

### GET THE SCOOP ON...

Why you need a business card even when you're not employed ■ Making your references work for you in more ways than you thought ■ Biographies and marketing briefs for the executive edge ■ Making a splash with a job search portfolio

## More Self-Marketing Tools

**M**ost job seekers breathe a sigh of relief when they complete their résumés, assuming that the résumé is the one and only marketing tool they'll need and that they're ready to dive into the job search. The job hunters who get the competitive edge, however, are those who go the extra mile to prepare some additional self-marketing tools. The two essential tools are a job seeker's business card and a set of references—both a reference list and letters of recommendation. Optional self-marketing materials, depending on one's situation, are a biography, a marketing brief, and a job search portfolio (in print and/or online format as a Web site).

### Job seeker business cards

If you're job hunting the right way—that is, doing a lot of networking—you'll be out and about sharing your name and contact information with just about everyone you meet in the hopes of building a

professional relationship. After all, it's those relationships that lead to the best sources of job leads or at least to other networking contacts who point you to the job opportunities. Scribbling your name and contact information on the back of a bank deposit slip you find in your wallet or on any other stray scrap is not only a hassle, it smacks of a lack of professionalism. To be a fully put-together, polished job seeker, you need to carry job seeker business cards.

You might be tempted to use the cards from your current employer if you're still working while job hunting or from your most recent employer if unemployed during your search. Don't. Those cards were developed as a way for you to represent the organization you worked for, or currently work for. They were not intended to be a job search tool. You must carry a card that is expressly designed for your search. The time and money outlay for such a card is minimal, but the rewards are monumental as the job seeker business card enhances your professional image, saves time, encourages people to stay in touch (because they're more likely to keep track of and refer to a business card than a random scrap of paper), and serves as a minirésumé telling the recipient who you are and what you have to offer.

## **What to say on your job seeker business card**

At a minimum, your card needs to include your full name and some contact information. You may choose to give all contact information such as telephone number(s), mailing address, and email address or choose to list only one or two items such as a phone number and email address. It doesn't matter as long as you can be reached easily.

Beyond those basics, you can include some optional, but highly recommended, additional content.

### ***Function and/or industry tagline***

You're probably used to having your position title under your name on your business card. So, what do you do when your title

is “job seeker”? You can use that space strategically by including a brief phrase that serves as a tagline of sorts, identifying your area(s) of specialization and/or industry background. The tagline can be as specific or general as you are comfortable with, depending on how narrowly targeted or broad your overall search is. Just as you may have described yourself in fairly versatile terms in your résumé’s summary section, you may want to keep your options open on your card. You could give your tagline as “Accomplished General Manager,” “Sales Professional,” or “Telecommunications Professional.” But if your search has a more laser-sharp focus, those generic taglines could be turned into something like “Operations and Sales Manager, Biomedical Industry” or “Manufacturing Equipment Sales” or “Specialist in Wide Area Data/Voice Networks.”

### ***Summary of qualifications***

To get the most out of your card, make it serve as a minirésumé. Rather than keeping the back side of the card blank, use it for a brief blurb describing what you have to offer. Working from your self-marketing sound bite, your résumé summary section, or both, compose a concise paragraph and/or set of bullet points that gives a quick overview of what you have to offer. An optional part of this blurb is to include an objective statement to convey not only what you bring to the table but what you’re looking for as well. The “Roger Brown” sample later in this chapter shows how the back of a card reads when both the qualifications summary and objective elements are included.

### **Sample job seeker business cards**

The “Ann Caldwell” sample shows how sufficient information can fit on only one side of the card with the reverse left blank. This job seeker wanted to keep her options open, so the content is more general and versatile. The “Roger Brown” sample is more detailed as this job seeker has a more clearly defined job target in terms of both functional role and industry.

## **Ann Caldwell**

*Sales and Marketing Professional*

Email: [acaldwell@ac.com](mailto:acaldwell@ac.com)

H: 111.555.0000

Website: [www.acportfolio.com](http://www.acportfolio.com)

M: 111.555.0001

## ***Manufacturing Manager***

*Operations • Logistics • Production*

### **ROGER G. BROWN**

111 Main Street, Anycity, CA 11111

**Phone (000) 111-1111    [RGBrown@email.com](mailto:RGBrown@email.com)**

Results-driven manager with 15 years in plant operations and distribution center logistics seeks mid-level management position in manufacturing environment. Record of accomplishments in:

- Productivity and process improvement
- Lean manufacturing techniques
- Cost reduction and waste control
- Team-building and training
- Vendor and contractor relations and negotiations

BS degree • Six Sigma Green Belt



### **Bright Idea**

If you develop an online job search portfolio (these are described later in this chapter), include the URL of your Web site on your business card.

