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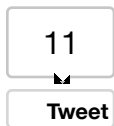
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Job Hunting 101: Resume Writers? Career Coaches? Are They Worth It?

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[May 30, 2012](#) Posted by [Meredith Deliso](#)



When you're looking for a job, the last thing you want to do is spend money beyond the essentials. That makes job services such a debatable expense: Should you spend upwards of hundreds or even thousands of dollars on resume writers, recruiters, career counselors, or subscription job boards to give yourself a competitive edge? Or should you just use the resources that are already available to you – often for free – to get the job?

The short answer is, career professionals can often provide a service that people sending out hundreds of resumes without a bite don't know how to do – market themselves effectively.

“The truth of the matter is, if anyone could promote themselves, then PR agencies wouldn't exist,” said Lauren Milligan, founder of the Chicago-based [ResuMAYDAY](#), a professional resume writing company. “People are good at doing a lot of these things for themselves, but that doesn't mean they're good at selling their story the right way.”

There's no shortage of these job consulting “PR agencies,” with services ranging from resume and cover letter writers to headhunters, career coaches, image consultants, and job search seminars. These services are nothing new – headhunters even date back to World War II – but the extensive layoffs in the intervening years since the stock market crash in 2008 helped put a spotlight on the industry in a big way.

“The recession really brought them to light because more people were looking for work and trying to find that edge,” said Miranda Marquit, a blogger who specializes in finance and career advice at [Planting Money Seeds](#).

Just about every recruiter or paid employment service will tell you upfront that they do not guarantee they'll find you a job, but that edge could lead to landing a job faster, advancing up the ladder, getting paid more, or finding greater job satisfaction. But that doesn't mean people always take advantage of these services. In fact, Milligan said her biggest competitor isn't other resume writing companies, but people who don't think they need the service.

“My competition is the job seeker who thinks they can write their resume themselves, or who doesn't want to invest in career advancement services,” said Milligan.

One common counter argument against spending money on these services is that so much is already available to job seekers online – often for free. LinkedIn and Twitter can serve as your headhunter, providing networking and self-marketing tools. You can consult message boards, articles, and other web resources for career advice. You can attend job workshops through your local community or religious organization. You also can have friends, family, and colleagues read your resume for you. If you can spend the time, you can learn the tricks of the trade.

” With time and effort, you can perform nearly every function of a job service on your own without spending a dime,” said Andrew Schrage, co-owner of [Money Crashers Personal Finance](#). “Several years ago, I spent nearly \$3,000 for an employment service, and although it did help, I later realized that I could have performed nearly all of the provided services myself.”

Of course, for those who don’t have the time to spend on an effective job search, that’s where job consultants can come into play.

“There are so many elements involved in the skill of job search that most people find themselves up against a wall,” said David Muir, Jr., founder of [GigSpire](#), a job training workshop based in Virginia. “Sure, there is plenty of information available for free on the Internet, but there are so many sources and conflicting opinions it can confuse the reader.”

Another counter argument against using resume writers, headhunters and the like is that they may be preying on people’s desperation in a down economy and not providing a legitimate service. With that in mind, we’ll walk you through each job service available out there, what they do, and what you should keep in mind if you’re looking to invest in one.

Resume Writers

The common sentiment we heard over the course of talking to people in the industry is this: if you spend any money on job services, spend it on a good resume writer.

“The only thing I recommend spending money on during a job search is resume writing, as it’s crucial for your resume to look sharp and professional,” said Schrage. “Too many people make crucial resume and cover letter mistakes that eliminate their chances of getting a job before they even have an opportunity to interview.”

A sharp resume is especially important, as recruiters going through hundreds of resumes may spend as little as [5 to 7 seconds](#) on each one.

“Candidates have but one chance to catch a recruiter’s eye,” said Gaye Weintraub, a professional resume writer in Houston with more than 20 years of experience. “With hundreds of resumes crossing the recruiter’s inbox and desk, candidates cannot afford to have a resume that looks like everyone else’s or that fails to promote their individuality and unique qualifications for the job.”

A good resume writer will revamp your resume so that it avoids clichéd phrases, is cut down to one page, provides specific information on job achievements, has a clean design, uses appropriate key words so that it makes it through screening software to an HR rep, and is tailored differently to the types of jobs you’re applying for.

“The biggest mistake most job seekers make is not having a personal brand and a clear job target,” said [Kelly Donovan](#), a Los Angeles-based career communications specialist and certified professional resume writer. “Many people have diverse experience and figure they’ll just create a resume and LinkedIn profile without any particular target, and they’ll apply for whatever jobs they see online that seem like jobs they could do.”

Resume writers don’t do just resumes, either. You can get help writing a cover letter, biography, or LinkedIn profile, as well as interview tips and post-resume training sessions so you can use your resume effectively.

There are hundreds if not thousands of practicing resume writers out there – the Professional Association of Resume Writers and Career Coaches has more than 1,000 members – so how do you find one? It’s always helpful to get a recommendation, if a friend or colleague has used a service that saw results. It also can’t hurt to go with a resume writer that has at least one certification or is a member of a professional association like the Professional Association of Resume Writers and Career Coaches or the National Resume Writers Association, as it shows a commitment to the profession. You can also check a business’s standing with the Better Business Bureau. And like with any legitimate service, the cheapest option isn’t always the best option.

“Not all resume writers are created equal,” said Donovan. “There are many typists and secretaries who call themselves resume writers, as well as ‘resume mill’ websites that use labor in India to create the resumes.”

In general, Donovan recommends avoiding any service that charges fewer than \$200.

