



Marketing Yourself: Creating a Successful Sales Strategy for “ME, Inc.”

by Mary Kilkenny

Your ideal position just opened up and you are the perfect fit—you graduated in the top of your class from a well-known university, have an impressive exam-passing history and a five-page list of related accomplishments and were recently named Employee of the Year at your “A++” rated employer. However, if you don’t market yourself properly, you will get overlooked in the masses.

In this competitive industry, it is imperative to market yourself. The same rules apply to internal promotions and potential employment at a new company. You are a product that has features and benefits. You are your own company, “ME, Inc.,” and you need to market your product—you and your abilities.

Research, research, research: the foundation of a healthy marketing plan. How do you know just what qualities are considered most valuable to the person sitting on the other side of the desk? Do your homework. Utilize mentors, PD advisors, peers and alumni connections, in addition to the Internet and written materials you can find on the subject.

Know the product—you. Before marketing yourself, evaluate your strengths and weaknesses. Write them down and be open to input from close friends and family. They may have surprising suggestions you had not considered in your self-assessment. If you have trouble jump-starting this process, The Actuary’s Career Planner, published by the SOA, is a helpful tool to walk you through it. Whatever it is, find your brand and keep it consistent throughout the execution of your marketing plan.

Know the market. Research the industry. The CRUSAP¹ report is a good place to start.

Where is the marketplace heading? Who is your competition? Be familiar with current trends, issues and recent media coverage of the company and the issues in general. Be prepared to discuss such topics in interviews. Remain unbiased should an actuarial discussion turn into a political debate.

Know the consumer/client. Research the company and position you are interested in. Know the company’s goals, vision and mission statement. Find out what it is they are looking for in an employee, both technically and personally. Most companies have standards of production and core personal competencies by which employees are gauged for employment or promotion. Know what they are. You need to clearly demonstrate how your skills can add value to the specific team and the organization as a whole.

Keep in mind that you are not only researching; you are networking. Your information sources could become vital contacts in the future. Always leave behind your business card or resume: they may think of you the next time they are hiring.

Create an advertisement: market yourself through your resumé. Advertisements that deliver a laundry list of benefits and features are not powerful, because they are too busy to catch the consumer’s attention. When writing your resumé, remember that employers only skim your resumé. Follow these keys to creating a well-organized, relevant piece that will stand out from the crowd:

- Include a summary that outlines who you are and builds upon your technical, leadership and interpersonal skills.

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- Emphasize strengths that can be linked to the position to which you are applying.
- Draw on key accomplishments and projects as further support, using action-oriented words and definitive numerical figures when appropriate.
- Highlight only relevant education and professional training.
- Format your resumé in a reader-friendly style, and keep it brief (never more than two pages).

Market yourself in a sales meeting: the interview. The employer has seen your ad (your resumé). An interview is your opportunity to further market yourself. If you believe your message and say it with confidence, the person on the other side of the desk will be more likely to believe it as well. Practice is of the utmost importance. Do not underestimate the benefit of rehearsing your responses out loud so that even nerves will not affect your delivery. Prepare yourself to answer these three hidden interview questions:

1. Can you perform the job?
2. Will you perform the job well?
3. Will you mesh with the company?

Thanks to your research, you now know how to answer their questions in such a way that there is no doubt that you are their ideal candidate. Articulate what you have accomplished and how you can add value to their organization, keeping your audience in mind. Also, don't forget the importance of packaging—dress the part.

Keep them thinking about you: frequency. Many fear that follow-up letters are old-fashioned or may seem pushy. Stop worrying—

there is nothing wrong with showing a little appreciation for the interviewer taking the time to see you. Keep it short and sweet. This extra step will help you stand out from the crowd. A simple yet effective follow-up e-mail or letter keeps your name in front of the consumer—an essential goal of a successful marketing plan.

¹ Critical Review of the U.S. Actuarial Profession, prepared by a task force of the American Academy of Actuaries □



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