## **Design and printing options**

Keep the design and layout of your card simple. Unlike a corporate card in which sophisticated graphic design and logos are needed to reflect the company's brand, your job seeker card is one that you hope not to be using for very long, so keep it simple and inexpensive. As long as the text is large enough to read but not so large as to look juvenile and the information is presented in a clean, easy-to-read layout, your card will look fine. Steer clear of using clip art for a logo as the result usually looks cheesy. After all, you aren't a company; you're an individual. You don't need a logo. The only exception to this is when you hold a professional certification or membership that allows you to use a logo. Being a certified Microsoft engineer is an example of this. If in doubt about using logos from your own certifications, check with the organizations that granted the certifications.

To put the actual card together, you have three options:

### ***The do-it-yourself method***

Your word processing application might have a built-in template or wizard for creating business cards. You would find it in the same place where you find other document templates, such as fax cover sheets, presentations, invoices, and more. If you don't see a business card template, and you use Microsoft Word, you can go to [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com), click on Downloads, and then do a keyword search within that area of the site for free business card templates. The other option is to purchase simple, inexpensive business card template software available in office supplies stores. This software often comes bundled with business card stock (8½-inch-by-11-inch sheets of heavy paper for printing 12 cards per sheet and then tearing them apart at the

perforated edges). Whether you use a template you already have or purchase the software for cards, you'll need to buy this sort of paper anyway to print your cards from your own printer.

### ***The semi-do-it-yourself method***

A handy option for designing the card yourself but having someone else print it is to go through an online service such as VistaPrint ([www.Vistaprint.com](http://www.Vistaprint.com)). On VistaPrint, you browse lots of design templates and choose the one that will best represent your information and style. You then type your content in the template for your chosen design and submit your order. The cards are free (but you pay a small shipping and handling fee) if you are willing to have the VistaPrint logo appear on the back of the card. It's a relatively unobtrusive logo that doesn't bother most people, but some don't like the idea of having advertising on their cards, plus this means you can't put your own content on the back of the card. Instead, for a very reasonable fee, you can put text on both the front and back of your card and have no logo appear. The paper quality from Vistaprint is excellent, and their turnaround times are quick. You might prefer to do a keyword search for business card services online to find choices beyond VistaPrint for comparison, but I've known many job seekers who've been very pleased with VistaPrint's services, and I use them myself.

### ***The full-service method***

If creating and printing your own business card, even with a template to guide you, is just not your thing, there's always the full-service method. Visit any local office supply store or print shop to find out how they handle business card production.



#### **Watch Out!**

As with résumé printing, stick with conservative colors for your business cards unless you're in a very creative or non-business-oriented field. Select white, ivory, or very pale gray for the card stock and black or dark blue for the ink.

Most have sample books you can look through to choose your design, card stock, and text color. They'll probably require that you order large quantities, such as 500 or 1,000 cards, so this method doesn't give you as much flexibility to change the wording of your card from time to time as you would have with the self-service methods.

## References and letters of recommendation

Employers have become increasingly careful about checking references over the past few years. Horror stories of prominent people being fired, or merely humiliated and reprimanded, for having falsified their credentials have made headlines, leading to increased vigilance in reference checking before a candidate is brought on board.

Before you fully launch your search, take the time to put together a list of people who will serve as references for you. You might also collect some letters of recommendation to have on file, although many employers won't put much stock in these. After all, if someone is willing to write a letter that you will see, are they going to write negative things and be completely candid about your faults? Probably not. Also, many companies have a firm policy of not providing references in writing, so you might ask past bosses or colleagues and find that they're aren't allowed to write you a letter no matter how much they would like to.

