

# Job Hunting in the Electronic Age

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by Angela Picard, MEd, RHIA (formerly RRA)

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Professional networking is a major factor in the success of your career, and it certainly is a critical element in the job search process. As Perry Ellie, MA, RRA, president of H.I.M. Recruiters, says, "Statistics show that up to 80 percent of all employment opportunities are found through networking." By using electronic resources, such as e-mail and the Internet, you can broaden your networking and job search efforts to find the position best suited for your next career move.

## Electronic Networking Tools

To communicate electronically, you will need to establish an e-mail account. But before you set up this account, give careful consideration to the name (e-mail address) that you will use. An ideal e-mail address is one that is easy to remember and clearly identifies who you are.

When choosing an e-mail address for business and job search contacts, avoid names that suggest an unprofessional image, such as "hotbabe@email.com." As the adage goes, you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Your electronic identity is a small, but very important, part of a professional image.

If you do not own a computer, it is possible to set up an e-mail account using some of the free services available on various Web sites, including:

- <http://www.hotmail.com/>
- <http://www.lycos.com/>
- <http://www.snap.com/>
- <http://www.yahoo.com/>

However, it is necessary to have periodic access to a computer in order to check messages and respond in a timely fashion to potential employers who may contact you via e-mail.

## Show Me the Jobs!

After you have established your online presence, begin to seek out virtual communities that will assist you in your job search endeavors. First and foremost, use your professional resources. AHIMA's newest member benefit, the "Communities of Practice" will provide various professional networking tools including Job Banks and Discussion Forums that can help you with your job search.

Other industry publishers offer Web sites that list positions specifically for HIM professionals, including:

- *Advance for Health Information Professionals* Web site, at <http://www.advancweb.com>
- *For the Record Web* site, at <http://www.gvpub.com>

Another resource to investigate is the HIM List (HIM-L) -- a listserv (also called an online discussion group) subscribed to by many HIM professionals seeking advice and collaboration. HIM-L offers invaluable opportunities for networking, and joining is free. To subscribe to HIM-L, send an e-mail to [listserv@lists.umsmed.edu](mailto:listserv@lists.umsmed.edu), leaving the subject line blank. In the body of the

message, type "SUBSCRIBE HIM-L Your Name" (e.g., SUBSCRIBE HIM-L Jane Doe). For assistance with HIM-L subscription, send an e-mail message to [him-help@lists.umsmed.edu](mailto:him-help@lists.umsmed.edu).

## Creating an Electronic Resume

There are several options for creating an electronic resume (e-resume). Tutorials for designing electronic resumes are provided by Rebecca Smith on her Web site at <http://www.eresumes.com>. The different types of e-resumes include:

- ASCII text resume
- resume as an e-mail attachment
- key word resume
- Web resume

### ASCII Text

Many recruiter and employer Web sites request that you submit your e-resume as ASCII text only. You can create a resume in ASCII text format using a standard word processing program like Microsoft Notepad. Microsoft Word or Word Perfect can also be used as long as you save the file using the text format feature. A file saved in ASCII text format will have a name extension of .txt (e.g., resume.txt).

### E-mail Attachments

Sometimes it is possible to provide your resume as an e-mail attachment. However, this option is not always successful due to the potential incompatibility of the computer platforms or programs used by the sender and receiver. To improve the chances that your resume will transmit successfully, ask the receiving party if they have the same or compatible software program that you used to create the original document.

### Key Word

Employers and recruiters generally search resume databases using key words. Key words are nouns and phrases that highlight technical and professional areas of expertise, including industry-related jargon. To identify key words, put yourself in the shoes of the employer. Think of the strategic key words he or she would use to search a database in order to find a candidate who has the skills and credentials needed for the position.

For instance, a hospital in need of an inpatient coder might search for some of the following terms: experienced coder, CCS, certified coding specialist, and ICD-9-CM coding. The idea is to identify all possible key words that are appropriate to your skills and accomplishments that will support the kinds of jobs you are seeking. Once you have identified these key words, list each word or phrase by order of importance in a separate section near the top of your electronic resume.

### Web Resumes

Web resumes are online documents that can be viewed by potential employers as they consider job applicants. This type of resume provides an opportunity to showcase your computer skills and expertise and link a prospective employer to samples of your work (or Web sites of your previous employers).

Designing a Web resume may sound like a daunting task, but there are many resources available to assist you, including:

- Microsoft Word (1997 version or higher) has a feature that automatically converts your document to hypertext markup language (HTML) format

- Netscape browser software includes the Netscape Composer option, which can be used to create your resume in HTML format
- Various sources on the Internet teach the basics of HTML design. Two to try are <http://builder.cnet.com/Authoring/Basics/> and [http://www.eresumes.com/tut\\_webresume.html](http://www.eresumes.com/tut_webresume.html)

Key design elements to remember when creating a professional Web resume are:

- use graphic images sparingly to avoid long delays in downloading the pages for viewing
- keep the content professional (no personal details)
- safeguard your privacy by omitting your home address
- avoid using backgrounds that clash with the text
- use colors that are pleasing and easy on the eyes

## Posting Resumes Online

Sharing resume information online should be done with the same discretion and caution you would exercise in circulating a paper-based resume. It is prudent to deal only with reputable companies and contacts that will handle your information in a confidential manner.

