

Here's How - and How Not - to Land that Job

David Guy, Ottawa Citizen

To nail a job in advertising or marketing, you'd better be bursting with creativity.

But don't send a resume written on a softball. Or a resume with pineapple scratch-and-sniff stickers on it.

And don't handcuff yourself to the prospective boss's desk.

Those were among "the most unusual or most creative" - but not necessarily successful - job-hunting tactics reported in a survey of 250 advertising and marketing executives in the United States.

The study's findings were released yesterday by The Creative Group, a firm that matches freelance creative types with potential employers.

"You're probably better off sticking with the tried-and-true methods. Like sending thank-you letters - it's very traditional, but it really does the job," Wendy Gilbert, the Creative Group's Toronto division director, said yesterday. "It shows you're serious.

"Great electronic portfolios that are quick and to the point" also work, she said.

"But that doesn't mean that sending a T-shirt with the names of everyone in the company, and your own, isn't going to work - in the right circumstance."

The key is knowing your target - "if you've done your research and you know the company has the sort of office environment where that sort of creative thinking is encouraged," then go ahead and do something goofy, she said.

Stephen McGill, the president of McGill Buckley advertising of Ottawa, runs a quirky firm.

On the company's Web site, he poses with a robot-like gizmo on one shoulder, a three-eyed monster on his lap, and Spiderman on his knee.

Mr. McGill once hired a copywriter who sent him two envelopes a day apart.

The first envelope contained only the ink impression of a bare foot on a piece of paper.

In the second envelope was a resume with a cover letter that began: "Now that I have my foot in the door ... "

"It seems kind of corny, but this guy happened to be a very talented young writer," Mr. McGill said yesterday.

At The Gordon Group, an impressive resume works better, said Howard Whittaker, a partner in the Ottawa marketing firm. "I haven't hired anyone who has done anything unusual or wacky ... probably because they didn't have the experience. We're more established, so we tend to hire more experienced people.

"These people don't need to use gimmicks. They just send in a C.V. and name-drop, and that gets

people's attention pretty quickly."

Job-hunters who have sent Mr. Whittaker candies and baked goodies with resumes are wasting their time and money, he said.

And gimmicks can really backfire.

Mr. McGill recalled the story of a job-hunter in Toronto "who was trying to get into a very conservative firm and, obviously, he hadn't done his research.

"He just kept sending boxes with plastic bugs in them. The guy at the company flipped out and called the RCMP. He thought somebody was sending him a sign they were tapping the phones."

In fact, the job-seeker had intended to send a follow-up note saying: "Sorry to bug you ..."

"It's like any industry," Mr. McGill said. "You've got to know your audience."

The survey was conducted for The Creative Group by ICR, a marketing research group. Its findings are not considered statistically valid.

Wacky Job-Hunting Techniques

Some off-the-wall tactics job-seekers have used, according to a survey of 250 advertising and marketing executives.

- "A guy organized a chain letter that included a request for me to send his resume to 12 other agencies."
- "One candidate handcuffed himself to the desk during the interview."
- "An applicant sent me a pair of socks in the mail."
- "Someone attached pineapple scratch-and-sniff stickers to his resume."
- "We had a job-seeker send us a singing telegram."
- "One candidate sent us his resume written on a softball."
- "Someone being interviewed jumped on the manager's desk to make his point."
- "One job seeker sent lottery tickets with her resume."
- "An applicant rented a billboard that could be seen from our creative director's window and used it to list his qualifications."
- "We had a candidate bring two bodyguards with him to the interview."
- "A candidate sent us a T-shirt with the names of everyone in the company on it -
 - and her own."

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