

Getting Noticed

One of our members sent an Email in December asking me to write a newsletter dedicated to the idea of how to get noticed in a job search. Being recognized and noticed is probably a basic human need, and by the way, it is a constant topic for discussion between my teenage daughter and her friends, although for different reasons. How to differentiate yourself from the vast army of job seekers who compete with you, is daunting at best. This member request was in reaction to a newsletter authored by one of our members, Larry Runge, Vol. 2 No 37, entitled, “Are Mass Mailings to Search Firms Still Effective?” If you have not read this newsletter, you will find it on my company’s Web site: www.brunerconsulting.com Just hit the TENG button. Quickly summarizing, Larry feels that mass mailings are not very effective and I think many would agree with him.

Our requesting member added, “Even when one of us does ‘all the right things’ that we know to do in an effort to get any response whatsoever, nothing seems to happen. So, we ask all sorts of people (professionals, peers, coaches, etc.) about our resume and cover letter, etc. The feedback is ‘wonderful’ why are you even available with a resume like that, they say.”

He commented further, “Still nothing more than an automated Email reply or a note card stating the usual, ‘we’re reviewing your information, do not contact us, we’ll contact you.’ He’s lucky. Some of you would be pleased just to get an automated Email reply or a note card acknowledging receipt of your resume.

I wish I had an easy answer for this, but I don’t. We are all suffering the fallout from a variety of issues that include supply and demand, marketplace conditions, timing and a nagging sense of impatience that plagues each of us, driven by a desire to get out of our present limbo in order to get on with our lives.

At this stressful time we are all confronting a variety of forces, which we cannot control. Let’s briefly explore them:

- There is no magical way to write a resume so that it “floats to the top of the pile”, even though you may have an MBA from a prestige school and a successful track record with Fortune Fifty companies. When a recruiter has a “pile” of hundreds or thousands of paper or electronic resumes, he or she will ignore the cover letters and skim resumes until they find a few good fits. If your resume is near the top of the pile, it will be read; if it is too far down, it won’t; no matter how much time, thought and money you put into it.
- Information Technology professionals at all levels are in over supply. One of our recently landed members in the Midwest commented that he needs to hire an Oracle Data Base Administrator and that he was having no problem finding suitable local candidates. As recently as three years ago, Oracle DBA’s were among the most sought after IT candidates. Many received multiple daily calls from recruiters, all offering seemingly escalating compensation packages. Here in Connecticut, companies were offering as much as \$140,000 for a senior DBA. Any company seeking an Oracle DBA in that hot market for less than \$100,000 was a laughing stock. Now

companies are finding takers at \$70,000, and certainly not more than \$90,000. When the market was hot, consulting firms could bill a client \$150 per hour and more for a consulting DBA. Now that rate is just better than half and is still falling. Off shore rates are lower still.

- A former colleague who had worked in the garment business in New York once said, “I would rather have bad goods in good times, than good goods in bad times”. When people have means and want to spend, and good products or services are selling at a brisk pace, they are caught up in the frenzy may be less demanding and discriminating in their buying decisions. When economic conditions are slow, the opposite is true. If your car or one of your home appliances needs to be replaced while you are in transition, you will probably shop diligently and haggle to the point of exhaustion until you can get a product with the most features for the least amount of money. Hiring companies behave much the same way in tight markets. In the hot market, or “good times” of the late nineties, people reported receiving job offers over the phone at the end of a short interview. Companies made many poor hiring decisions and purchased “bad goods”. Some of them are now over reacting and over correcting by being excessively focused on finding the perfect fit.
- While we are seeing more TENG members land, it’s difficult to determine if the market is improving or the constantly increasing size of our organization allows us to see more of us being hired. Anecdotally, some members inform me that they are receiving more calls from recruiters, but the substance behind them is not always evident.
- Companies and recruiters are still overwhelmed by floods of candidate resumes. A number of you have contacted me remarking that the Internet links on some of our recent job leads do not work. This is beyond anyone’s control. Corporate and independent recruiters are tired of “drinking from a fire hose” for the few positions they have and quickly remove the Web postings when inundated with resumes.
- Getting hired today has more to do with your connections and being available at the right time than it does with your credentials, professionalism and expertise. Reve Carberry, an executive trainer and coach who has been addressing a series of TENG Stamford Chapter meetings on career search time management and sales techniques, remarked that your experience and knowledge are what qualify you to be a player in the IT management arena, much like table stakes in a poker game. To play the game however, you have to sell yourself. People hire people they either know, like or trust; or all of the above. Qualifications and experience are part of the equation, but not all of it.
- All of us want something to happen. We are tired of marking time and waiting. Patience and money are worn thin or are exhausted. Some of you who are married are suffering stress at home. Those of you who are single are isolated from what may have been your primary social vehicle, namely your job. We are caught in a complex web of economic and political issues: pending war with Iraq, tension with North Korea, globalization and transfer of jobs offshore, slow economy and a faltering stock market. And those are just the big issues. We are all wondering what is next and how long will it take before things return to something that looks like normal. I have heard more than one person say something like, “I hate war and don’t want to send troops to die, but I wish we would invade Iraq and get this behind us”.

The upshot of all this is that you are dealing with a sales issue and you are trying to sell the best of goods in the worst of times, which requires considerably more effort, than it would have back in the late nineties when recruiters were probably calling you on a daily basis. The newspaper, USA Today, published a graph of the Bernard Haldane Associates Internet Job Report (USA Today, Monday, February 3, 2003, Page 1B). The Haldane study revealed that sixty-one per cent of all job seekers found their latest jobs through networking. Nearly all other sources, including recruiters, Web sites, Internet job sites, walk-in applications and schools were in the single digits; while newspaper ads accounted for sixteen per cent of all recent hires.

There is no easy way to network. You can't "shotgun it", send a proxy, use billboards or other forms of passive advertising. Successful networking means active, intentional, planned and focused human contact. While the Internet is great for Email and business research, it only a tool and it is not a replacement for personal vocal interaction. You best accomplish that one phone call and one handshake at a time. To be trite, this is not rocket science, but it is the only way to differentiate you from the hoards of other candidates who are surfing the Web and flooding companies with resumes. By personally networking into senior hiring executives, you gain the recognition and visibility because have taken the time and made the effort to learn who they are and made the effort to find a mutual contact to introduce you to them. The message and its medium are both important. This is a slow, arduous process, but there is no other way to do it. Three years ago, you may have found a position after making fifty phone calls. Today, you may have to make two thousand. If there existed some magic, silver bullet approach to help each of us to gain instant market recognition on a broad scale with minimal cost and effort, someone would have discovered it long ago. Selling is a numbers game, pure and simple. Ask any professional sales person and she or he will tell you the same thing. Expertise, market knowledge and business intelligence only go so far. At some point in time, you have to start talking and sharing your message with others. It is impossible for any sales person to predict with absolute certainty the source of her or his next deal. This is why they are constantly calling on prospects and customers. It is the discipline, tenacity and persistence of regular calling with a professional presentation, in the face of rejection, which makes them successful.

I say all this knowing that many of you have been networking and calling for extended periods of time, with little or no result. I am not living in an ivory tower and am at the end of my patience with our present business economy, yet sometimes I find that a reminder helps us to refocus on our goal. If the answers to meeting our present challenges are easy, I hope someone shares them with me in the very near future.

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