



*ExecuNet Career Guide:*

# Marketing Yourself In A Job Search

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## Marketing Yourself In A Job Search

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### **About ExecuNet**

Founded in 1988, ExecuNet is the leader in providing job search and career management services to the \$100,000+ executive and senior-level manager. It is the first source executive and corporate recruiters use to find top executive talent. For the latest in job market intelligence, or to learn more about ExecuNet's services, visit us on the Web at [www.execunet.com](http://www.execunet.com).



## Dear ExecuNet Member:



Whatever your reasons for making a job change, the process of a job search is often daunting. Although this process is one of the most important things that you do in your professional life, it is also one of the most feared, misunderstood and mishandled activities. Hand-in-hand with being an effective networker, marketing yourself is a critical skill to landing the job you want.

Job search is a marketing and sales process, and most of us are not experienced or comfortable with these disciplines. Even experienced marketing and sales executives often find it challenging to apply these disciplines to their own job search. This Career Guide defines the process "Marketing YOU" and offers thought-provoking articles to help you define the product, know the prospect, and develop marketing strategies for your search.

*Marketing Yourself in a Job Search* compliments the family of ExecuNet Career Guides developed to support you in your job search. In this Guide you will find links to other Guides that offer advice and guidance on researching companies and preparation and planning for your search among others. I highly recommend that you check out all of the ExecuNet Career Guides as you develop your marketing and sales strategy!

If you find "Marketing YOU" a challenge, take advantage of an [ExecuNet FastTrack Program](#)! We offer many programs that will help you develop your skills and become more comfortable in your marketing and sales effort. Two are targeted specifically to help you apply these disciplines to your search: *Selling Yourself as a Big Ticket Item* and *Branding Yourself in a Buyer's Market*.

I mentioned that effective networking and marketing yourself go hand-in-hand to help you land the job you want. Truly effective networkers are well prepared before they make contact. They can articulate what they are looking for, and they are prepared with information and the willingness to support a networking contact. Networking is the best way in a job search to create visibility for yourself and to let others know what you know. Confident and professional self-promotion in networking will help you land the job you want. When your marketing and sales strategies unfold, take advantage of [ExecuNet networking events](#) and online networking resources.

I also urge you to explore our [Special Interest Networks](#) and our [Member-to-Member Directory](#). Both of these resources will help you to network directly with thousands of people across the country who can help you make important connections.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave".

**Dave Opton**  
**Chief Executive Officer & Founder**  
**ExecuNet**

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## **PART ONE: Executive Job Search = Marketing YOU**

### **You Are the Salesperson and the Product is You**

**By Eugenie Brown**

Learning how to market yourself can be tough, especially if you are not accustomed to it. Sales representatives are used to it, but for others it is challenging to understand that the marketing [yourself] aspect is key. You have to get in front of [those who can hire you] or you have no chance.

During your in-transition time, you are in sales. Think in terms of 'billable hours' in your interactions and your daily planning. That means knowing the difference between "pay time" and "non-pay time" activities. "Pay time" is about making interactions, such as e-mails, calls, networking meetings, coffees and lunches, and other connections with your network. "Non-pay time" is more of the administrative type of activity that helps support your networking, such as internet research and résumé updating. Divide your day into "pay time" and "non-pay time."

For example, devote 8-9 am for non-pay time work. Then from 9 am to noon go to 'pay time' work. From noon to 2 pm go back to non-pay time, which includes lunch. From 2-4 pm go back to pay time. Then from 4 until 5 or 6 you finish with non-pay time activities that help you also prepare for the next day. The exact schedule is not important, but you should build 3-5 hours of pay time into your day.

**Setting goals is an important part of the recipe for success in job search.** That means setting monthly goals with a set number of informational interviews targeted, and a set number of other interviews. But don't use those numbers as a bat to bludgeon yourself with.

**You cannot fail at prospecting unless you fail to prospect.** I see it over and over, there must be some kind of karma out there. What you do today pays off in the future. But remember that your net worth equals your network. Building a network is hard, and it is not something we should ignore and focus on only after we are in transition. The average job time for a senior executive today is three years. You don't want to have to start over building your network each time you are in transition.

**Remember "The 3-Foot Rule."** Anyone who is within three feet of you — no matter where you are — is a potential connection. Be open and polite in all of your dealings. You never know who will be helpful. I have met future clients standing at the luggage carousel at airports! And make asking for referrals part of your daily interaction with others during the job search process.

**Understand the "Six Degrees of Separation" rule, too.** Somebody you know knows the person you want to meet. If you know who you want to meet — a name, a title, a company — anything you can do to narrow it down makes it easier to get that connection.

**In your networking, don't be "I" centered.** Think about others and what they are trying to

accomplish. Remember Ralph Waldo Emerson's law of compensation: To get more, give more. It is important to help people with no strings attached. But be sure you are clear in your own mind about this, or you may feel resentment. In other situations, such as referrals, that is more of a back and forth relationship. But it is okay just to help because it is the right thing to do.

**During your interactions, remember the "70/30" rule.** If you listen enough [at least 70% of the time] and ask the right questions, people will tell you enough to sell to them — or at least you will quickly see that there is no point in trying to make the sale because it just won't happen. A wise person once pointed out that we were given two ears and one mouth. Take the hint. Don't talk yourself out of a job. During interviews, the person talking to you is looking for ways to rule you out more than for ways to rule you in. Don't give them a reason to rule you out.

**Determine in advance the three best reasons someone should hire you with respect to your expertise, your results and your personality.** This speeds your bonding and helps people "see" who you are. And ask for permission to ask questions. And ask again for permission to ask tough questions.

You should always be prospecting, but don't take rejection personally. In any kind of selling, you will get more "No's" than "Yesses." Go for the No, because each one takes you closer to a Yes!

*ExecuNet FastTrack Seminar leader Eugenie Brown is a recognized authority with more than 20 years of highly successful experience in business-to-business corporate sales, in industries including high tech, the internet, advertising, HR, finance, office products and graphic arts. Her experience in selling to companies from small business to the Fortune 500 gives her not only a unique perspective on today's business environment but also the sometimes delicate process of selling that most important product of all — yourself!*

## Get the Credit You Deserve to Fuel Personal Brand

You've been on the new job about a month now. Things are going well, you've helped land a big new account, and your team is clearly energized about what you've brought to the organization. Everyone below you on the org chart seems to be singing your praises. Getting credit from your team (and giving it back to them) has been a natural process that doesn't feel forced or, worse, like self-centered bragging.

Unfortunately, your boss and his boss, the CEO, aren't involved day-to-day in your successes. They don't often see you at your best, and your only formal chance to shine is the weekly staff meeting where some of your colleagues grate at you (and probably the CEO) by turning their part of the meeting into a laundry list of all the great things they've apparently accomplished without the help of anyone else in the past seven days.

You don't want to grandstand like some of your peers blatantly vying for attention, but can you get your CEO to give you credit for your achievements in a positive way just as you've done with your own team?

The answer is an emphatic yes, according to corporate communications coach and author Peggy Klaus, author of the book, *Brag! The Art of Tooting Your Own Horn Without Blowing It*.

"I'm hearing from executives all over the country that after thinking about their approach, they're finding it much easier than they expected to 'brag' in an effective and casual way," Klaus told ExecuNet (see *Debunking Seven Bragging Myths*).

### Tougher at the top

Ironically, it tends to get tougher to receive credit in a casual way as you move higher up in an organization, said psychologist corporate communications expert Ken Christian. "More is expected of you automatically as you go up the ladder" and a VP- or SVP-level employee has to be careful that they aren't seen as bragging about an achievement that should be relatively easy for someone with their stature, he warned.

To be an effective self-promoter, it is important first to be clear about if and how the credit you seek will help advance you in your career, advised Ben Dattner, an organizational psychologist and adjunct professor at New York University.

First, ask yourself why you want the credit," advises Dattner. "Separate the pragmatic credit from that credit which is purely about self-esteem," he told ExecuNet. If getting the credit for strong financial numbers posted by your division will help you land a promotion or raise, he advises making more of an effort — and even taking more risks — to garner it. People often make the mistake of angling for credit that is purely about self-esteem instead of focusing on credit that will help them advance, he said. "Pick your battles, view credit as currency, and don't go after 'self-esteem' credit and pay a higher cost politically than it is worth," he said.

Sometimes the most valuable credit currency you can obtain is the credit you don't grab, Dattner said. Taking again the example of the strong financial numbers posted by your division, Dattner says that if your boss wants to be the one to present those numbers at a broader company meeting, you might be shrewd to agree without putting up a fight. If you have a boss you can trust, "making your boss look good and keeping a secret can be more in your own interest than tooting your own horn," he said. If key decision-makers know about your success, it is much less likely to be worth the political cost of insisting that the whole firm hear about it, Dattner added.

### **Give and take**

But don't expect much credit from anyone if you don't dish it out yourself, experts agreed. "If you are reluctant to give credit, you won't get it back," Dattner said. Giving credit to your team members and other colleagues is the smart and honorable thing to do, experts agreed. And when you are viewed as someone who shares credit, those same colleagues tend to talk out loud about your valuable contributions, too.

"Recognize the achievements of others, including those who contribute to your work," agreed John Baldoni, a leadership communications consultant in Ann Arbor, Michigan and author of *Great Communication Secrets of Great Leaders*. Among other benefits, this will help to position you as a team player within the organization, he said.

