

# e-HIM Professionals Wanted: Steps to Land a Job and Build a Career in Today's Modern HIM Job Market

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The rapid evolution of health information management (HIM) has created enormous opportunity for those individuals who are up for the challenge and prepared for the work. With the emergence of electronic health records (EHRs) and supporting technologies, the roles of HIM specialists are under reconstruction. Both new and seasoned professionals are required to obtain the knowledge and possess the skills to navigate through the new world of HIM. A plan to traverse the road ahead is necessary to build a successful career in HIM, and begins with determining and taking that first step. As Winston Churchill once wisely said, "He who fails to plan is planning to fail."

## Step 1: Make the Most of Your Degree Program

HIM degree programs are essential to the development of tomorrow's workforce. They prepare future graduates with the latest domains of knowledge that will be necessary to appreciate various facets of HIM. Beyond the A&P flashcards and stack of coding books, there is a shining light of opportunity in the Professional Practice Experience (PPE). However, program directors report that it is increasingly difficult to establish PPEs for their students due to shrinking HIM departments and the increasing number of staff working remotely. Despite these challenges, HIM directors and leadership teams are remiss in not taking this occasion to train the next generation of HIM specialists.

This is an equal opportunity for HIM students and directors to take advantage of this unique juncture to learn from and interview each other. And make no mistake—a PPE is an interview. It is an extended interview for the students to demonstrate their skills, learn about the various functions of the HIM department in order to discover their ideal fit, and examine the culture of a company to see if this is where they would ultimately like to be employed. HIM directors devote their time to host PPEs for students with the hope of finding the best candidates for future positions.

Every aspect of the PPE is under surveillance—timeliness, professional dress, teamwork, work ethic, time management, critical thinking, and work standards. Take advantage of this opportunity to promote your value. Over-deliver when you can and do what is expected—both before it's expected and better than it's expected. These are the students that directors want to hire and the employees that will advance.

With this unique opportunity to make all the right moves comes the prospect of also making the wrong ones. There are some common mistakes that can land you on the "do not hire" list. Among the top offenses are those related to inappropriate use of social media, the Internet, and smartphones. The world is certainly technology driven and people are increasingly consumed by the need to stay connected, but there is a time and a place for these activities. During work hours and/or the PPE, personal use of apps, sites, and gadgets should be minimal. Employers will also make note of inappropriate attire as a reason that someone may not be hireable in the future. It is widely assumed that the way a person shows up for an interview is the best they will ever look at the job. Even though this is a PPE, remember that it is still an interview and one should put his or her best foot forward in all areas, including professional attire.

Another way to gain visibility as a student is to demonstrate interest in the profession. Participate in AHIMA activities and a state and local HIM association when possible. Volunteering is a great way to meet professionals and it can also be highlighted on your resume and during your interview. Mention the things you did, new information learned, speakers you heard, topics you enjoyed, and whom you met (chances are your interviewer may know them). Remark that you stay abreast of the professional literature and cite the journals and websites that you follow. There are many free journals and e-newsletters you can sign up for, as well as AHIMA *e-Alerts*, to stay informed of current trends. Networking with industry professionals is also an ideal way to find out about employment opportunities.

Social media can be a powerful tool a student can use to begin networking. Create a LinkedIn account and profile that highlights your skills and strengths. Be sure to include industry keywords and information about achievements, associations, and professional goals. This ensures that employers will be able to find you on LinkedIn and take that all important next step of requesting your resume. But beware the blunders of social media as well. While employers use social media to find candidates, they use it to screen candidates as well. Facebook profiles that lack discretion or are not in line with a company's image can prevent employers from recruiting someone.

Now that you have obtained your degree and made some professional contacts, you need to commit your qualifications to paper.

## Step 2: Write an Effective Resume

Large companies typically utilize search tools that electronically comb through submitted resumes for keyword matches to a particular job description. It is important to carefully read the job description and extract key phrases that you can include on your resume to increase your chance of being selected for review by hiring managers. The next part of the recruitment process is generally focused on accomplishments and results. Be clear about your qualifications and experience.

Resumes should follow some general guidelines:

- **Demonstrate the value you bring to the company.** Resume screens are typically done in seconds, so your resume should highlight what you are good at and what you want to do, as well as clearly outline how you fit the job's requirements.
- **Highlight your accomplishments.** Employers prefer resumes that are accomplishment-oriented rather than those written with general resume language. Employers want motivated candidates that consistently perform past their basic job functions. Focus on demonstrating how you were able to save time or money, gain efficiencies, build relationships, or solve a problem.
- **Place job-relevant skills near the top of your resume.** Specific skills relevant to HIM should be included in the summary section at the top of the resume.
- **Utilize a bulleted format.** Bulleted lists are more reader-friendly and widely preferred by employers. Be consistent with the use of bullets to prevent the reader from questioning why some material is not bulleted or indented.
- **Don't list references on your resume.** These should be listed on a separate sheet if you choose to submit them. However, references are generally not submitted unless requested by the employer.
- **Verify the formatting of your resume.** Formatting on e-mail attachments varies from computer to computer, so it is recommended to experiment by sending the e-mail to various users to verify that format is consistent. Using a text version of the resume is generally the most common format for e-mail.

### Landing a Different Job Within Your Current Organization

With the consolidation of HIM departments across the industry, many HIM professionals are finding themselves having to re-interview for new jobs within their organization. To make the transition to the new roles, it is necessary to understand what employers are looking for as they restructure their HIM departments with staff that will help them meet the demands of the EHR, the "meaningful use" EHR Incentive Program, and regulatory requirements.