Most prospective employers will prefer to call your references to learn what they can about you, so you need to have a list of references on hand. Some companies will give out only the bare minimum of information, such as verifying your dates of employment and the positions you held. Some might confirm your salary, but not all do that. It has become increasingly rare for employers to make any subjective comments about your performance or work style due to the risk of being sued for giving a bad reference.

## Building a reference list

The word “list” brings to mind a very linear setup. We envision a straight column of names and contact information going down a page. Of course, that’s how your reference list will be presented on paper, but to decide which people will be included in that list you should think in a more circular fashion. Picture yourself at the center of a clock with various types of people positioned around you on the clock face. Above you at 11:00 and 1:00 would be your current or past supervisors or managers. At 12:00 would be your managers’ managers. Out at your level on the circle at 3:00 would be your co-workers, and over at 9:00 would be any customers, clients, vendors, suppliers, or others you worked with outside of your organization or in other divisions within your organization. Down around 5:00 to 7:00 would be anyone who reported to you.

This 360-degree view of your colleagues helps you create a well-rounded reference list. Of course, most prospective employers are going to want to speak to your most recent bosses. But, a reference list that contains nothing but bosses is incomplete. Many employers will want to talk to people who’ve worked with you in other capacities, so try to include at least one individual from each of the other three categories—co-workers, outside or internal customers or vendors, and subordinates—if those categories are applicable to your line of work and your level.

Aim for having at least five or six names on your list. Even though you often see employers ask for only three references, giving them more names makes it more likely that they’ll be able to reach enough people in the time frame they’re hiring within.

## Personal versus professional references

Most prospective employers will want to speak with people you’ve worked with in paid employment situations, so reference lists should be made up entirely of professional references, not personal. Have a couple of personal references in mind (friends with respectable careers or businesses, community leaders, or

clerics), but supply them only when requested. If you're a student with limited paid work history, you'll list professors and internship supervisors and supply the names of friends only when asked. But, if you have no professional contacts, or only ones from your distant past—for example, you're a full-time parent entering or re-entering the work force—you might need to include some personal references on your list. No matter what your circumstances, if your personal references are going to be contacted, coach them just as you would the professional ones. They might not be in the habit of providing references and could talk too casually and openly, saying things you would rather they not say.

“ Personal references can be very revealing. I had a candidate's friend say, “Yeah, Joe's a great guy now that he's not drinking so much.” Another raved about his friend but when asked if he would hire him, said “Oh, I'd never want to *work* with him!” ”

—Nina Collins, Human Resources and Career Consultant

## Sample reference list

The format of reference lists varies slightly according to personal style preferences but usually parallels that of your résumé—that is, you use the same or similar font style and size, layout, and paper. Copy your name and contact information heading from your résumé and paste it at the top of a new (separate file) document. Then type the heading “References” in the center or at the left margin. Below that, list the names and contact information of your references. Include an email address and fax number for each of your references whenever possible, in addition to mailing addresses and phone numbers. If any of your references have changed jobs or companies since you worked with them, list their current contact information, but add a parenthetical statement that clarifies their past connection to you because your relationship to them won't be obvious from your

résumé. It is optional, but recommended, that you do this for all other references even if they're still in the same place, in order to clarify all connections. Here is a sample reference list so you can see how all this looks:

Nancy Burton  
5555 First Street  
Chicago, IL 11111  
(111) 333-3333 (tel)  
address@email.com

### References

Molly Craig  
Vice President, Corporate Finance  
First Capital, Inc.  
222 Second Street, Suite 400  
Chicago, IL 11111  
(111) 444-4444 (tel)  
(111) 444-5555 (fax)  
mcraig@email.com  
(Emerging Markets Group Director and  
immediate supervisor, 2004 to present)

John Stevenson  
Vice President, Corporate Finance  
The Global Corporation  
333 Fourth Street, Suite 500  
Chicago, IL 11111  
(111) 555-5555 (tel)  
(111) 555-6666 (fax)  
js@email.com  
(Emerging Markets Group Director and  
immediate supervisor at First Capital 2000–2004)

Alexandra Gaines  
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444 Fifth Street, 6th floor  
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(111) 777-7777 (tel)  
(111) 777-8888 (fax)  
AKG@email.com  
(Client at First Capital)

Homer Prince  
Professor, Finance Department  
Graduate School of Business  
Wilson University  
222 Rockefeller Hall  
Boston, MA 33333  
(222) 888-8888 (tel)  
(222) 888-9999 (fax)  
hprince@wils.GSB.edu  
(Professor during MBA studies)

## **Making the most of your references**

Job seekers typically think of their references simply as people who will say either good things or bad things about them, but the issue is a little more complicated than that. When selected carefully and used strategically, references can be much more than people who will put in a good or bad word for you. Your references can serve as publicists of sorts, helping you shape an image that will be received favorably by prospective employers. By letting them in on your self-marketing strategy, particularly the main selling points you're emphasizing, your references can reinforce your brand identity whenever they speak with prospective employers for you.