To master the art of smart bragging, Klaus advocates an opportunistic and magnanimous approach to delivering good news. For example, casually thanking a superior for a sales lead that you've turned into an account win is a smooth way to recognize their contribution while also letting them know you've just scored, she said. But it can take some advance planning to pull off something "casual and spontaneous" like that, she noted. In the case of the sales lead and your boss, you should have that idea of thanking them in the front of your mind, ready to glide out effortlessly the next time you bump into them by the water cooler or in the hallway, Klaus said.

Getting the credit you deserve is an art, not a science, agreed Christian. "It should be part of the overall dialogue you are having with your colleagues, and not something you save up and wait" to present at a big formal meeting, he said. "Saving them up makes for a much more awkward conversation."

Klaus echoed that, warning that those who "save up" their self-reflecting good news are liable to be burned. "If it is not casual and connected to something, it runs the risk of coming off as a non-sequitur and you'll sound like a bad bragger," she said. Worse, you can be branded as boring, condescending, and someone who goes "on and on" about themselves and never asks about anyone else at the firm.

### **Right from the start**

It's almost never too early in your new job to launch your targeted bragging campaign, Klaus said. But be sensitive to the atmosphere of the organization, she said. For example, a firm that has had a recent round of layoffs generally has much lower, raw morale. After you start the job, give yourself the time needed to "gauge the emotional temperature of your audience," Klaus said.

### Debunking Seven Bragging Myths

In her book, *Brag! The Art of Tooting Your Own Horn Without Blowing It* (Warner Business Books), author Peggy Klaus lays out her seven myths about bragging in the workplace.

**1. A Job Well Done Speaks For Itself:** "Given the constant changes — mergers, management shifts, downsizing — you must let people in the organization know who you are and what you are accomplishing, Klaus says.

**2. Bragging is Something You Do During Performance Reviews:** Always be ready to talk about an accomplishment or connect when the opportunity arises, e.g. a seatmate on the airplane happens to be with a company you've long sought as a customer.

**3. Humility Gets You Noticed.** Maintain the balance between bragging and expressing enthusiasm, but not talking about your accomplishments is a good way to be ignored.

**4. I Don't Have to Brag, People Will Do it For Me.** It's great if others are doing it, but don't sit back and rely on that for your entire strategy. "No one will ever tell your story and get people excited about you like you can," Klaus says.

**5. More is Better.** Use some judgment in your approach, and don't come on too strong.

**6. Good Girls Don't Brag.** "Many talented women today continue to abide by the myth that it's unbecoming and aggressive to promote themselves," Klaus says.

**7. Brag is a Four-Letter Word.** "Someone who is effective at self-promotion brags in a way that isn't obvious to others, and doesn't come across as too self-serving," Klaus says.

One smooth way to start your bragging off early and effectively might be to mention to your boss that you are even more excited about working at the firm than you'd expected to be, Klaus advised. The reason for your light and casual conversation with your boss could be that you've just gotten off the phone with a great and enthusiastic client, and you are fired up by the possibilities of new projects with them.

"It is not obnoxious to say you are pleased about something like that in a natural way," agreed Christian.

But if getting credit is a two-way street, credit also has a soft underbelly. "The other side of credit is blame," Dattner said. The two go hand in hand and coming off like someone who will only accept credit without the responsibility for failure can do you a fair amount of damage, experts agreed. "You don't want to be viewed as someone who only wants their performance appraised when they do well," he said.

In fact, a perceived willingness to accept blame can be leveraged to your advantage — if you show that you are someone who wants to learn from mistakes to improve company operations, Dattner said.

“Position yourself as a problem-solver rather than a glory-seeker” by sharing credit for challenges that have been overcome, Baldoni said.

Ultimately, accepting blame and calling for clear performance goals and expectations gives you “an opportunity to show you are a big picture person who won’t hide blemishes,” Christian said. “Include the successes as well as the knotty problems in your ongoing dialogue” with top brass.

Part of that opportunity is the ability to put yourself in more situations where you can get credit for wins, experts said. For example, if your firm does not have clear performance guidelines and metrics, consider banding together with some of your colleagues to devise some and present them to the top of the organization. This can show “you really have a commitment to improvement” at the organization, Dattner said. When presenting the metrics, consider making the argument that employees understanding their own and each other’s performance goals is important because it will inspire employees to improve their performance and learn from prior mistakes, he said.

Finally, while the people who “constantly wave their arms for attention” in front of the CEO can “snow folks from above for a time,” it’s not usually a good long-term strategy, Christian said. The most effective bragging, the kind that will translate into raises, better reviews and promotions, probably won’t even sound (or feel) like bragging at all.

*Source: Brag! The Art of Tooting Your Own Horn Without Blowing It For more information, go to [www.bragbetter.com](http://www.bragbetter.com)*

## Futurists Extol Value of "Brand You"

Worried about layoffs, offshoring or outsourcing applying a body blow to your career? Then it's time to focus on marketing yourself as a brand, futurists Tom Peters and Dan Pink urged at a recent webinar. "You don't have any choice," Peters said.

For starters, think of yourself in terms of a Yellow Pages advertisement, Peters advised. Find a way to quickly demonstrate your entrepreneurship, independence and creative spirit. Noting that we're all living during a huge paradigm shift away from lifetime employment with one or two companies, Peters said that this is a "wonderful time" for executives who can adapt.

Key to that adaptation is conducting a regular and rigorous personal "brand equity" evaluation. As part of that process, finish the following statements:

- I am known for [2 to 3 things]; next year at this time I'll also be known for [1 more thing]...
- My current project is challenging me by...
- New things I've learned in the last 90 days include...
- My public "recognition program" consists of...
- Additions to my Rolodex in the last 90 days include...
- My résumé is discernibly different from last year's at this time by...

Pink, author of the ground-breaking book, *Free Agent Nation: The Future of Working For Yourself*, discussed his book, *A Brand New Mind* (Feb 2005). Taking up Peters' theme of the necessity of branding yourself, Pink said workers skilled in "High Touch" or "High Concept" skills were the ones best positioned to thrive in the new economy. As defined by Pink:

- High Touch people have the ability to empathize, to understand the subtleties of human interaction, to find joy in one's self and to elicit it in others, and to stretch beyond the quotidian in pursuit of purpose and meaning.
- High Concept people have the ability to create artistic and emotional beauty, to detect patterns and opportunities, to craft a satisfying narrative, and to combine seemingly unrelated ideas into a novel invention.

Peters and Pink also stressed six successful aptitudes that the executives of today and tomorrow will need to succeed in the new economy:

### 1. Design

**2. Story** The ability to inform is important. "Argument is not enough," Pink said.

**3. Symphony** The ability to put the pieces together.

### 4. Empathy

**5. Play** "The age of intense joyless sobriety" is over, Pink said. The ability to play is especially important, Peters said, because it feeds the ability to explore and experiment.

**6. Work** The endeavor should feel like a quest rather than a task.

**7. Meaning** "This is the fault line of who will make it and who doesn't," Pink stressed.

## **PART TWO: Know the Product**

### **Who You Are and What You Want?**

**By Melody Camp**

A process of self-assessment is critical to precisely uncover the kind of organization you would like to work in. If you don't know exactly what you're looking for in a new or existing position, then how will you know if you've found it?

There are many ways to undertake your self-assessment. Most people find that it works well to combine a good workbook that walks you through a multi-faceted self-assessment process with a trusted career coach who can be either a professional or an experienced friend, associate or mentor.

In completing workbook exercises, different people tend to get stuck at different places as they dig into what their values are and what they desire in a job, an organization and coworkers. The task requires time, effort and deep thinking about what makes you tick. It's easy to keep postponing it. Don't. Here are several reasons why self-assessment can be important to you:

Your résumé and your interviewing approach should reflect that you have done some strategic thinking about who you are, what you want, and what you have to offer. Interviewers expect to hear you clearly articulate how you get things done and work with others. This is particularly true when executives want to switch industries or functions. These executives become more desirable and persuasive when they can define exactly the positive impact that their broader skills, abilities, values and work style will have on an organization.

There may be no ideal work situation, but you can move closer to what is best for you if you do the up-front legwork of self-assessment. You may be used to selling yourself to the organization, but when you fully understand what you want from it, you are more comfortable asking the organization to sell itself to you.

Self-assessment helps you identify the areas where you are willing to make tradeoffs. A position that pays less may still be attractive if it gives you flexibility and time off you know you need to balance your work and home lives. Self-knowledge enables you to explore more opportunities rather than discard them, because the fit may seem wrong on the surface. It also prevents you, when accepting a job offer, from foregoing conditions that can turn out to be essential for you.

Not properly assessing fit between you and the hiring organization can lead to failure for which you may blame yourself. Knowing with certainty what type of culture does not work for you can prevent you from inadvertently sabotaging your career and engaging in recriminations that can increase self-doubt and lower self-confidence.

Many executives undertake a “by trial and error” approach to their careers — taking jobs and learning over time what situations work best for them. This may work for you. If, however, you want to hit more career bull’s eyes — positions that give you the best opportunities for growth, happiness and reward — then self-assessment is important.