In this scenario, it is important to show enthusiasm for the changing environment, establish that you understand the needs of the new job and have a willingness to grow, and provide examples of how you have met challenges in the past. As a bonus, demonstrate your passion for the profession by discussing how you stay current on HIM topics by reading industry magazines and how you are involved in local organizations for networking opportunities.

## Step 3: Prepare for the Interview

If you have written an effective resume and your skills are a good match for the position, you are likely a promising candidate for an interview. Large organizations commonly schedule a phone interview with a recruiter as a first step. During this phase, the recruiter will ask a series of questions to determine why you are interested in the position, what your salary requirements are, and if you would be a good fit for the culture of the company. Although this feels very informal, it is important to take this step seriously. Make sure you are in a quiet environment during the phone call with your resume at hand.

If you pass through this initial filter, you may finally be granted the official job interview. You may not be the only candidate that interviews for a particular position so you need to make sure that you stand out from the crowd. The number one thing you can do is prepare. Preparation not only shows that you are very serious about the position, but it helps to alleviate nerves that may otherwise hinder your ability to exhibit that you are the right candidate for the job.

Begin by learning everything you can about the company. With the abundance of information available online, there is no excuse to show up to the interview with little to no knowledge about the company. Scour the company's website and find out everything you can about their mission, their range of services, locations, history, news stories, etc. The information you gather will help you converse with the interviewer and ask intelligent questions that will demonstrate you have done your homework.

Familiarize yourself with the job description so you know what the employer is looking for in the person they hire. Highlight the skills you possess that are aligned with the job description using examples from your coursework or previous work experience to validate your competency. Practice responding to anticipated interview questions so you can develop concise answers with sufficient detail. Carefully choose interview clothing that depicts your professionalism and demonstrates you are serious about the position. Prepare a notepad or portfolio to take with you to the interview that contains extra copies of your resume for distribution, questions that you would like to ask, and extra paper to take notes during the interview. Remember that an interview is just as much about you determining if the company and the position is a good fit. Ask the questions that you need answered to decide if this is the right place for you.

## Step 4: Land the Job

While interviewing can be nerve-wracking, most interviews will contain some common questions that you can prepare for in advance. One of the most common interview questions is "Tell me about yourself." Be prepared to answer this concisely and with focus on what the interviewer would like to know about you with respect to the open position. This is not about where you grew up or your hobbies but rather about how you would fit into the job you are interviewing for. Focus on strengths and skills that directly pertain to the open position. You need to demonstrate that you are the exact person they are looking for. Provide examples with results such as "I increased productivity by 10 percent over a nine month period by... ."

If you are a new graduate with limited experience, don't let your lack of relevant experience trip you up. Discuss any exposure you had to similar functions during your PPE and demonstrate that you are knowledgeable about the function. If you had access to EHR applications during your degree program or during your PPE, be prepared to establish that you were able to quickly adapt to the software and provide examples of what you were able to accomplish with those tools. Just remember, what the interviewer is really looking for is your ability to evaluate a situation, determine what needs to be done, and think ahead to the next steps. Think about examples you can use during your interview that illustrate this critical thinking, regardless of the context.

In addition to HIM knowledge and computer skills, employers are increasingly seeking soft skills such as critical thinking and problem solving. Interpersonal skills (how well you work with others) and communication skills (the ability to effectively communicate with various groups) are among the qualities most sought after by employers. These skills, along with time management and work ethic, indicate higher functioning employees that will get the job done quickly, effectively, and with minimal supervision.

At the conclusion of the interview, be sure to reiterate your excitement for the position to illustrate your enthusiasm and motivation. When the interviewer asks if you have any questions, refer to the list of questions you prepared ahead of time and see if there are any outstanding topics you would like to discuss. Finally, remember to thank the interviewer for his or her time and ask when you might hear back from them or what the next step will be.

## Step 5: Taking the Next Step in Your Career

It is not very often that someone new to a career lands their dream job right out of the gate. For new graduates and career changers, there is a process for getting to where you want to be. The key is to plan out your next career step. Do you have aspirations of becoming an HIM director? More education and/or further certifications may be necessary to reach that goal, so look at the road ahead and plan accordingly. Are you looking for advancement opportunities at your current organization? Networking is a valuable tool for finding out about opportunities. Make others aware of your goals so that they can let you know when they hear about open positions that may interest you. By letting your manager know about your career goals, they may be able to help you gain the knowledge and skills you will need to take that next step. Seek out an HIM mentor in the organization that can guide you to the next level.

The employment opportunities in HIM are endless—information governance, data analytics, and clinical documentation improvement are just a few of the new HIM roles that need skilled professionals. HIM professionals possess a unique range of skills that make them valuable in so many different facets of healthcare. When new opportunities become available, remember to speak up and let employers know you are up to the task.

There are numerous avenues to get to where you want to be—but you have to know which direction you want to take. If you know you want to advance but don't really know what that entails, there are career planning tools available through AHIMA—visit [www.ahima.org/careers](http://www.ahima.org/careers)—and other organizations that can help a person visualize where they want to be and how to get there. Stay connected with local, state, and national HIM organizations. Through networking and giving back to the profession a person can learn a lot more about available opportunities.

The above steps will help you navigate the evolving roles in HIM and map out a successful career path. Make the most of your PPE, write a professional resume, prepare for the interview, and network and utilize professional resources. You are now ready to step into the HIM profession, land the job that you want, and map out the career of your dreams.

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