographical preferences, and develop a plan to target perhaps five hundred or more companies and contact each one of them. This is in addition to networking, speaking with recruiters and answering advertisements. Your goal is to penetrate any company that could use your services. A daunting task, yes, but timing is everything and you want to be on someone's mind when the need to hire arises.

How do you prepare for this? Consider these ideas first:

- Assess your strengths and your passions. What are you best at doing? Consider the following areas: management / leadership, technology, industry specialization(s). Be able to summarize yourself in a brief and direct cover letter.
- If you are a CIO or VP / Director of Applications, your business background will outweigh or perhaps be equally weighted to your technology experience. You should seek out companies that operate in your industry, or whose business processes (sales or distribution channels, manufacturing processes, related

- insurance lines) would benefit from your expertise. Healthcare people will not fit retail and insurance executives will not be attractive hires to a manufacturing organization. A good retail executive with expertise in distribution and warehouse systems will fit into a variety of logistics, manufacturing and distribution environments. Don't forget vendors, consulting companies, VAR's and the like.
- If you are a VP / Director of Infrastructure (Telecommunications, Data Base, Operating Systems, Security, Operations, etc.) your search may be more influenced by your technology expertise than the business environments you've seen, but this is not absolute. Recent anecdotal evidence indicates that infrastructure executives are now expected to have specific industry experience.
 - What are your geographical limitations? You must seriously consider your personal needs. It certainly helps any senior IT executive to be available to at least a broad regional area, as opposed to one city or part of a state. Nonetheless, the job of your dreams could turn into a nightmare if your spouse, significant other or children are unhappy. This is a very personal issue that requires discernment and discussion with loved ones. Mistakes can be very costly, in terms of strained relationships, poor job performance and financial stress. Don't apply for your dream job on the other side of the world unless you know that you can move there. and have committed support from your loved ones. Not every family unit can survive your absence due to high travel or a long-distance, weekly commute. Talk it out first. For some, a weekly commute to a distant city is a way to further their career until their children complete high school. They can then relocate after the kids go to college. You may also have to factor care for aging parents and how they will be supported if you are far away. Due to the stress of our present economic climate, you may have to consider the distant job, but give it a one-year commitment, and keep your network active for something closer to home. Perhaps your loved ones may find that to be an acceptable alternative.

Let us now consider some specific steps:

- First of all, map out your geographical plan. Start close to home and fan out in a radial pattern. If you can find a great position without moving or suffering a long commute, go for it. Companies always favor the local candidate to avoid moving costs. So too, the local candidate can start work immediately and become productive earlier, since they are not distracted by moving and family adjustment issues. Later on, as you are looking at companies further out, you can still check back for opportunities at those closer to home. Many people will consider multiple states or regions. Prioritize them into a sequence and then go on a "search and destroy" mission, company by company within each state or region. Hiring companies will look more favorably upon candidates who have previously lived in a state for an earlier job or while attending school, etc.
- What are your industry specializations? What are all the industries that have similar business processes, where your expertise will fit in, but you will bring just enough new ideas to the game to be refreshing. Find out the name of as many companies as you can find, who operate within these industries and within your

targeted geographical area. Watch the newspapers for announcements of new companies or relocations.

- Much of this research can be done on the Web. If you have any experience searching on the Web, you can use industry “buzz words” to pull up Web sites of companies within a given specialty. A good place to start is the Web portal that I distributed in an earlier email: <http://www.ceoexpress.com> You might also wish to visit <http://www.searchezee.com> which allows you to select your search engine. Two others that I have used are <http://www.hotbot.com> and <http://www.dogpile.com> Once you start visiting company Web sites, you can, in most cases, find the names of the CEO and other key executives.
- If your industry has trade associations, you can search for them as well. Some will have their entire roster of member companies posted on-line. Others may offer actual hot links to member Web sites and a few may have contact names for member companies.
- Trade and industry conferences usually have Web sites. You may be able to obtain a list of conference attendees. At the worst, you should be able to get the names of the major conference speakers, who are typically senior executives and thought leaders in an industry.
- Visit your college Web site. Many colleges have searchable alumni databases and provide Email links.
- A more traditional, but no less effective approach is to visit a local college or university. Many will grant free access to their libraries, even if only for a limited time. Some years ago, I was able to get a free pass from Yale University that was good for fifteen days. This permitted me to use the special business library that serves the Yale School of Organization and Management. Most colleges and universities that offer a business degree(s) will have company directories in their reference libraries. I have found that nearly all reference librarians are only too glad to help you find what you need. Ask them if they have the latest Thomas’ Register, Hunt Scanlon or any other business directory that lists the names of the corporations’ top executives. If a good business school is not close by, many public libraries will have this information. You want the names of the CEO, President, COO or CFO.
- The idea is to build a huge list of contacts. You should then send each one of them a brief cover letter with your resume. In your letter, say that you are in the job market, but that you have no reason to believe that they can be of immediate help. State that you will call them in one week to determine if they can provide you with any leads or names of top executives who could potentially have an interest in your background. Keep a log of the letters sent and live up to these calls. When you call, you will probably reach an Administrative Assistant. More than likely, your letter will have been passed to them. They may invite you in for a meeting, set up a conference call, provide you with the names of some leads, or say that they can’t help you. Be ready for anything and be sure to tell them you will call back.
- This is a numbers game, and you are looking to win by showing up at the right time. Don’t forget, business and life are dynamic events. There may be five companies out there who need you, because an incumbent executive just

terminated or is about to be fired. Your resume may arrive at this moment. If you have the right skill set and the company can avoid paying an expensive retainer, everyone wins.

- The emotional advantage here is that you now have a process that you can control. Be prepared to face a high level of rejection, but look at it this way. If you contact five hundred companies and get to interview with two per cent of them, that gives you ten new interviews. Make it your business to send out a fixed number of these letters every day, in addition to answering ads and postings. It will increase your market penetration and may help you to land some valuable business contacts.

If nothing else, this process will help to relieve the tension of waiting for the phone to ring. It will give you something to control and do that will directly benefit you. It will be frustrating, but the potential for reward is there. This can make you the CEO of your job search. Please call me if you have any questions.

© Copyright 2002, Edward J. Pospesil, Jr.

Ed Pospesil
Chairman
Technology Executives Network Group

Managing Director
Edward J. Pospesil & Company
135 Church Street
Guilford, CT 06437-2401
www.ejp.com
Phone: 203-458-6566
Fax: 203-458-6564