*Melody Camp is a facilitator of individual and organizational learning and coaches individual executives in Chicago. She facilitates organizational learning and helps to clarify challenges related to strategy and organizational processes. Learn more at <http://www.melodycamp.com/>.*

## Know Thyself and the Companies You Plan to Work For

Before you launch into a job search, careful assessment of what you have to offer is critical. You need to know what product you are rolling out. "Executives," says Marge Larsen, a principal in the Larsen Leadership Group, a broad-based team of professionals experienced in executive coaching, outplacement, corporate psychology and organizational development, "are often threatened at the prospect of marketing and selling themselves. By seeing themselves as a company of one, executives can sometimes more easily find answers to the following questions that are needed to develop and implement a personal business program":

- What do I have to offer?
- How is my offer interesting and unique from others?
- Companies are interested in saving time and money, in making money, in resolving problems, how does my "product" help them?
- Is there a market for what I do?
- Who specifically might be interested in buying my product?
- How do I come to market and create visibility and understanding of my "product?"
- How do I build a reputation to support my expertise?
- What type of network must I build to help develop and execute my business plan?
- Which organizations and associations should I join to introduce my product?
- Who should I enlist on my personal board of directors, including people from different industries, companies, departments and different levels of an organization?

Many executives are experienced in resolving these questions and challenges on behalf of the companies they work for. They simply have to put the same experience to use in marketing and managing their own businesses.

Here are the steps that California-based career coach and ExecuNet Networking Facilitator Linda Dominguez walks her clients through as they develop and implement their career plan:

- If you are in transition, acknowledge if you are angry about the circumstances surrounding your leaving your last job. If you are angry, get over it; because it shows in everything you say and do and can negatively influence what others' opinions are of you.
- Realize that implementing a solitary job-search tactic, such as looking in help-wanted ads, is not going to work. Research consistently shows that a significant number of all career opportunities are found via networking.
- Know yourself intimately. What are your values? Your needs? Do you like to work alone or in a team? Are you more comfortable in a home office or an organization? What motivates you besides money? What do you dislike in your work? What situations don't work for you? You have gifts, what are they?

- Based on your answers, put a plan together that outlines who you are, how you work, and what you seek in a job, organization and culture.
- Decide if you are willing to trade money for conditions — the chance to spend more time at home or to do work you feel is meaningful.
- Instead of looking at past accomplishments, think about and write down what you believe you can accomplish in the future.
- Be your own career advocate, and build and use your network to fulfill a career dream, not just as a tool to help find your next job.
- Construct a five-year career plan. As you achieve each level, develop a specific strategy to get to the next level.
- Become critically self-aware. When you feel stuck in your career, learn to ask yourself, “What am I resisting? What must I change? How must I grow?”
- As you seek opportunities and interviews for positions, tailor your interviewing techniques to individually suit you rather than using one-size-fits all. Consider using the interviewing questions below.

### **Looking for clues: must-use interview questions**

Linda Dominguez swears that the following interview questions are a must for intrepid and seasoned candidates who seek behavioral information about prospective bosses or coworkers, as well as the style and culture of hiring organizations:

How will I know if my behavior does not meet your approval or expectations? A direct and straightforward answer shows that the interviewer respects honest communications.

What should I do if I think you’re making a mistake? Any suggestion that you should deny or ignore their mistakes is a bad sign.

How do you handle conflict? It’s bad news if your interviewer denies any conflict in the organization. It’s fine if they ask you for ideas and support handling conflict.

Do you have any eccentricities I should know about? (You never know...)

What would you like me to do should you become angry? Look for an answer that reflects honesty. People reveal anger in different ways. Be on guard for denial.

Career management today is largely about viewing yourself as a business that you market broadly and successfully and whose rewards include a balanced, productive and profitable work life. Achieving such work/life balance, however, requires that you adopt an attitude of responsibility for yourself, your career path, and your professional development, and for creating your own flow of work opportunities.

## **PART THREE: Know the Customer**

### **Using Company Research to Get Attention — and Interviews and Job Offers**

**By Louise Kursmark**

Your job search may be chugging steadily along on the strength of mass-mailed résumés, template cover letters, and the strategy of “shoot for a lot of targets, you’re bound to hit one.” It’s true that luck and timing play an important part in career transition — you’ve got to be in the right place at the right time. But if you’re a highly specialized executive in a niche industry or searching within a small geographic market, you might also consider a high-quality/low-volume strategy — one that requires fewer contacts but demands that each one is customized for greatest impact. Or you might wish to supplement your mass-market efforts with highly tailored approaches to boost your response rate from your most sought-after targets.

To apply this strategy, you must do your homework. Through research, you can find rich nuggets about a company, an industry, a market trend, or other salient business information. Use this information in your cover letters and during interviews, and you’ll clearly show that you are attuned to what’s going on with the company and ready to provide solutions to pressing problems.

There are many good, readily available sources of “competitive intelligence” that can boost your job search. Here are a few suggestions.

- Company websites, annual reports, press releases
- Daily newspapers, business journals and business periodicals
- Industry association websites
- Industry-specific newsletters and magazines
- Online business-information services, such as Hoovers Online
- Informational interviews with current or former employees
- Informational interviews with competitors
- Trend magazines/sites, such as Wired ([wired.com](http://wired.com))

What do you do with this information once you’ve gathered it? You can drop a current dilemma into a cover letter, then show that you have what it takes to solve it. In interviews, relate your responses and success stories as closely as possible to the problems, trends and issues you’ve uncovered. Use the information as a networking tool to strike up a dialogue with an influential person in the industry.

Here are a few examples of how Cincinnati-area ExecuNet members used this strategy to advance their searches:

- A sales executive made a successful transition from industrial power systems to the manufactured-housing industry. His extensive research was what did the trick in keeping his candidacy alive — when he interviewed with the company president, he “knew more about the industry than the interviewer did!”
- A CIO and technology consultant clipped relevant news stories and sent them along to senior executives with a one-page qualifications brief and a personal note. Often, he was able to leverage this contact into a personal meeting.
- Another technology executive monitored his target company’s non-confidential intranet sites and used this “inside information” in his cover letter. You can bet the company president was interested in a letter that pointed out recurring and potential problems... and showed that the technology executive had the solutions.
- After a 6-month “traditional” search, one senior executive switched tactics. He followed breaking news and wrote to C-level executives about current issues and trends, using a general “broadcast” letter instead of a traditional cover letter and résumé. His 60% response rate is testament to the success of this strategy.

A customized approach to your job search is, undoubtedly, more work than simply posting your résumé on the Internet or mass mailing to hundreds of recruiters. Yet your efforts will clearly demonstrate that you’re informed, aware, insightful and above the crowd of “average” job seekers. Why not give it a try?

*Louise Kursmark, an award-winning resume writer and published author, has been working with professional and executive job seekers since 1982. She is president of Best Impression Career Services, Inc. ([www.yourbestimpression.com](http://www.yourbestimpression.com)), the author of more than a dozen resume and career books, a frequent contributor to online and industry publications, and the facilitator of ExecuNet's executive networking meetings in Cincinnati, Ohio.*

## Gathering Intelligence in an Age of Information Overload

Whether you're preparing for a job interview, about to call someone for an informational interview, or considering a new position, being prepared means gathering as much information as possible to help you ask valid questions and make informed decisions. But with the abundance of information now available to anyone conducting research, knowing where to go for intelligence — rather than overload — can be tricky. That's why ExecuNet launched its [Research Center](#) offering an all-in-one online resource to help streamline your search for information about companies, industries and even people.

"Research is very valuable in helping people to target their industries and companies," says career coach Linsey Levine, of White Plains, New York-based CareerCounsel. "Sometimes people start a job search, and they don't get the most effective help, because they don't ask the right questions." In addition, a little research can go a long way to boosting confidence and encouraging a dialogue rather than a diatribe during any career-related encounter. "It's so much easier to get information from someone when sharing information," says Levine, who advises gathering background information before you make any phone calls for informational interviews. "The more you know before you pick up the phone, the more productive your conversation will be," she points out.

When it comes to informational interviews or phone research, doing a little prep work also can offer you an introduction into the conversations, says Taunee Besson, CMF and president of Dallas-based Career Dimensions. "If you're calling, and you don't know anybody there, then you need a researching hook on why you want to talk to that person in particular." Find common ground to talk about by looking for things like new product lines they are developing, new markets they are entering, or problems they are encountering. "Find things that match up with your experience so that you can talk about them," says Besson.

While your research will become more in-depth depending on your exact circumstance, below are some of things you'll want to look for:

**Industry trends:** [Try to identify industry trends that can show the prospects for a particular industry](#) or part of an industry. Investigate which parts of the industry are growing and which are declining. "The idea is that the more you know the more you can show how you can fit in and take advantage of opportunities to solve challenges the industry is facing," says Levine. One great place to get a feel for hot issues — check association websites for information about recent or upcoming conferences. By scanning their agenda, you can get a feel for what's hot in the industry, says Levine.

**Corporate history:** Although most companies include a good deal of corporate information on their website, it shouldn't be the sole research avenue. Several sites — Hoovers, 1Jump, Business.com, Vault.com and Dow Jones Interactive — offer more objective views of corporate performance, industry standing, and give basic facts on corporate structure and finances. In addition, trade and general business magazines and newspapers can offer insight into a company.

One shortcut — many corporate websites have a media or press section, which will include press releases and previous articles written about the company. Keep in mind that this is by no means an objective selection. You'll want to search for other articles on your own, and take press releases with a grain of salt, but this can at least get you started. By researching corporate history, present

condition and future plans, you can better present your own possible role in helping the company solve its problems and meet its goals, says Levine.

### **Corporate stability**

Before you go into an interview, you should have a fairly clear view of the financial viability of the company you're interviewing with, says Besson. "Look for the uh-oh factor," she says. That may include pending lawsuits or a lack of resources or other indicators of trouble ahead. If the company is depending on venture capital funding for future growth, you'll want to check out its sources of funding as well. Also, look for indicators as to the company's direction, and try to ascertain if it's a direction you'll want to go in too, says Besson.

