

A well-written resume is an effective job search tool, but it is not the most effective job search tool at your disposal. So what is the most effective tool? The answer is you.

No resume, no matter how attractive, credible, or information-packed it may be, will get you the job you want. It takes an effective strategy of using your resume to your advantage if you want to be successful in your job search.

Let's look at three resume strategies you should consider.

Strategy #1 - Targeted to employers with job openings

Your resume should be flexible enough to be tailored and targeted to specific job openings. It may be simpler to print up fifty copies of your resume and mail it out with a cover letter in response to job advertisements, but that strategy usually doesn't work.

Take the time to really examine the qualifications that the employer is seeking for each job posting. Look for clues that will help you decide which of your attributes to highlight in order to grab their attention. For example, if the employer is looking for someone who is 'motivated' or a 'self-starter' then you should tailor your resume to emphasize specific examples of how you demonstrate those attributes.

Once you have determined which part of your qualifications to emphasize, revise your resume so that those things stand out and can be easily spotted by whoever reads your resume. It is okay to use bold, italics, or bullet points to draw the reader's eye to certain information, but use these tactics sparingly so that the information does indeed stand out.

Strategy #2 - Targeted to employers without job openings

Nearly all employers will accept resumes even if they do not have any open positions, so take advantage of this. If there is a particular employer whom you admire and would like to work for, tailor your resume to highlight the attributes that they would find attractive and deliver it to them. This will take some research on your part,

Try to hand deliver it to the person with hiring authority whenever possible, as this is an opportunity for you to make a positive impression. Dress up as if you were going to a job interview so that the person sees you in a professional light, and talk to them briefly about why you are giving them your resume. Practice your statement in advance so that it is clear, concise, and to the point - you want to make an impression but you do not want to drag the person into a long speech about why you want to work for them.

Strategy #3 - Targeted to your network of contacts

Use your resume as a tool to network with your contacts. A good place to start is with the people who have agreed to act as your references. Make an appointment to see them (15 to 30 minutes max), letting them know in advance that you would like to share your resume with them and solicit their feedback.

During your meeting, encourage them to provide honest input about how you could improve your resume. Talk about the key points you are trying to communicate and ask them if those points do indeed come across. Ask for suggestions and ideas on ways to make your resume more effective. If their feedback is minimal and you feel comfortable leaving the resume 'as is' you should leave two or three copies of it with your contact. This will keep you firmly in mind and allow them to pass your resume along where appropriate. If you decide to make changes based on their feedback, that's okay. Go home, make the changes, and then send your contact two or three copies of your updated resume, along with a brief note thanking him or her for their time and input.

Regardless of the feedback you receive, ask your contact if they know anyone else in your field of interest that you could contact to ask for resume feedback. Chances are they know of at least one or two people and will be happy to give you their contact information. You can then approach these new contacts to go through the same meeting/feedback/ask for referrals process.

In all cases, your meetings with contacts should be short and to the point. Don't get caught up in meandering conversations or storytelling - you are there for a purpose, and your contact's time is too valuable to be spent just chatting. Dress professionally, and always follow up your meeting with a thank you note. As your job search progresses, check back with your contacts periodically to update them on your activities and keep yourself in the forefront of their minds.