



Making the Call

Getting in the Door

What You'll Learn in this Chapter

- networking and mingling
- submitting your resume
- following up to get an interview
- preparing for the interview

One of the most difficult aspects of contracting is getting your foot in the door. You can send your resumé to every one of your target companies or agencies and eventually you might get a call for an interview. However, there is another approach that is more likely to garner you a position.

This approach involves:

- **Networking**—getting a referral is critical. Many agencies pay their contractors for referrals of new professionals that result in a contract
- **Researching**—finding out about companies and agencies and the requirements for available positions.
- **Customizing**—modifying your resumé to make it specific to the job.
- **Following Up**—ensuring your resumé has been received and reviewed.

Networking

In order to market yourself, you must get yourself known. In every social situation, professional or otherwise, introduce yourself using your professional label to enforce the association of what you do with who you are. You never know when someone you meet will meet someone else who requires your services.

I've heard it said that you're only four people away from knowing everybody.

Through networking you are more likely to find out specifically who is looking for someone with your skills, and get a contact name or even a referral to that company.

For example, Susan attended a meeting for parents of little league players and introduced herself to the other parents as a software developer, specializing in Visual Basic. A week later,

one of the other parents called to give her the name of one of his clients who needed a VB developer.

Susan's friend Vera, also a Visual Basic developer, introduced herself as "in the computer industry." It's going to be difficult for people to think of Vera for work opportunities since it is unclear exactly what she does.

Learning How to Mingle

Learning to mingle without seeming pushy or desperate is easy to master. Once you overcome your nervousness and use your professional label as part of your name, mingling comes naturally.

Following are some tips for overcoming anxiety and maximizing the networking you accomplish at any professional event:

- Before you go, decide how many people you want to meet. Having a goal helps you focus on mingling instead of sticking with one person. Measure your success by the number of business cards you can get at a meeting.
- Arrive early and talk to the organizers of the event. They can give you an idea of who might show up. It'll also get you into the "mingling mode".
- When you introduce yourself using your professional label, maintain eye contact and shake hands with the other person. This is your first impression with them.
- Ask everyone you meet what they do and where they work. Ask them what they like about the company they work for, and what technologies they use. When they ask about you, restate your label and ask if they know of a company or a person who could use your services.

You should say 'I'm looking for a job in Visual Basic and I need your help. Tell me, who do you know that might be using Visual Basic developers?'

- Exchange business cards with all the people you'd like to talk to again. Your card will reinforce your professionalism, and will contain all the information they need to contact you. Their card will help you keep in touch with them.

The most important question to ask people you meet at a professional event: "Do you know of a company or person who might require my services?" Remember, if you don't ask, they won't offer.

Getting a Referral

The best way to get a referral is by asking for one. When you're mingling, don't be afraid to ask anyone "Who do you know that might be looking for a Visual Basic developer?" If they know someone, they'll tell you, and that gives you an invitation to submit your resumé, and call to say "So-and-so mentioned that you might be looking for a Visual Basic developer..."

When you contact a prospective employer, it is important to be upfront and specific about who referred you; this helps you gain instant credibility with the person you were referred to.

Specifying how you heard about a job is much stronger than saying "I heard you might be looking for a VB developer."

Submitting your Resumé

Once your resumé is ready to submit to your target company or agency, there are a couple of steps that may help to get it read, such as:

- Step 1. Address it to the person who should receive it rather than just to the company or Human Resources. To get a contact name, call the receptionist of the target company and ask "If I was a C++ developer who would I send my resumé to?" If the receptionist asks you why, be honest and upfront, say "I want to find out who to approach for contract work in my area of technical

specialization, so I can send them a letter or e-mail”. Make sure you ask for the contact’s e-mail address and direct telephone number.

Step 2. Decide the best way to deliver your resumé: by e-mail, regular mail, fax, or by hand. Whatever delivery method you choose, keep in mind the following:

- If you use e-mail, send your resumé in MS Word format, it is universal. *Make this your primary choice.*
- If you choose to fax, your resumé may transmit poorly or not reach the intended recipient. *Make this an alternate choice.*
- If you use snail-mail, your resumé may spend time in a mail room before reaching its intended recipient. *Make this your last choice.*
- If hand-delivering, dress professionally and be well-groomed and most of all be persistent. You want to make the drop in person, meet, deliver, but don’t linger. *Make this an alternate choice.*

Step 3. Compose the cover letter or e-mail, identifying who referred you or why you decided to approach the company. Say that you have done some research on the company and that you want to introduce yourself.

Step 4. In two days, follow up with the company contact to ensure your resumé was received and to ask for an interview. Your key goal in sending a resumé is to get an interview or a face-to-face meeting.

Remember, if you don’t have a referral or a contact person to send your resumé to, call the receptionist at your target company and ask for the name. Also get the person’s direct number and e-mail address so that you can follow up later.