### **Salary norms**

"One area that is neglected in research is salary," says Levine. The more research you do the better prepared you are for salary negotiation. And while useful salary information is more difficult to find the higher up you go, even a limited amount of research can be useful in helping you to set salary parameters.

### **Personalities**

Find out as much as you can about the major players in industries or companies you're interested in. Understand who is a major player, who is a minor player, and who is up and coming. If you're considering joining a new company, find out the personality and management style of those you'd be working with. ExecuNet's Research Center can direct you to sites like [corporateinformation.com](http://corporateinformation.com) and Forbes's PeopleTracker, which help in researching people. Hoovers.com's "Officer Bios," meanwhile, gives a quick peek at biographical information for high-level executives. Industry and general business publications also are a good source of information about personalities. As a CareerSmart Member, you also have access to our Comparative Salary Report. This tool gives you the insider's look at salaries across industries, job titles and parts of the country.

In the end though, what you do with the information is more important than how much you gather, says Levine. "The major point is using the information you gather creatively," she says. That means identifying how information is relevant to you and then following through by using it to ask better questions, to better position yourself, or to better negotiate your next career move.

## **PART FOUR: Marketing Strategies in Job Search**

### **Brand Yourself a Winner**

Your e-mail address pops up on a colleague's screen...your phone number appears on a customer's caller ID unit...a former coworker hears your voice from around the hallway when they've returned for a visit. What is their gut impression when they "see" you there?

The answer is they see your personal brand. Whether you know it or not, you have a personal brand right now with everyone you work with, customers you serve, former colleagues and contacts in the field, and anyone you've connected with in almost any capacity. Your personal brand is one of the most potent tools you've got to advance your career and generate exciting new opportunities in any economic climate, advises Nick Papadopoulos, president and head coach of Sky's The Limit, a professional coaching consultancy firm that helps individuals to raise earning potential, enhance professional image, and guide career development.

Think of your personal brand as your "promise to deliver services, features and goods," Papadopoulos says. Then think of yourself as the CEO of You, Inc. and take steps to improve your personal brand by launching your own public relations campaign so that your extended network will work to create opportunities on your behalf.

Key to developing and executing an improved personal brand is to follow five steps:

#### **What is your vision and mission?**

There are no easy shortcuts here. As the foundation for all your efforts, you must take the time to think deeply about what is important to you, what you value, and the path you have thus far taken in your life. If at all possible, Papadopoulos recommends taking a personal retreat to get away from it all. But at a minimum, "you have to spend some quiet time thinking about your dream job," he says. If you are stuck, imagine that a genie appears out of a bottle and says he can grant you the perfect job. What do you ask for?

#### **What is your value proposition?**

As with defining your vision and mission, this step also requires careful thought and time. Define your personal characteristics, strengths and weaknesses to find out the type of professional you want to be. As the CEO of You, Inc., conduct personal "focus groups" just like marketers of consumer products and other services. Identify and contact a group of at least a dozen current or former colleagues and peers, customers and the like and ask them the same set of questions focusing on issues, such as what you do well, what needs work, and what has been your greatest accomplishment. You'll be surprised by the helpful and insightful answers you'll get, Papadopoulos said during a recent [ExecuNet FastTrack Program](#), *Branding Yourself in a Buyer's Market*.

As a second part of defining your value proposition, carefully assess the unique set of talents that you offer your audience. Think in terms of how you help your customers address their problems.

### Who is your target audience?

Determine and find the audience that fits your values and could benefit from your unique talents. To help you frame this exercise, think again about that genie in the bottle who appeared to offer you the dream job. Instead of blurting out a job title or company target, you'd be better served to consider the components of a career to help guide your answer. For example, think about what you want in terms of compensation, geography, company culture, responsibilities and management duties. Even a seemingly easy checklist item like travel can raise more questions than you might suspect, Papadopoulos says. Are you willing to travel overnight often? Travel overseas? Travel on weekends? Coming up with your answers to these questions can help you refine and focus your search.

### What is your brand promise?

This is the message you should consistently communicate to your various audiences that invoke a specific image, feeling and thought after you've contacted them. This is also called the "elevator pitch." Meaning if you found yourself in a 45-second elevator ride with a potential customer or job prospect, how would you explain your skill set and value to them? The pitch should focus on the other person by showing you understand their professional challenges and how you can help to address them. This pitch should also be in your résumé, cover letter, and other less obvious tools like your own website listed on your business card.

### How to execute your brand?

You are the product. You know the wonderful things you can do to help your target audience. Now you've got to get the word out. Start by launching a personal public relations campaign, Papadopoulos advises. Take a page from the most successful public relations agencies and corporate marketing departments to elevate your profile and boost your personal brand. Effective tactics include:

- Writing articles in trade journals, local newspapers and association publications. Papadopoulos told an ExecuNet FastTrack Program audience that he got 22 responses to the first guest article he ever wrote. One even became a quality client.
- Speaking at trade shows and other events. Most are always on the lookout for fresh faces, especially to sit on public panels.
- Volunteering for projects and causes. This can be an outstanding way to use your talents in a personally rewarding way, while simultaneously demonstrating those talents to others around you.

Leveraging your existing contacts is also an integral part of enhancing and advancing your personal brand, Papadopoulos says. Winning tactics include:

- Introducing your contacts to each other. If you have a colleague who is looking for an accountant, recommend yours and help set up the meeting. Every time they work together, they'll think highly of you for providing the connection, he says.
- Inviting contacts to industry events. This is a thoughtful move, and will make them feel compelled to help you because you are adding value to the relationship.

- Sending them articles and other relevant information from time to time. Here, Papadopoulos much prefers using old-fashioned snail mail and a post-it note instead of e-mailing the material. The personal touch stands out.
- Offering them speaking or writing opportunities. As you check out venues for yourself, keep your contacts in mind for ones that may suit them and not you. They'll appreciate the heads-up and be more inclined to do the same for you.

As the CEO of You, Inc., you've got a "product" you believe in. Use the power of branding yourself to find the perfect audience for those skills and help that audience to help you thrive in any economic climate.

## Practice Your Own PR by Highlighting Your Strengths, Sharing Your Gifts and Nurturing Your Network

If you want to become well known in your company, or have your name made prominent throughout your industry, consider launching your own public relations campaign. Who better than you can tell your story? You know your strengths and weaknesses, your life goals, and what makes you tick; you may be the best candidate to package and project yourself for the community in which you want to earn a reputation. But as many PR practitioners will tell you, the art involves more than packaging and spin. To build yourself a solid reputation within your target community, focus on using your strengths to help yourself and others while keeping your network alive with contacts.

### Get comfortable in your skin

If you're going to initiate a self-promotion program, it's important to be honest with yourself and about yourself. If you're not, a) you won't project yourself with confidence and, b) others will see through you. "You have to accept who you are, not try to be someone you're not or put on a show to impress everyone around you," life coach and author Janet Esposito told ExecuNet. "Come to terms with your strengths and vulnerabilities and accept the whole package." She adds that confidence brings about a special appeal. "It's very charismatic when someone is comfortable in their own skin."

When you reach that point, she says, your focus will naturally shift away from the self and toward helping others, even if it means giving up the limelight. "Directing a client to someone else, helping other people get together, promoting another person's expertise or ability.... It's having enough security and faith that there is enough abundance in the world," she says. "If you want to do business with them but refer them to someone else, it shows integrity, honesty and forthrightness and that is incredibly important."

Melissa Mayers Lewis, author of *Upside Down Speaking*, points out that focusing on others is a reciprocal exercise that reaps respect and recognition. "Be willing to put yourself out there by teaching or sharing your knowledge," she says. If you're trying to promote yourself within your organization, why not offer programs or workshops during lunch, or seminars after work, etc.? "Often we get so busy that we get caught up in our own thing and we don't think to help others. What you give out comes back to you eventually."

### What do you bring to the party?

You may know what you want, but it is at least as important to know what other people want and how you can help them to get it. When branding yourself, conduct a personal inventory that will identify your unique skills, talents and values so that you can help others to see them, too. Otherwise, you're just a face in the crowd.

Conducting this kind of personal inventory has another benefit: it will help you put a compelling narrative into your personal brand story. Look for patterns: have you helped troubled divisions make a turnaround? Launched successful new products? Handled delicate downsizing and other complex personnel issues? Those patterns are an important contribution to your overall personal brand. Studies have shown that people learn much more from stories and anecdotes than from numbers and rote repetition. If you can help people to see that you're "the guy who helps companies turn it around in three quarters," or "the guy who gets new products out the door on-time and under budget," you've gone a long way toward establishing your personal brand.

It might also help you as you work on your personal brand to think about the ways you can use it. For example, a good personal brand should help you to:

- **Create Your Own Commercial.** If you got thirty seconds in front of a decision-maker, could you offer a clear description of yourself as a professional who makes an impact? The guy sitting next to you on the Acela might get bored with his magazine and ask what you do. Be ready!
- **Take Yourself on a Road Show.** Executives do it all the time when taking a company public or seeking funds from VCs. You can take a page from this tactical book by getting out there — setting up lunches, breakfasts, coffees, going to tradeshow or local meetings. A résumé is fine, but you'll do yourself more good in person. Look for meetings, receptions, chapter events, etc. and attend them. Local business sections often list calendar events, for example.
- **Project Confidence even when you don't feel confident! Don't Let Them See You Sweat.** Remember that deodorant commercial from years ago? Well, they got it right. It sounds obvious, but if you are feeling desperate, you can't let it show. Never go hat in hand to ask for a job. It's bad for your personal morale and it won't work anyway! Instead, be creative about how you get in front of CEOs. For example, see if you can get a neighborhood paper to "assign" you to write up a profile of a local business leader you want to meet. Those little papers are always looking for articles and writers, and most execs love the free publicity. Now, instead of going to see them to ask for a job, you are doing them a favor and giving them a chance to see you and your personal brand up close and personal.

