



“CUSTOMIZE” YOUR CAMPAIGNS:

FINDING WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO GET NOTICED

(AND TO DECIDE WHETHER YOU WANT TO WORK THERE TOO...)

Never has the need to **customize** your job search—in terms of contacts, cover letters, resumes, supporting documents, portfolios, references etc—been so critical as it is today. In this economy, hiring managers report uniformly a five-to-tenfold increase in the number of applicants for each job; truly, the only way to stay out of the circular file, at resume-screening time and after, is to know exactly what the organization needs right now, and **demonstrate that you can deliver it**. Anything less than that is a waste of everyone’s time, especially yours.

There are fewer jobs and more applicants: that’s pretty challenging math. So how can you find what you need, in order to know to what an organization’s needs are right now, and play to those needs? And the good news is this—when you do your homework, you not only increase your chances of getting noticed and then hired, but you also have a better chance of knowing whether you really want to work there or not. It’s definitely a win/win deal.

John Naisbett, in his book, [Megatrends](#), wrote about the complementary rhythms of High Tech and High Touch in our professional lives. That means balancing data-driven and digital resources with the power of personal connections. When you rely on technology, there will always be a counterbalancing pull toward the emotional and intuitive, to which you must pay attention. Nowhere is that more true than in a campaign to get yourself hired.

Yana Parker, author of [The Resume Catalog: 200 Damn Good Examples](#), observed wisely that “**a resume is a marketing document, not a career obituary.**” The only thing potential employers need to know are the ways in which you can meet their needs—and all the rest is extraneous. Yet writers of cover letters and resumes so often seem hell-bent on telling their life stories, the good, the bad and the boring. And end up in the circular file as a result.

In simpler times, employers might have been willing to mull over a letter and resume to see where an applicant might fit in. Not now. The people deciding whether to interview or hire you now are busy, impatient and overwhelmed with applicants: the burden of proof that **you can hit the ground running** is on no one but you! So how do you find out what problems you're supposed to know how to solve? And what kind of colleague they really want to hire?

You have to use both **High Tech** and **High Touch** strategies to unearth the data you need—call it goal-centered spying—so that you can sift through what you find to strategize **just how to get your target market's attention**.

For **High Tech**, here are the obvious sources: search engines, social networking sites, blogs, web sites of various organizations, associations, news venues such as Lexis-Nexis, online newspapers, professional and business journals, online industry magazines, college alumni/ae websites

For **High Touch**, all of the following kinds of people can be invaluable sources of information, before, during and even after your campaign: friends, family, neighbors, classmates, association members, special interest group members, sports friends, college alumni or career services offices, present and former colleagues, other parents or club members, former professors and managers, mentors. And don't forget people who work for competitors, who are always "reading their mail" and finding out the "juicy" and potentially important stuff about them.

So what will you be trying to discover before you set your strategy for a particular job or organization? Find as many of the following nuggets of information as you can, using both **high tech** and **high touch** sources and approaches:

- What particular skills, job-specific knowledge and general aptitudes are required to succeed? What do they stress in the job description, if there is one?
- What direct experience of yours could be useful here? Why?
- Do a **SWOT analysis** on the work unit and on the organization: what are their current Strengths/Weaknesses/ Opportunities and Threats? Why might they need you?
- What is the culture of the organization and work unit? How do they behave? Who succeeds there?
- If this information is being gathered for a "marketing inquiry" rather than a response to a job posting, what problems, challenges or opportunities could your skills and experiences help them address?
- What are the preferred and required educational and professional credentials? How and why could other credentials and experience of yours add value to the organization?

- How “healthy,” financially and structurally, is the organization? What is their standing vis a vs the competition?
- What is the chain of command in the organization? What opportunities for growth would this position yield?
- What is the organization’s stance on developing their employees?
- What are the mission and values of this organization, and are they in alignment with yours?
- Could you “be yourself” there?
- How does this group handle conflict? How collaborative is the management style currently in play there?
- What is the organization’s stance on life/work balance, flexibility, and/or telecommuting?
- How inclusive an organization are they?
- What are the hiring preferences of the manager or search committee? Are they risk-takers or not? What about the style and preferences of the person to whom this position would report?
- What buzz words and language would you be expected to know and demonstrate in communicating with them?
- What do the leaders read? What conferences and organizations are they associated with?
- What organizational issues might affect the kind of person they’re seeking?
- Who had this job last? (They’ll usually want a change.)
- What innovative ideas or best practices you know about could be helpful to this organization, and why? Sketch out some of them, with a rationale for why each one could be useful now. If you can’t think of anything, that can tell you a great deal about whether working here would be a good next step for you.

TMI (Too Much Information), you’re probably saying. Not so. Remember this—the results of this due diligence can be useful to you at any stage on the spectrum of **“getting employed”** and **“staying employable.”** If you’re not thinking this way all the time, you’re not really **managing your career** very well. **And if you don’t, who will?**

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