If you are currently employed and do not want your employer to know of your job search efforts, be very selective about posting inquiries and resumes to public forums and resume databases that your boss might access. Even if this is not a concern for you, it is still wise to research the confidentiality or privacy policies of any Web site at which you consider posting your resume.

Again, do not provide your home address on your e-resumes. Consider using a post office box for written communication and your work phone (if possible) as a contact number.

## Employer and Relocation Research

Most companies and healthcare organizations now have Web sites that include a section for job postings. These resources let you job hunt and conduct online research about a potential employer prior to submitting an application. Furthermore, these electronic job listings are generally more up-to-date and accessible than regular print advertisements. To find out if a company or facility has a Web site, you can call the organization and ask, or simply look them up using an Internet search engine such as Yahoo (<http://www.yahoo.com/>), C-Net Search (<http://www.search.com/>), or Dogpile (<http://www.dogpile.com/>).

Regardless of your geographic location, online resources found on Web sites, such as <http://www.virtualrelocation.com> and <http://www.homefair.com>, can help you investigate the impact of relocation, including cost of living comparisons, real estate prices, state and local taxes, educational resources, and relocation expenses.

## The Art of the Interview

Hopefully, as a result of your on- and offline networking efforts, you will be interviewed for various job opportunities. An initial phone interview is common when an employer considers a candidate who lives in a distant geographic location. The success of a phone interview will generally lead to a face-to-face interview.

Some interviews, especially those for management or administrative positions, may involve a tour of the organization, meetings with other employees or departments, and/or meals in which the prospective candidate is evaluated based on interaction with a variety of people in different settings. Regardless of the situation, it is important to maintain a professional decorum and use active listening skills to establish a positive rapport with your potential employer. By doing online research prior to the interview, you will be able to demonstrate your interest in the organization and ask relevant questions about key issues.

In *HIM Journeys: A Career Guide for Health Information Management Professionals*, Kathleen Cunningham, RRA, recommends rehearsing or role-playing the interview experience ahead of time by anticipating questions frequently asked by interviewers.<sup>1</sup> Other tips for successful interviews include:

- gather background information on the organization
- dress professionally and present an organized, neat appearance
- bring items with you that further illustrate your qualifications for the position
- have several copies of your resume
- bring a note pad and pen to write down important information
- be early
- smile and have fresh breath
- use a firm handshake
- be polite, tactful, honest, friendly, patient, and considerate
- maintain eye contact
- be alert and prepared to answer and ask key questions
- think competently and act confidently
- demonstrate genuine interest in both the people you meet and the position
- relax and speak in a calm, controlled voice
- think before you answer
- avoid interrupting the interviewer
- restate any questions that are unclear
- show enthusiasm and let them know you want the position
- send a thank you card or message and follow up as appropriate

Bear in mind, this is also your opportunity to interview the organization. Consider making a list of items you wish to discuss. Some issues you may want to ask a prospective employer include questions about:

- the organizational structure in the company/department
- why the position is open
- has there been much turnover
- how soon they plan to fill the position
- what kind of people they usually look for to fill the position
- how did the interviewer happen to join the organization
- the interviewer's experience with the supervisor/manager/director
- employee benefits information

## Making the Most of the Outcome

An interview generally results in three possible outcomes:

1. you get the job offer
2. you are called back for another interview
3. you do not get the job

Getting the job offer often signals the beginning of salary negotiations and the possibility of reimbursement for relocation expenses or a sign-on bonus. If you are working with a recruiter, he or she can be of assistance in this phase of the process.

Getting called back for another interview is certainly a good sign that you made the cut from the first round of interviews. However, it is still crucial that you do your homework and continue to present a strong professional image during subsequent interviews.

If you are not offered the position, view the situation as a valuable, although sometimes difficult, learning experience. Consider contacting the employer for feedback and suggestions for improvement or possible referrals for other jobs in the area. Every experience, positive or negative, affords the chance to learn many lessons. So remember to always ask yourself, "What am I learning now?"

## Notes

1. Cunningham, Kathleen. "The Art of Interviewing," in *HIM Journeys: A Career Guide for Health Information Management Professionals*. Clearwater, FL: Picard Communications Inc., 1997, pp. 117-138.

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*This article is the first in a two-part series on how to use electronic resources in the search for employment. See "[Taking the Lead](#)" in September for a look at how electronic tools can assist employers in recruiting and hiring employees.*

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