### **Public speaking yields visibility and networking opportunities**

Lewis says to look for every opportunity to speak. "I'm a big believer in getting out there and speaking in front of the group whenever you can," she says, noting that most of her business comes to her through speaking engagements. "If you have something of value that you'd like to be recognized for, get the word out." Sometimes, especially at the outset, the only speaking opportunities will be pro bono, but Lewis says that even these bring golden opportunities. "If you can spend 20 minutes talking to the Rotary Club, you never know where that will lead," she says. "I've had people come back to me years later having remembered seeing me speak, and taken my card." She adds that getting involved with a nonprofit can offer the opportunity to speak. Even if your topic isn't industry related, it is a great way to gain visibility and make contacts.

If you do have the opportunity to speak before a group, offer to write something for the organization's newsletter. "Editors are always desperate for material that set them up," Lewis says. "The next thing you know people are starting to see your name everywhere."

### **Fear of public speaking**

Janet Esposito counsels clients who are afraid to speak in public. The fear, she says, cuts a wide swath across all races, ages and levels of employment and escalates as a person moves up the ranks in an organization. "When you get to a high executive-level position, there is a feeling that people expect more from you now. People will avoid the speaking in public, because they're trying to avoid judgment and evaluation. The real fear is the fear of not measuring up." Gurney says the best way to overcome the fear is to keep talking to people. Esposito emphasizes the need to be yourself and nothing more — even in front of a crowd.

Speakers' bureaus can offer lucrative opportunities, but they're often highly selective, and may not be an option for someone just starting to build a reputation. "It's not easy to get a paid speaking engagement through a speaker's bureau," Lewis says. "They're like banks. They don't want you unless you don't need them." That is, they usually are not interested in you unless you are already well known in your industry. Your own company may have a speaker's bureau, however, and that can elevate you within the company as well as your community.

### **How much is too much?**

When do you go too far with a personal PR campaign? Lewis says you can't go too far if you're focus is on sharing your knowledge and expertise. "It's not the amount of exposure, but the intent of the exposure," she says. "If you think in terms of what you're going to get out of it, people can tell."

If you behave in a way that is cocky and try to oversell your talents, you may win some initial business but lose in the long run. "People know on a gut level that something is off," says Esposito. She says it's far better to under promise and over deliver. "That is the wiser way to go. It doesn't mean you should sell yourself short, but it's very appealing when someone over delivers."

## Direct Mail as a Job Search Technique — Is it Viable in an Internet Age?

In an era of e-mail excess and postal glut, can a direct mail campaign cut through the clutter and land you a job? Yes, say career coaches, if you employ certain methods to ensure that your résumé lands in front of the right person. A targeted piece that is tailored to the preferences of the hiring executive can be an effective component to a comprehensive job search.

"I am high on targeted direct mail," says Fred Coon, President, FEC Career Services. He notes that unless you're responding to a specific job opening, blindly sending a résumé to a company that will channel it to human resources is usually a waste of time. And, whether postal or electronic, communication should be personalized. Career coach John O'Connor warns that "Dear Sir or Madam" will likely land your letter in the trash. "The personal touch, 'Dear Ms. Jones, etc.,' will at least get the person to read the next few lines of the message," he says.

### E-mail — Fast, downloadable, disposable

It's a boon to recruiters and their clients allowing people to quickly "cover the waterfront" when seeking a job. Recruiters usually prefer it to posted mail because it allows them to easily put résumés in a database and circulate them. And when sent to corporations, e-mail often bypasses the gatekeeper. "E-mail will get to the person it's intended to get to," says Coon. "Rarely do you send it with the chance of having a secretary screen it."

One of the drawbacks to e-mail, of course, is that recruiters and employers receive voluminous amounts of it every day. O'Connor suggests sending a "broadcast letter," a brief, well-written mini résumé featuring objectives followed by key reinforcements of that objective, all stated within the text field of the e-mail. An attached cover letter and résumé are optional. "A broadcast letter can go through the gatekeeper more easily and sometimes folks do not want to open an attachment," notes O'Connor. To guarantee that your communication won't be mistaken for spam, have the subject line succinctly say it all. For example, "Mary Jones — candidate — financial" or "executive candidate for management opportunity in finance."

### The postal route

A targeted paper campaign is sometimes used for a narrow market and certain employers prefer it. "Part of our homework is to make phone calls and find out how they (recruiters and employers) would like to receive documents," says O'Connor. He adds that some industries, such as manufacturing (not high tech), are more oriented to paper.

Bob Bronstein, president of Pro/File Research, says the postal route is practical when sending letters to "Corporate America," because no adequate database exists for company e-mail addresses. Still, he adds, direct mail is a last resort. "Use it only if you are not a candidate for recruiters or venture capital because it is expensive." O'Connor agrees that the method of choice can depend on the database available. "Rather than 1000 vague points of e-mail contact, 225 solid company addresses may be more workable." Some career coaches advise canvassing recruiters with e-mail, then targeting companies with a combination of paper and e-mail, depending on preference and availability.

If you use regular mail, remember that packaging is important. "Put it [résumés and cover letters] in a 9 x 12 envelope so it isn't folded," says O'Connor. "Then you get a much higher hit rate than from those folded in a smaller envelope — they look cleaner and nicer; the smaller package cheapens the message." Also, paper and type styles can coordinate with your brand or identity. Bronstein warns, however, that it's best not to get too cute. Don't send head shots in envelopes or, in the case of e-mail, attached as JPEGs. "It's like sending cookies to get into college," he says. "Unless you're applying for a job where that kind of creativity is required or admired, don't send the cookies."

### **Good old-fashioned faxing**

Has faxing fallen by the wayside? No way, says O'Connor, who maintains that it's often the favored method of sending a résumé. "We get a very good response using this technology," he says. "About 500 direct mails can be loaded into a database. The info goes out and you get responses that are pretty powerful."

He says faxing becomes especially important during virus scares, when no one wants to open attachments, and during heightened terrorist alerts. During the Anthrax attacks, for example, faxing became essential. Even now, with people in company mailrooms having to wear gloves and carefully sort, faxing seems easier on everybody. "When you're faxing, you don't have any of those problems."

### **Content — Show the candidate as the solution**

Whether you're sending a paper letter, broadcasting e-mail or fax, make sure the goods are upfront. "A lot of times jobs are created because they like the skill set that they see," notes Coon. "They hire with a set of credentials in their head. They want someone who has solved their problem before." Bronstein agrees. "You need to capture someone's interest at the top of the paper," he says. "People hire because they want to fix something. You have to capture their interest in the beginning of Paragraph Two." He talks to a lot of employers and recruiters who pull the wastebasket out and reduce 100 résumés to 10 in less than 10 minutes. "Then, they put the trash can away and read the résumés or put them in the 'I will read later' pile."

Coon says to forget bragging about vague, extraneous qualities. "Take the Boy Scout stuff out — 'works well with others, results-driven, self starter' — bury it." Readers will be able to discern those qualities when they review your experience.

### **Following up**

Act quickly once your résumé has been sent out, especially if you know that the intended audience has read it. "Even if you actually get to hand it to the decision maker, it does no good unless you follow up with a phone call," says Coon. Better still to couch the communication in conversation, i.e. talk to the decision maker initially, send the résumé and letter, then follow up. But the best ploy, if you can manage it, is to be introduced first through a friend. "The most ideal thing is to talk to someone who knows the decision maker and can give them a heads up."

With regard to the broadcast letter, O'Connor urges clients to quickly contact potential employers. "We've seen surprisingly good responses from a well-crafted broadcast letter. Increase this response by following through with a phone call."

Bronstein advises against chasing recruiters — if they want to contact you, they will. "Don't follow up with a phone call unless you know them," he says. "You need to have incredibly thick skin," he says. Often, high-level execs, who are accustomed to people returning their calls, become irked when recruiters don't acknowledge their résumés or return their calls. "They think, 'I was president of Yucky Yucky Poo Poo, and this no goodnik won't call me back!' It's very frustrating." Bronstein says they should understand that recruiters get 300 to 500 résumés a day, and can't take a blind phone call. If, however, you've sent your résumé to a venture capital firm or to anyone in Corporate America (including government and nonprofits), don't hesitate to get on the horn, as this group is more likely to call back. "You may get lucky."

As a job search technique, remember that direct marketing is a secondary tool — networking comes first. "Networking is 'Job Number One,'" says Bronstein. "Direct mail is never a substitute for it." Still, he maintains, the tactic has its place in the job search process. "Sometimes you have to go beyond your network and tell others about your abilities. The way to do that is through targeted direct mail."

### **Caveat emptor**

Job-seeking executives are well advised to consider the limited potential of direct mail. "Direct mail as a marketing technique usually nets a very small response," notes Dave Opton, founder and CEO, ExecuNet. "If you are not familiar with the response rates of direct mail, you may need to know what your anticipated return on your investment may be. You need to be aware that your response rate will be small, have appropriate expectations."