Career Counselors

Resume writers may be the most strongly recommended job service, but there are other professionals that can provide similar services for those who are not having success finding a job, as well as seeking career guidance. Career counselors do more than just give personality tests – they can help you write your resume, develop interview and salary negotiating skills, figure out which skills are going to be most useful in your desired field, and, if you’re unhappy with your job or want to make a career change, help you through that process.

“The big picture is definitely to find satisfaction and fulfillment in one’s career,” said [Rachel Eddins](#), a licensed professional counselor in Houston. “We’re going to have 10 jobs in a lifetime. The more you know about yourself, feel confident about yourself, and have the skills to make effective decisions, the better off you’re going to be in the long term.”

If you’re seeking a career counselor, it’s best to go with one who’s specific to your industry.

“If someone’s legitimately good at revamping your resume, is an expert in a specific industry, and can help you tailor your resume to positions you want, that can be helpful,” said Marquit. “But you have to work really hard to find those types of career counselors.”

You can start by seeking out recommendations from colleagues, as well as checking your state’s or city’s workforce service department. Some corporate jobs may also offer counseling as part of

training. As these services can be pretty costly – a session with a career counselor could range from \$125 to \$250 an hour – you might also want to consider counseling through your college's career services department, or a job search ministry.

Job Workshops

A job workshop or seminar can be like a career counselor and resume writer all in one – you can find help building your resume, developing your interview skills, find new ways to search for jobs, and learn how to best promote yourself on paper and in person. Muir thinks of it as learning the job search.

“Our suggestion, and our core business model, is for the job seeker to learn the skill of job search,” said Muir. “GigSpire teaches people a methodology for the job search that replaces the need for paid service and will be a skill they can use for the remainder of their working lives.”

Workshops can vary from one afternoon to five days. The cost of these job seminars can also vary greatly, from nothing to thousands of dollars. For instance, Muir's tuition for his five-day program is \$2,750, though some residents of Virginia may qualify for free training if unemployed.

Headhunters

Also known as recruiters, headhunters help employees find jobs and employers fill jobs.

“A headhunter's job is to match your skills with somebody who needs them,” said Marquit. “A good headhunter will be honest with you about your skills and your chances.”

Much like applying to a job, a good headhunter will often have an application process to determine your skill sets and decide if you're a good fit for a job they're hired to fill. If you don't have the necessary skills, a headhunter might not even work with you. Headhunters also mostly work to fill positions at the middle-management level and up, so if you're just starting out in your career, they won't be of much use to you. It's also best to find one who works in your specific industry.

As far as costs go, this is one job service that you really shouldn't pay for.

“There are a number of companies that charge job seekers large upfront fees and then either do nothing or take the money and run,” said Donovan. “If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.”

If you're considering using a recruiting service, choose one that's paid for by the employer, rather than one that charges you a fee.

Paid Search Sites

Headhunters aren't the only way to find jobs. There are paid search sites that, with a subscription, can provide you access to a database of jobs. These sites may be industry or location specific, or focus on part-time work at large. [FlexJobs](#) is one such site that lists telecommuting, freelance, and part-time jobs. Since launching in 2007, it's grown to more than 23,000 members who have access to more than 10,000 gigs.

“Our job research team spends hours researching and verifying legitimate, professional-level jobs so that job seekers can find them quickly, easily, safely, and all in one place,” said FlexJobs founder Sara Sutton. “We aim to save job seekers time and to help them avoid the huge number of scams associated with these types of jobs.”

A site like FlexJobs will cost you \$14.95 a month. That’s \$14.95 more a month than a free job search engine like Monster or Careerbuilder will cost you, so if you’re to find highly relevant, vetted jobs, it might be worth your money. Sutton recommends asking these questions before you pay for a database service: Does this service save you time and effort in your job search? Does this service make you a better job seeker or help you better yourself as a professional? Does this job service have a track record of successful results? And does this job service offer you a money-back guarantee if you’re not satisfied with their services?

When to Invest

Before spending money on a resume writer or career counselor, your first stop should be whatever free or low-cost services are available to you, said Marquit, such as your college’s career services or religious organization. If you still don’t have success then, a job consultant may be worth your while.

The most obvious time to use a job service is when you’re looking for work, even with the added expense. Jennifer Vickery was having trouble getting office management work when she turned to a private resume writer. Within a week of sending out a revamped resume, she was called in for seven interviews, which resulted in four job offers.

“We all know that the most challenging task is getting a foot in the door,” said Vickery. “When my resume was professionally written, I found a major difference in the percentage of interviews I received.”

Unemployment doesn’t have to be the only catalyst for seeking out job consulting. Milligan recommends preemptively taking advantage of a resource like resume writing to get your resume in the best condition – before you need it.

“When you don’t have a job, getting a job is your job, so the best time to spend working on your resume is when you don’t need one,” said Milligan. “There’s less stress, and you’re in a place to be doing more self-assessment.”

You can use that time to find your strengths, as well as find out what skills you need to further develop in your job, such as through additional training or certification. If your company has promotions, you may want to boost your resume or interviewing skills to land the job. Or, if you’re looking to change your career path completely, or feel stuck in your current position, a counselor could help you find a new direction.

Even if you feel like you have a grasp on your resume, interviewing and job search skills, you might learn something new. Faisal Rana, a senior information security professional looking for work, recently attended a GigSpire workshop, where he learned new job searching techniques that helped lead to several job offers.

“I have three masters and a Ph.D, I’m pretty IT savvy,” said Rana. “But I didn’t know that you could look for jobs on YouTube.”

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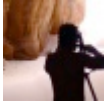



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