Opportunity rarely knocks on your door. Knock rather on opportunity’s door if you ardently wish to enter.
—B.C. Forbes

See this web site for information about writing cover letters

www.careerlab.com/letters/

Writing the Cover Letter or E-mail Message

Include a cover letter with your resumé, or put cover letter content in your e-mail message. The purpose of this content is to introduce who you are, what you want, and who referred you. Keep your cover letter brief. Your resumé already contains all the details about your experience and skills.

The best cover letter contains the following content, no more, no less:

- An indication that you have researched the company and are interested in working for them as a contractor.
- The type of position you're seeking.
- An indication that you plan to follow up the letter by telephone and e-mail.
- The name of the person who referred you.

Following Up

After you send or deliver your resumé, wait a couple of days and then phone or e-mail the person identified in your cover letter. If you promised to contact the recipient by a specific date, make sure you do it.

In your follow-up call, you want to:

- ensure that they received your resumé.
- ask when they are planning to do interviews and who will be doing the interviews.
- ask for an interview.

An ideal follow-up method is the one week follow-up plan; it has built in persistence:

Monday	Tuesday	Friday
<p>Call the contact person at the company and even if you get only their voice-mail, let them know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• who you are and what you do (use your professional label).• you have done research on their company and are interested in pursuing a position with them.• you sent your resumé and want to ensure it was received.• where they can contact you. <p>Be clear, concise, and brief. Follow up with an e-mail message if you have the contact's e-mail address.</p>	<p>No response? Call again. This time leave your name and professional label in a voice-mail. You want to remind them who you are and what you do. This call will help keep your name in their memory.</p>	<p>No response? Call again and leave another brief reminder about your interest in the company and that you submitted your resumé. Was it received? Is there anything they'd like to pursue? After this point, if you don't get a call, you likely will not get a response. Do not keep calling, you will only seem desperate and annoying, and that's not the impression you want to leave. You can always try again after a couple of months.</p>

Turning a Negative into a Positive

If you get an interview—terrific! If not, don't despair. It may be that the company doesn't require someone with your skills at the moment.

If you do get to speak with a contact from your target company, ask them if they know who might be looking for someone like you. Say, "I'm a Visual Basic developer and I need your help, tell me who do you know that could currently use somebody like me?" The only way to get help is if you ask for it. Who better to ask than someone from your utopian company who has already read your resumé. You may even get a referral!

*You have to use every contact that doesn't give you
a job as a source of a referral.*

A referral brings you one step closer towards getting your foot in the door for an interview.

Gearing Up for the Interview

See these web sites for information about interviews

www.myjobcafe.com
www.myjobsearch.com
www.careers.wsj.com

The interview is your opportunity to shine. The reason you send your resumé to a company is to introduce yourself and give an overview of your capabilities. The interview is where you get a chance to elaborate on your skills and experience and to connect with the company; it's crucial that this process runs as smoothly as possible.

When arranging the initial meeting, don't forget to:

- Arrange the interview for a time that is completely free of conflict: you don't want to be late or have to reschedule, but as much as possible be open to their time. Nothing is worse than asking for an interview, and then declining the times offered to you because they don't fit your schedule.
- Ask if there is anything specific you need to bring with you such as a list of references, or a portfolio of recent work.
- Ask if you are required to do a skill test at the interview.
- Find out how they conduct interviews: is it one-on-one, or panel-style?
- Find out who conducts the interview: is it the supervisor, the project manager, a techie, an HR representative?
- Ask about the dress code.

By getting this information well in advance, you have the opportunity to prepare and be ready for the interview. Remember this is business, put your best efforts into this first meeting.

You have an interview with your utopian company, now read *Interviews—Making the Gate* on page 69 to prepare for the interview and follow up to ensure you get the job.

Frequently Asked Questions

- Q** What is the most important thing to remember when networking?
- A** Three things are especially important to remember when networking:
- Always introduce yourself with your professional label.
 - When talking to a new contact, ask for a referral, ask if they know of any companies looking for someone with your skills.
 - Be persistent, optimistic, and slightly aggressive. Remember this is business.
- Q** Should I include all my previous jobs on my resumé?
- A** NO! You should customize your resumé to suit the position you want, including only experience and skills that are relevant.
- Q** How should I send my resumé?
- A** Although there are pros and cons to each delivery method, there is a definite advantage to using e-mail. Sending your resumé by e-mail is fast, you can select to have a delivery receipt notice returned, it gives an automatic opportunity for the recipient to respond, and your e-mail message acts as your cover letter.
- Q** How soon and how often should I call after I've sent my resumé?
- A** Use the one week follow-up plan, as described on page 61. Leave a detailed call and e-mail on Monday, a brief call on Tuesday, and a final, detailed call on Friday. Be persistent, but not annoying.

Q How much detail should I put in my cover letter?

A Your cover letter should identify who you are, where you can be contacted, what you want, that you've done enough research to know what you want, and the name of the person or company that referred you.