Also be aware that direct mail is time and cash intensive. "Whether you do it yourself or employ others, it's an investment of time and resources," Opton says. "Evaluate the return on investment and consider the time involved." And remember, quality vs. quantity — targeted pieces tailored to the person you want to reach are infinitely more worthwhile than broad-based canvassing.

## **Playing the Waiting Game: How and How Often to Follow Up During Your Job Search**

**By Louise Kursmark**

You've nerved yourself up and placed a cold-call to an executive at one of your target companies. Or you've telephoned a recruiter who, you've heard, specializes in filling jobs like the one you're seeking. You've reached out to a networking referral ... and now you're waiting for a call back.

Should you call again? How soon? How often? At what point do you become a pest, and at what level of persistence are you over-investing in that potential contact?

There are no hard and fast answers to these questions, but a discussion among ExecuNet members at a recent networking event revealed a few general guidelines, real "in-the-trenches" experience and good words of advice.

### **It's worthwhile to call more than once**

Let's face it, your job search may be your number-one priority, but it's not nearly as important to the people you're calling. Persistence can indeed pay off, and two, three, four or even five calls may be in order before giving up.

Of course, it's also good etiquette to follow up any business letter or phone call, so you'll boost your professional image if you continue to leave polite, persistent messages until you reach your quarry. Consider indicating a specific time for your callback: "I'll try you again at 4:30 on Tuesday and hope we might speak at that time." You'll plant a seed of expectation in your target's mind, and a phone call at the appointed hour might be just the memory-jogger needed to induce your target to take your call.

### **Use e-mail as an effective means of following up**

Following up a voice-mail message with an e-mail message has been an effective strategy for many senior-level job seekers. E-mail is often viewed as less intrusive, less disruptive, and harder to ignore than a phone call. It's also quicker and easier for the recruiter or hiring manager to hit "send" and type a rapid sentence or two than it is to pick up the phone and chance getting your voice mail. The hiring authority might also be more comfortable delivering a "not interested" message via e-mail rather than in person; but regardless of the message you get, at the very least, you'll have closure on that contact.

Using e-mail to introduce yourself prior to a phone call can also be a good door opener. When you call, your target will be familiar with your name and background and, if he or she has any interest, will be more interested in taking your call than if you were calling "cold."

**Call early, call late**

Busy executives often arrive at the office early and work late, so before 8 a.m. and after 5 p.m. might be good times to reach them and avoid another voice-mail message or round of telephone tag.

**Never show frustration, annoyance or anger about not receiving a return call**

Repeated phone calls can leave you frustrated; but whether you're leaving a voice-mail message or talking to an assistant "live," be careful not to let your irritation show. If you do, you'll just give your image a black eye, and you won't get any closer to your target.

**Be aware that hiring can take a l-o-n-g time**

For any number of reasons, a job might remain open for months. In one story related at our networking meeting, a résumé sent in May — supplemented by periodic phone calls or e-mail follow-up — yielded an interview in August. Why? The recruiting firm had been retained to fill several senior-level positions at the same company, advertised them all at the same time, then got swamped with replies and decided to focus on each job in turn. Three months later, with the first few jobs filled, it was time to start interviewing candidates for job number three.

**Don't leave a meeting or interview without crystal clarity about hiring timeline, preferred means of follow-up, and agreement on next steps**

Conclude your meetings by reiterating the action plan:

- "I'll expect your call, then, by Friday. May I touch base with you on Monday if I haven't heard from you?"
- "I understand you'll be moving forward quickly, so I'll look for a phone call from Ted Sampson tomorrow. If he doesn't call, shall I follow up with you or directly with him?"
- "What is the best way to follow up with you? By e-mail (at what address) or by phone (at what number)?"
- "I appreciate your referral to Nancy Smithson. I'd like to get in touch to tell you about my conversation with her. What's the best time to call you? Or would you prefer an e-mail?"

**Couch your messages in a way that guarantees a conversation**

Neat trick if you can do it, don't you think? Consider leaving a message like this: "If I don't hear from you, I'll assume it's okay to call back." Again, even if you only get a message that says, "Don't call back," you'll be able to reach closure on this opportunity and move on to a more productive contact. And you might just get a receptive ear when you do make that follow-up call.

The "waiting game" is an inevitable part of every job search — particularly one that relies heavily on networking and therefore involves many contacts with different people. You can do a lot to make the process more productive and less frustrating. Be organized and methodical, so you don't lose prime opportunities for lack of action or persistence. And above all, be sure to communicate clearly and make it as easy as possible for your targets to respond. You'll accelerate your progress to the finish line and be a winner in the waiting game and the job-search game.

## Create a Calculated First Impression

Perception is reality, or so the saying goes. Even the most courageous, the most experienced, the most skilled feel doubt, uncertainty and maybe even the urge to run for the hills from time to time. But what sets apart many of the most successful executives is the ability to create the perception that they are calm, cool, collected and eminently capable of handling even the most trying situations.

Such executives have the ability to project an image of confidence, competence and comfortableness, says Debra A. Benton, consultant and author of the just-published *How to Act like a CEO* and a slew of other books aimed at executives, including *Lions Don't Need to Roar*, *How to Think Like a CEO* and *The \$100,000 Club*.

To be sure, first impressions count, regardless of whether they occur in a business meeting, a meeting with your child's high school principal, a job interview or a meeting with your boss. "Those first seconds really can make or break the outcome of that meeting or event," says Benton.

And while this isn't news to most executives, "that doesn't mean time and attention is focused on how they can make sure the message they send is the message they want to send," Benton says. Making a good impression is a calculated process, requiring forethought and practice.

"You may not feel confident — nobody does 100 percent of the time — but you sure had better look and act it," says Benton. "We may be all those things — confident, competent and comfortable with ourselves — but not come across that way. Unfortunately, it is all or naught because what the people we interact with read and conclude is the truth to them."

There are specific behaviors to strive for (and some to avoid) when aiming to appear confident, competent and comfortable, according to Benton. They are:

### Have a good attitude

Having a good attitude may sound like a no-brainer, but putting it into practice can be difficult. "You may feel overwhelmed or nervous or uncomfortable and think 'why am I here,' but you must have a positive attitude," says Benton. "If you are going to be in the situation, you'd better think about how you want to come across." A negative attitude is hard to hide, she adds, and will be evident in your demeanor and subtly in your body language.

### Be aware of your physical appearance

Unfortunately, just putting on a nice suit and polishing your shoes doesn't get you off the hook. "You have to physically, literally show comfort and confidence," says Benton. Make a conscious effort to stand up straight when walking into a room and try to avoid fast, nervous motion. "Be a little slower in movement and more purposeful than you may feel. When you shake hands, hold onto the other person's hand a split second longer than you are inclined to. Finally, try to have a relaxed look on your face," says Benton. "Scared people scowl, confident people smile."

### **Initiate the conversation**

In an interview, for example, it's wise for you to be the first to say something. Benton suggests an opener such as, "I'm very glad we can have this time together, and I know we have a lot of ground to cover. Why don't you start, Joe... "

Many people fall into the trap of "supposed politeness," thinking they should wait to be asked questions before they speak. "You don't want to be rude, but you want to be engaging throughout the conversation," says Benton. "By initiating the conversation, you take yourself out of the subservient role." The strategy holds true in almost any encounter — meeting new boss, meeting with a colleague, interviewing for a new job.

### **Recover from gaffes quickly and strongly**

While it's true that the first impression is critical and lasting, it is not the only chance you'll ever have to make an impression. Fortunately, you can recover from gaffes that may make a bad first impression, says Benton. "It can be done, but you have to be extra good while you're repairing, and it might take a little planning and even a hint of theatrics," says Benton.

To make her point, Benton relates the story of an executive she once was hired to coach. Upon meeting him, Benton tossed out her favorite line, "So, you're the man whose ring I'm supposed to kiss." It was a toss off for Benton, a joke she'd made repeatedly in the past, but she knew immediately by his reaction that she'd made a mistake. "He did not think it was funny, and I realized it was the wrong thing to say to him," recalls Benton. The executive was rushed on stage to give his two-hour speech, leaving Benton to squirm and plan a recovery. After the speech she offered an olive branch. "I held out my hand to shake his and I said, 'Can we meet again now for the first time...I think I made a mistake the first time.'" Having cleaned the slate, the two were able to start again. "The point is, I corrected the mistake and apologized, but I did not shrink or cower," Benton says.

The good news, says Benton, is that "five minutes of the right stuff is worth five years of hard work." Repairing the damage of a bad first impression takes courage, a carefully thought-out plan and, finally, the ability to turn up the juice to rescue the relationship.

Unfortunately, mastery of the three Cs — confidence, competence and comfortableness — is an intangible skill set that is expected at the senior level. "Where you're expected to learn this, I don't know," admits Benton. But don't expect too much help from you peers or your superiors. "They say it's lonely at the top, and it really is, because few people will make negative personal comments to you," Benton says. "They won't say, 'you lack confidence,' even if they think it." In a job interview the results are equally devastating. "They are going to be reticent to tell you that you don't have it," says Benton. "You just won't get that second call."

In short, the key to calculated first impressions is that they are, well, calculated. As Benton says, "This must always, not just occasionally, be something you think about and plan and then carry into action."

## PART FIVE: Market Yourself in Résumé & Cover Letter

### Bolster Your Case With a Tight, Strong Résumé

**Here's the paradox:** The best résumé in the world by itself won't get you a job, but a lousy one can pretty much guarantee you won't get it either.

