



CAREER

8 CREATIVE WAYS TO LAND A JOB

While gimmicky job-hunting tactics tend to backfire, you *can* use creativity when applying for your next design gig. Based on feedback from executives, we've outlined 8 proven tactics you should put to use in your job search.

As a designer, it's only natural to put a creative spin on everything you touch. But, as with any project, you need to channel that energy in the right direction. Ingenuity gone awry can cause you to miss out on the very career opportunities you most desire. Take, for instance, the following real-life examples of misplaced creative expression on the job hunt:

- "A guy organized a chain letter that included a request for me to forward his resume to 12 other agencies."
- "One candidate handcuffed himself to the desk during the interview."
- "Someone attached pineapple scratch-and-sniff stickers to his resume."
- "We had a job-seeker send us a singing telegram."

Although these approaches are questionable at best, any offbeat method for reaching out to employers can be risky. In fact, more than half of marketing executives interviewed by The Creative Group said they viewed gimmicky job-hunting tactics (like sending your resume in a shoe to "get a foot in the door") as unprofessional, and about one in four advertising executives felt the same.

That's not to say you should stifle your impulse to innovate while searching for work; you just need to flex your creative muscle wisely. Following are eight ideas that can help you connect with employers without crossing into perilous territory.

CREATIVITY GONE RIGHT

According to advertising and marketing executives polled by The Creative Group, gimmicky job-hunting tactics aren't always viewed as professional. That's why they should be a last resort and not an opening salvo. If you're going to do something off-the-wall, be original and tasteful. Following are some unusual strategies that worked:

- "A candidate sent a piggy bank with his art samples inside. I called just to find out how he got his artwork into the bank."
- "An applicant made an interactive, computerized presentation, showing she knew our clients and the work we do."
- "The applicant had her name printed on golf balls that got into the hands of executives who were hiring."
- "One candidate took a picture of himself with every one of the client's products and sent three photos a week for an entire month."
- "The applicant sent six postcards, and each was a piece of a puzzle. When you put the puzzle together, it was his résumé."

1. MAKE YOURSELF A CHART-TOPPER

Looking to jazz up your resume? Create charts and graphs that highlight the results of your design efforts. For example, if a banner ad you created resulted in a 20% higher click-through rate than the one before, tell that story visually. Or, if the number of site visitors increased after a redesign by your firm, show it.

You might even consider taking this idea a step further by creating a more detailed career infographic that shows your professional progress. You can attach it to your resume or link to it from an online portfolio. As more organizations look to share large quantities of data in easy-to-digest formats, the ability to tell a story in pictures has become more prized. By translating your successes into sophisticated graphics, you'll highlight not only your achievements, but also your talent for creating high-impact visuals.

2. BRANCH OUT

The Beatles knew what they were talking about when they said they'd get by with a little help from their friends. You shouldn't limit your networking efforts to LinkedIn. Other online tools allow you to grow your circle of contacts, too. For example, BranchOut (www.branchout.com) and BeKnown (www.apps.facebook.com/BeKnown) are applications that enable you to expand your professional contact base on Facebook. The advantage is the ability to find job leads from people who are friends, or even friends of friends.

Think about it: Your Facebook network may be more robust than others—and include people who are more heavily invested in your success. Plus, industry higher-ups show more interest in Facebook than any other social networking site: 54% of advertising and marketing executives polled by The Creative Group said that if they had to limit themselves to one social

media platform, Facebook would be their preferred choice, above LinkedIn (23%), Google+ (11%) and Twitter (4%).

Before using these and similar tools, you want to have a thorough understanding of how each application operates so you can put your best foot forward and avoid revealing aspects of your life that are best kept under wraps. For example, BranchOut allows prospective employers to view your friends, which is probably not an issue, unless of course, your personal network resembles a "most wanted" list.

Invest some time learning the rules of the road before you use any service. Once you join a network, keep active. In the same survey mentioned above, executives said the most common mistake creative professionals make when using networking sites for professional purposes is not updating the content often enough, ahead of sharing too much or inappropriate information.

3. RAISE YOUR PROFILE

Tools such as Klout (www.klout.com) and PeerIndex (www.peerindex.com) allow potential employers to evaluate how influential you are based on your social networks. If you're seeking a new gig, a relatively high score can increase your value to employers. (Over-achievers be warned: The average Klout score is 20 on a 100-point scale, whereas 82 puts you among the ranks of Ashton Kutcher).

Even if you're not striving to wield a lot of "Klout," it's wise to show you're invested in your career, whether it's through a Twitter feed, comments on blogs or periodic Facebook posts that relate to your profession. LinkedIn also offers several ways to share information with those in your network, including LinkedIn groups, where people weigh in on topics of mutual interest via a discussion board. Better yet, LinkedIn's Creative Portfolio Display application from Behance enables you to showcase your creative work in your online profile.