**Watch Out!**

If you're in the running for a senior executive position, particularly c-level, you'll probably need a lengthy reference list. Prospective employers may want to speak with 3–4 CEOs with whom you've worked or who know you well, 3–4 peers, and a few of your direct reports.

Your references are also valuable networking contacts. By getting back in touch with past bosses, colleagues, and customers, you're not only asking them to serve as references for you but are letting them know what you're looking for and how they could help. There are countless stories of job leads resulting from a conversation in which all the job seeker had intended to do was to ask for a reference.

To make the most of your references, follow these steps:

1. *Train them like a sales force.* Coach them on how best to speak about you to prospective employers. Discuss your career objectives with them and share your asset statements. Even if your references know you well, you would be amazed at how uninspired and generic a recommendation they can give without realizing it. So, be sure to let them know which of your strengths and areas of experience you would like them to emphasize, and which personal qualities they should mention. Also remind them of how you distinguished yourself from your peers, and, of course, refresh them on the basics of what you did on the job.
2. *Keep them in the loop.* Don't just contact your references once and then go off on your search without staying in touch. Check in with them briefly by email or phone whenever you know that an employer might be contacting them. Let them know about the job in question and how they might need to modify any of the earlier "sales training" from step one to fit this particular opportunity. Also keep them apprised of your search in general, reminding

them of what you're targeting and asking whether they have any ideas or leads.

3. *Show them appreciation.* Send a brief thank-you note by email or regular mail whenever your references have been contacted by one of your prospective employers. If your search goes on for a long time and your references have to speak on your behalf frequently, you might not need to thank them every time, but be sure to do so periodically, and consider giving a very small gift during your search as a token of thanks for their time.

Most people serving as references won't mind that you want to give input into their recommendations of you because doing so makes their jobs easier. In fact, if you're able to get a letter of

### **Checking Out Your Own Reference Checking**

If you're concerned about what will be said when your references are checked, you might want to do a little sleuthing. Perhaps you're worried that a boss you clashed with will bad mouth you. Or, maybe you're just concerned about the very real possibility of discrepancies in employment dates or position titles you have on your résumé versus what past employers have on record. Whatever motivates you to check out your own references, you have a couple ways of doing so. You can enlist a friend to pose as a prospective employer and make the calls to check your references. Or, you can have the professionals do it by using any of a number of services available. Allison & Taylor, Inc. (found at [www.myreferences.com](http://www.myreferences.com)), is a well-established, reputable organization that charges reasonable fees for various levels of service. They'll contact your references and give you a report on what's being said. Also, Yahoo offers a fee-based confidential background check that you can choose to share with employers.

recommendation from them in addition to having them serve as phone references on your reference list, some will even ask you to write a draft of the recommendation letter that they'll then tweak a bit and sign.

Taking the time to coach your references and stay in touch with them is a critical step that most job candidates don't take, so if you make the effort, you'll have yet another way to distinguish yourself from the competition.

## Just the facts

- There's more to preparing self-marketing materials than just putting together a résumé. You also need a job seeker business card and a reference list (and optional letters of recommendation).
- Your job seeker business card not only makes it easy for people to connect with you, it also serves as a minirésumé, marketing you when you're not around.
- Set your reference list apart from other candidates by including not only bosses but co-workers, customers, and subordinates. Coach everyone on the list on the best way to promote you to prospective employers.
- Executive and other senior-level job seekers also need a bio—a third-person narrative on one page that tells the story of their professional background and credentials.
- Not just for executives, a marketing brief helps your contacts not only know what you have to offer but also how to help you.
- Dazzle employers with an online and/or print portfolio with work samples, credentials, kudo letters, and other documents that provide evidence of your assets.