"Résumés don't get people jobs, people get people jobs," stresses résumé expert and ExecuNet FastTrack seminar leader Judy Rosemarin. "A lot of people make the mistake of thinking that a résumé is the be all and end all." Instead, think of a résumé as an integral part of your overall strategic job search arsenal.

Security experts tout what they call a layered approach: Instead of counting on one whiz bang piece of technology or a live caffeine-fueled ever-vigilant human guard and a few security cameras, the most effective strategy is to combine the strongest aspects of several tools and tactics to craft a winning program. Take a page from that book when working on your own job search strategy, advises ExecuNet Founder and CEO Dave Opton. "A strong résumé is an important factor, but it remains one of many and arguably not even the most important one." For example, a résumé without networking creates very little traction in the job search, he points out. "Résumés are no substitute for an effective networking program; a great résumé should be in service of an effective networking program."

"Networking is even more important if you have what Rosemarin calls a "Popcorn Résumé." That's a résumé for someone in a career path where they have made a lot of moves from one job or project to another. A headhunter will often reject that kind of résumé at face value, because it seems to indicate restlessness or instability; but if you network beforehand, you'll have the opportunity to give people perspective and context. Instead of thinking you are hiding something with all the job changes, headhunters and others can be shown that you've been promoted for doing outstanding work or that you were hired to accomplish a specific goal and then moved on when it was successfully completed.

#### What's Working Today

The challenge for today's executive job seeker is to quickly grab and hold the attention of the person reading your résumé. "Nowadays, résumés have to be so much crisper than ever before," says résumé expert and ExecuNet FastTrack webinar leader Louise Kursmark. "The pile of résumés is getting higher while attention spans are getting shorter," she says. Those two trends are forcing successful executives to ditch, sometimes reluctantly, the long-winded anecdotal résumé in favor of the short highlights version that makes your value immediately clear to anyone reading the résumé.

Too many successful executives are loathe to leave out any of their impressive achievements when putting together their résumé. Unfortunately, cramming a résumé full of what you feel is impressive going back twenty years in your career will be counter-productive in many cases. Rosemarin suggested going back about ten to twelve years in your résumé if you are having trouble pruning it back.

"Show your value up front right away," she said. In addition to grabbing the headhunter or other reader by the lapels and winning their attention, it also shows that you have your act together in other ways, she suggests.

If a reader of your résumé can't get a clear sense of your value in thirty seconds or less, advises Kursmark, your résumé isn't helping you to land a great job. "You've got to make it easy for people to pick up the key information quick," she says.

### **Start at the beginning**

A good beginning to a résumé starts...at the beginning. The first paragraph is critical in grabbing the attention of your target. But that doesn't mean opening up with a vague objective statement, advises Kursmark. That's more of a junior-level move, she said.

Your first paragraph should have strong, clear language that orients the reader to the rest of your résumé, says Rosemarin. She suggests you keep it to three sentences, four at the outside, and avoid personal information and personal pronouns. Make it less about you and more about what you did. For example, if the division you lead posted double digit growth, make that the emphasis of your opening graph.

Quantify to the degree possible the positive impact you've had on the bottom-line. That can mean you helped to generate black ink or cut the red. But in your opening section — and throughout the résumé — avoid jargon and acronyms. Your résumé may not start with the person in the firm who will understand it. That kind of mistake can often ensure that your résumé doesn't make it past the human resources person collecting résumés.

### **Eye the look**

While content may be king when it comes to crafting a successful résumé, formatting and look is at least a powerful queen. "What I say to clients is, if your résumé looks terrible visually, what does this résumé say to a person looking at it?" Rosemarin says. Think of it this way, a helter-skelter résumé with sloppy design may intimidate a person contemplating reading it. Who wants to have to shut their door and devote fifteen minutes of valuable office time trying to decipher a disorganized presentation? They'll likely toss that one in favor of a tight, focused résumé that gives them a good sense of a potential candidate in a minute or less. "The look of a résumé should be easy to read and not demanding," Rosemarin says.

A lot of the ultimate success or failure in a résumé has to do with formatting, agrees Kursmark. For example, if you try to include all of your achievements in an unbroken list of bullets, you are going to muddy your own message. Most people lose focus after three bullets, and if they aren't given a visual "breather" by breaking up those bullets with indents, you're liable to lose them before they get started. It won't matter how impressive your bullet points are if no one reads them.

### **Case study: You**

If you strongly believe you need to tell a longer anecdotal story about your professional experiences, Kursmark and Rosemarin both like separate addendum letters. "It's an especially terrific approach when you are sending an unsolicited letter to a company that doesn't have a specific job posted," Rosemarin said. For example, if you see a need in an industry or a company

and you feel you can show how you could fill it, consider sending an anecdotal letter separate from or even without a résumé attached, they suggest. "If you show you are keyed in to their needs and nightmares, they might be intrigued enough to ask to see your résumé," Rosemarin said.

If you are struggling with how to write the addendum letter, think of it as you would a case study you'd put together for an effective product. And just as strong case studies are one of the most effective tools a marketer has, so can they be for you in your job search.

A separate addendum page can be a great strategy to explain your value in more specific ways, Kursmark says. You might have several key achievements that take up too much space to properly explain in a formal résumé; putting those into a separate letter can be very effective. They are also an effective tool to send before or after an interview. "They are an outstanding way to demonstrate how you met a challenge and produced results," Kursmark says.

### **Don't get (too) personal**

In these days of political correctness and a highly charged overall political atmosphere, inclusion of personal information in a résumé is more problematic than ever before, Kursmark and Rosemarin agree. That means leaving out information about whether you are married or have kids, and even think hard before you include any clubs or other affiliations. Clearly, including your membership in the local Republican or Democratic Club is going to be problematic with one side or the other (or both!), but Kursmark adds another item to consider. If you aren't active in your extracurricular activities, they can come off as fluff that turns people off. She had a client recently who is a competitive ballroom dancer in their spare time. She suggested they include that at the end of their résumé because it was a genuine active interest and it had no political or religious overtones. "It is fun to talk about at interviews, but most extracurriculars don't really add anything to a résumé," she says. On the other hand, avoid the mistake of another Kursmark candidate who stressed on his résumé that he was still married to his first wife!

However, military service, which was once downplayed in résumés, is something you should mention, Rosemarin says. "You should be proud of your service," and in today's world it is viewed as a positive item in a résumé, she says.

## Cover Yourself With a Strong Letter to Augment Résumé

You go to the gourmet supermarket and spend hours selecting the choicest ingredients for your important formal dinner party. You bring home the finest cuts of meat, the freshest vegetables, and the perfect bottle of wine to accompany the meal. Following your Jacques Pepin cookbook to the letter, you spend hours in the kitchen creating a culinary masterpiece and then... you plop it onto a cheap paper plate and hand it to your suddenly underwhelmed and confused guests.

That's what a surprising number of other wise, savvy executives do when it comes to their résumés and cover letters. They spend hours upon hours crafting the résumé — sometimes with the help of a skilled and pricey expert — and then wrap the finished product around a quickly tossed off letter.

Sound familiar? It's a serious, common and completely avoidable mistake with many negative ramifications. Those executives fail to recognize that the cover letter sets the tone for the résumé. Worse, if you have hired a talented wordsmith to craft the résumé, it can be quite jarring for the reader to start with your own rougher cover letter. They'll think you had nothing to do with putting together the résumé and judge you by the cover letter.

Instead a good cover letter will entice a hiring manager or HR-person to look at and refer your résumé. While it is true that some recruiters don't look at cover letters — going straight to the top half of the first page of your résumé, noted ExecuNet FastTrack leader Linda Dominguez — an effective cover letter will identify a critical issue the company you are writing faces and show how you have the skillset to help address that problem.

To help you bolster your strong résumé with an equally strong cover letter, ExecuNet recently sat down with John Marcus to review and revise three different cover letters. Marcus, author of *The Résumé Makeover* (McGraw-Hill, 2003), which is being hailed as "the authoritative guide to résumés" by The Wall Street Journal's career website, CareerJournal.com, lives in Sarasota, Florida. What follows is the "before" version of each letter, John's improved "after" version, and an analysis about what was fixed — and why.

### Cover Letter Do's and Don'ts:

1. Don't make it a summary of your résumé
2. Do mention specific challenges or opportunities your target company faces — and show how you've got the skills to meet that need.
3. Don't ever fail to send a cover letter with your résumé. "It's almost disrespectful," Dominguez said.
4. Do get some help from a friend or a professional. Bounce it off someone and get some honest input, just like you did on your résumé.
5. Don't send a cover letter as an e-mail.
6. Do send the résumé electronically if that's how the job posting, such as ExecuNet's, handles them. But think of the e-mail as simply a means of delivery; in other words, produce a great letter and résumé on paper that you happen to send electronically!

## Cover Letters That Work: Before & After

Hayden N. Gerring  
2299 Rolling Pine Drive  
West Bloomfield, MI 48323  
(248) 366-6790  
Haydeng@attbi.com

October 15, 2002

Mr. Thomas P. Strickland  
Vice President of Sales  
Advanced Systems Concepts, Inc.  
1150 Griswold  
Detroit, MI 48226

Dear Mr. Strickland:

Throughout my 15-year career, I have held progressively responsible positions in sales, sales training, and sales management. Employers have included manufacturers, resellers, and service organizations that have been in both traditional and high-technology businesses.

I am well aware of the great strides your company has been making, especially in penetrating the explosive healthcare market, and would like to speak with you about how my background could contribute to your company's growth. My résumé is enclosed for your review.