Just like any relationship, online connections must be nurtured, so don't expect overnight results. If you consistently show your most generous, thoughtful self, your network will expand organically over time.

4. GET AN AGENT

It's the great irony of the industry: Wizards of promotion often shy away from selling their own skills to potential employers. If self-promotion for you is about as comfortable as tap-dancing in stilettos, consider getting some help from a staffing firm that specializes in placing design professionals. Recruiters can help you find job opportunities that fit your criteria. Better yet, they take on the task of promoting you to their clients, many of whom don't advertise their openings.

Along with helping you connect with potential employers, recruiters can give you valuable feedback to help you find your next job. For example, they may help you strengthen your portfolio and resume, and critique your interview performance.

When meeting with recruiters, you'll want to show a broad cross-section of your work—the wider the range you present, the more likely they'll be to place

you. You also want to be clear about your professional goals and work preferences. This information will help the recruiter zero in on the best match for your skills and ambitions.

5. BE A SOMMELIER OF DESIGN

In an age of information overload, the ability to curate becomes more valuable. Just as the wine guru at your local restaurant recommends unique and interesting varietals to choose from, you can do the same in your particular field of interest—whether it's highlighting your favorite web designs or mobile apps. The idea is to show your taste while also shining a light on deserving talent.

If you have an online portfolio, consider including a Top 10 list of designs you admire in various categories. This can be especially beneficial for emerging designers whose portfolios may not be robust: Revealing what you find appealing can give potential employers a sense of your taste that extends beyond the personal work in your book.

6. CUSTOMIZE YOUR PORTFOLIO

Face it: Tailored clothes look a lot sharper than those off the rack, and the same goes for portfolios. Before meeting with potential employers, get the skinny on the type of work they're most interested in, and build a portfolio that's made to fit. A useful strategy is to put your strongest and most relevant piece first, followed by five or six equally relevant pieces. Toward the end, you can include additional items that show your range. If you're interviewing for a print design position with a traditional financial services firm, for example, you might showcase the magazine ads you did for a conservative insurance company at the beginning, followed by examples of some more creative design work.

Don't forget to highlight the results of your efforts: Advertising and marketing executives polled by The Creative Group ranked including samples that don't show the value provided to the company as the most common mistake creative professionals make when assembling their portfolios.

7. TELL YOUR STORY

Although it's useful to highlight the results of your work, don't rely solely on data to stand out. Once you get a foot in the door with a potential employer, be prepared to wow her with memorable anecdotes that reveal your strengths and personality. Anticipate common interview questions, such as, "What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?" and, "Tell me about a challenge you faced and how you overcame it." Then, think of instances you can recount that shed light on your character.

Use colorful language to describe your experiences. For example, instead of saying, "I had to produce an important slick on a lean timeline," spice it up by saying, "I had less than 24 hours to produce a slick that the company was counting on for its investors; in the time it typically takes to prep a file, I developed a piece that helped us land \$2 million in VC funding." Employers want to know the real you, and hearing about your experiences in your own voice helps them

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get a better sense of what makes you tick. Also, view your portfolio as a conversation starter: When choosing between two pieces to put in your book, opt for the one with the best story. You may not immediately recognize the interesting tale behind each piece: Take some time to think about each project and what was unique or challenging about it. This will help you describe the project with flair.

8. SAVE THE BEST FOR LAST

Sure, first impressions last, but so do final impressions. Presenting a potential employer with an evocative piece of design work—preferably, something that she will be tempted to keep on her desk and share with others—can be a career coup. One job candidate, for example, left behind an illustrated list of reasons for hiring her. Another left a clever deck of playing cards with hand-drawn artwork on the back. Even a simple postcard of a key piece of art can keep you top of mind.

A post-interview thank-you note is another opportunity to show your skills. For digital designers, this could come in the form of a creative e-greeting. For print professionals, a clever card that highlights your strengths can set you apart. Remember, too, that content counts. In any written interaction with an employer, your copywriting skills are on display. Take the time to write a meaningful thank-you note that builds on the conversation that you had during the interview, rather than simply thanking the interviewer for his or her time.

Finding a job can be tough, even in good times. As a creative professional, you have the advantage of a natural inclination toward problem-solving and a deep understanding of promotional strategy. By directing that creative energy to your own professional aspirations, you can obtain the positive results for your career that you regularly achieve for your clients.

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WEB EXTRA

Want more job-hunting advice? Check out The Creative Group's 6 tips for how to build and present a portfolio that demonstrates value to potential employers.

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