Briefly, as sales manager for a software developer, I held complete responsibility for establishing sales goals, developing and implementing the sales strategy, setting pricing, plus directing sales channel development and management, sales force recruitment/training/motivation, as well as customer service. I quickly won recognition as an energetic, results-oriented leader who drove the company to new levels of success.

As sales trainer for a manufacturer of bearings with nationwide distribution, I defined the company's training needs, identified and utilized outsourced sales training programs, created in-house training programs, plus monitored improvement in sales performance. I trained most individuals at the corporate headquarters but performed extensive travel working with the sales force in the field as well as coaching district and regional managers on how to develop their sales personnel. My activities played a key role in the company's growth.

I would like to meet with you to discuss how my background could be of value to your company and will call your office next week to follow up. Thank you in advance for reviewing my résumé.

Sincerely,  
Hayden N. Gerring

### COVER LETTER #1: MARCUS' ANALYSIS

**Cover Letter Error:** Omitting accomplishments and stating only responsibilities in a cover letter

**Before:** Gerring doesn't discuss any of his successes, which prevents his cover letter from having impact.

**After:** By including his successes, readers see the enormous contributions Gerring has made at his employers and will be eager to read his résumé.

Hayden N. Gerringer  
2299 Rolling Pine Drive  
West Bloomfield, MI 48323  
(248) 366-6790  
Haydeng@attbi.com

October 15, 2002

Mr. Thomas P. Strickland  
Vice President of Sales  
Advanced Systems Concepts, Inc.  
1150 Griswold  
Detroit, MI 48226

Dear Mr. Strickland:

I'm an accomplished sales executive with a record of success in both sales training and field sales management. I have made important changes at my last two employers that drove both organizations to record revenue levels. At the present time I'm confidentially seeking a new opportunity and challenge and would like to meet with you to discuss how my background could play a key role in your growth and future plans. My résumé is enclosed for your review. Select highlights include:

- Joined a software developer as sales manager and grew sales 300% in 2 years, achieving 150% of goal and record sales.
- Redirected the sales strategy from focusing on small businesses to targeting key vertical markets, especially healthcare and financial services.
- Replaced 75% of the sales force through recruiting and hiring sales executives with target market experience.
- Aligned pricing with market conditions, expanding margins 20%.
- Previously, held the position of sales trainer for a reseller of computer components and systems, holding nationwide training responsibility. Developed and implemented programs that led to a 25% increase in sales within a 14-month period while reducing turnover 35%. Both were record levels.
- Rigorously analyzed training needs, then developed programs for both new hires and experienced personnel.
- Trained individuals at corporate headquarters, plus traveled throughout the U.S. to work with sales reps in the field.
- Coached district and regional sales managers on effective ways to further develop their teams.

I feel that my successes in sales training and sales management would enable me to make immediate and significant contributions to your company. I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and will call your office next week to discuss the appropriate next step. Thank you in advance for reviewing my credentials.

Sincerely,  
Hayden N. Gerringer

**COVER LETTER #2 "BEFORE"**

Arthur F. Lawson  
5601 Midway Drive  
Huntington Beach, CA 92648  
(714) 749-8028  
Lawson\_af@yahoo.com

October 12, 2002

Mr. Scott R. Fielding  
Chief Executive Officer  
10900 Wilshire Blvd.  
Barringer Industries, Inc.  
Los Angeles, CA 90024

Dear Mr. Fielding:

Vision. Leadership. Innovation. These are the qualities that corporations are seeking today due to the troubled times in which we live. With the strength of the economic recovery in doubt and the executive brass lacking credibility with the American people, Corporate America is facing one of the greatest challenges since The Great Depression. Companies need proven executives with integrity, who can identify existing problems as well as growth opportunities, then effect the changes necessary to rise above the competition and drive their organization to new levels of success. I am such an executive.

My background includes a history of achievement in starting up new companies, turning around virtually bankrupt organizations, plus growing the top and bottom lines at already profitable enterprises. My successes embrace multiple industries: electronics, traditional manufacturing, and financial services. It's of little import to me what a product or service is. The key to success is understanding business and its key drivers.

An entrepreneurial leader, critical thinker, outstanding problem solver, and adept corporate strategist, I would welcome the opportunity to talk to you about how my background and accomplishments could be put to use to help grow your company. My résumé is enclosed for your review.

Thank you in advance for reviewing my credentials. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,  
Arthur S. Lawson

**COVER LETTER: MARCUS' ANALYSIS**

**Cover Letter Error:** Beginning a cover letter with philosophical, global statements

**Before:** Some job hunters feel that an effective way to attract readers' attention, as well as show what great thinkers they are, is to begin their letter by discussing challenging issues being confronted by the country or the business world. This approach backfires. These people appear to be arrogant and pompous as they lecture the reader.

**After:** By omitting the first paragraph and expanding on the second, especially detailing his successes in turning around and starting up companies, Lawson demonstrates his capability and virtually guarantees that readers will turn right to his résumé.

## COVER LETTER #2 "AFTER"

Arthur F. Lawson  
5601 Midway Drive  
Huntington Beach, CA 92648  
(714) 749-8028  
Lawson\_af@yahoo.com

October 12, 2002

Mr. Scott R. Fielding  
Chief Executive Officer  
10900 Wilshire Blvd.  
Barrenger Industries, Inc.  
Los Angeles, CA 90024

Dear Mr. Fielding:

I'm an accomplished general management executive with multi-industry experience, including electronics, traditional manufacturing, and financial services. Key strengths include idea generation, strategic planning, start-ups, and turnarounds. At the present time I'm exploring career opportunities on a confidential basis and would like to meet with you to discuss how my background could play a key role in your growth and future plans. My résumé is enclosed for your review. Select highlights include:

- Acquired a failing toy manufacturer, then reengineered the organization, generated a profit within 6 months, and successfully sold the company 12 months later at a 150% premium to purchase price. This was accomplished with no experience in the industry.
- Cofounded a loan management company that specialized in student loan receivables originated and subsequently charged off by lending institutions. Grew the business to 18,000 accounts valued at over \$66 million, then sold the company to a large competitor.
- Restructured the Asia-Pacific operations of a manufacturer of electronic products and components, delivering 2 consecutive years of profits after 8 years of losses. Grew sales 62% in a market growing less than 7% annually.

I take great pride in my entrepreneurial talents as well as ability to succeed in highly diverse industries. I would like to meet with you to discuss how my breadth and depth of experience could be of value to one of the Barrenger companies.

Thank you in advance for reviewing my credentials. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,  
Arthur F. Lawson

**COVER LETTER #3 "BEFORE"**

Robert A. Boylan  
1 Leavitt Street  
Hingham, MA 02043  
(781) 749-1558  
Rbtab@hotmail.com

March 17, 2003

Mr. Jack Mohan  
Management Recruiters, International, Inc.  
607 Boylston St.  
Boston, MA 02116

Dear Mr. Mohan:

I'm seeking a manufacturing management opportunity with a progressive, growth-oriented company that is recognized in its industry for both innovation and outstanding product quality. The company will consider human resources to be its most valuable asset, plus encourage professional and personal growth through providing a nurturing and empowering work setting. Additionally, the company will have a promote-from-within policy as well as a comprehensive benefits package. My résumé is enclosed for your review.

In exchange for the above, I offer outstanding strengths in manufacturing management, with a record of achievement in new process and equipment design, cost reduction, productivity enhancement, and inventory management. My contributions at each of my employers have played a key role in the organization's growth to the next level of success.

I am recognized as a team player with a high energy level and burning desire to maximize a company's productivity and operating efficiency. Throughout my career top management has cited me for my innovation and hard work. I am certain that when you have a position for which my background is appropriate, your client will want to meet me and hire me.

Thank you in advance for reviewing my credentials. I will call you next week to discuss the appropriate next step.

Sincerely,  
Robert A. Boylan

**COVER LETTER #3: MARCUS' ANALYSIS**

**Cover Letter Error:** Focusing on personal needs in a cover letter, not on the value being offered to an employer

**Before:** The focus of Boylan's cover letter is what he wants from a company, not what he can offer an organization. This self-serving attitude is a turn-off to many résumé reviewers.

**After:** The rewritten cover letter focuses on the value that Boylan brings to companies, which will prompt reviewers to read his résumé.

**COVER LETTER #3 "AFTER"**

Robert A. Boylan  
1 Leavitt Street  
Hingham, MA 02043  
(781) 749-1558  
Rbtab@hotmail.com

March 17, 2003

Mr. Jack Mohan  
Management Recruiters, International, Inc.  
607 Boylston St.  
Boston, MA 02116

Dear Mr. Mohan:

I'm an accomplished manufacturing manager with a record of success in the electronics industry, with employers producing both high-volume products and custom systems. At the present time, I'm seeking a new opportunity and challenge and am enclosing my résumé for your review. Key highlights from my background include:

- Developed and implemented new manufacturing processes that decreased cycle time 15%.
- Designed production equipment that improved quality 10%.
- Introduced assembly procedures that reduced labor costs 12%.
- Created inventory management initiatives that increased annual turns 25%.

I am recognized as a team player with a high energy level and burning desire to maximize a company's productivity and operating efficiency. Throughout my career top management has cited me for my innovation and hard work. I am certain that when you have a position for which my background is appropriate, your client will want to meet me and hire me.

Thank you in advance for reviewing my credentials. I will call you next week to discuss the appropriate next step.

Sincerely,  
Robert A. Boylan