

The Special Case of Career Changers

While a creative job search is the right strategy for everyone, it is even more important for people who want to make a move to a new career – either by changing their functional responsibilities, or switching to work in a completely different industry. Most career-changers have thought long and hard before deciding to make the move. Often they are switching to a new field after years of experience in their current industry or occupation. Some have reached their decision after extensive career counseling and others simply woke up one morning and decided to make a change.

But, regardless of how they reached their decision, most career-changers have the same question. How can I get hired when I don't have relevant experience?

It is true that few companies will hire you as a graphic artist if you simply send them a resume outlining your 15 year career in tax accounting! Even the best resume cannot hide the fact that your previous experience has not qualified you for the position you seek.

The good news is that there are ways to gain entry into your chosen profession.

As Nicholas Lore explains in his exceptional career change book, *The Pathfinder*, "you gain admittance into any group, social or professional, by creating agreement." In other words, people are accepted because other people agree they belong. Agreement is developed through the things we say, the way we act, the knowledge we have etc. If a struggling, unpublished writer tells people "I hope to be a writer some day," she has already made it clear that she does not consider herself to be a writer. Others will agree with her categorization and accept that she is not a writer. But if she writes every day, submits short stories to small publications, attends writer's conferences and volunteers to write free articles for websites and local newspapers, she is now beginning to create agreement that she is, indeed, a writer.

The goal is to *become* your new profession. Don't wait until someone hires you before you think of yourself as a video game programmer. Start to think of yourself that way now. Begin gathering the knowledge and experience you will need. Surf websites and chat rooms. Talk to other programmers. Read books. Practice. And most importantly, begin to build a body of work.



We have worked with many professionals who took this route and were able to transition into new professions.

Take Jeff. A nurse by profession, Jeff was also a talented musician. He wanted to get into the video game industry, writing soundtracks and creating sound effects but he had little success when he first sent out his resume. The few responses he got were standard 'no-thanks' emails. Eventually, a friend suggested that Jeff take a different approach. Instead of sending in his resume, he created a demo reel of music he had written for famous video games. In each case he replaced the existing soundtrack with his own music. Then he started to network his way into the industry, attending game industry conferences and trade shows and meeting as many people as possible and keeping a database of his contacts. He subscribed to industry newsletters kept up to date with new technologies and industry developments. We created a website for Jeff which allowed him to demonstrate his music in addition to the demo CD he was mailing with his resume. Jeff created a snappy, short email which he sent, along with a link to his website, to all the key people in the industry. He received several calls praising his creative approach although no immediate job offers. Once a month, he stayed in touch with his network of contacts by sending a short email with a snippet of new music attached as an MP3 file. After four months, Jeff was called in to interview for a position as an entry-level sound engineer with an independent game developer. The call came from the company's creative director – someone Jeff had met a year earlier at a trade show. The company is not Jeff's ideal employer as they make games for children and Jeff is much more interested in role-playing action games, but he plans to stay there for a year learning all he can and then start to apply to the larger game companies.

Jeff's success was well-deserved. He took a proactive approach to his career change and dedicated much of his spare time to demonstrating his skills. By the time he was hired, he already thought and spoke and acted as a video game sound engineer. He knew the techniques and the software and had a solid grounding in the industry.

Another client is working towards a similarly dramatic change. Greg spent 10 years in the music industry where he was very successful. But his real passions were travel and photography. When Greg got the opportunity to live in Japan for a year he decided to make the leap and start serious work on changing his career. He built his own website so that he could demo his work and embarked on a



number of ambitious projects, including traveling to and from South Korea, where, after much painstaking research and careful relationship building, he gained access to North Korean defectors. Greg had completed several major photography projects when he approached us and he was ready to start publicizing his work, encouraged by the fact that he has just received his first acceptance – an article and photographs that had been published by the BBC. Greg is now working on seeking influential mentors and building a network. To assist him in making initial contact and attracting attention for his photographs, we designed an e-portfolio for him which links to his website. (You can see Greg's e-portfolio by [clicking here.](#)) Like Jeff, Greg knew that he would not be taken seriously as a photographer until he started being one.

Both stories highlight that the keys to success for career-changers are:

1. **Get started.** Don't wait for someone to pay you to be what you want to be. Just do it! If your dream job is in some way creative, you can develop a portfolio by working alone or volunteering to help people for free. If you want to prove you can design logos, for example, volunteer to redesign the logo for your friend's small business. Or simply redesign some existing corporate logos for demonstration purposes.
2. **Learn everything you can.** Read books, join associations, go to education events and trade shows. Read newsletters. Visit industry web sites and chat rooms. Learn the language and jargon of the industry you want to enter. Stay up to date with the newest trends and technologies. Understand the history of the industry in depth. Become an expert.
3. **Make contacts.** Build a network of influential people within the field you want to enter. Find creative ways to approach them and maintain the connection once it is made. One client actually approached one of the top names in her field and offered her assistance as a secretary in exchange for being able to attend meetings with him. He said yes! Offer to write an article for a trade magazine or website. Choose a topic which will provide you with a reason to contact key people within the industry.
4. **Find Creative Approaches.** Do not rely on the standard resume and cover letter. This will almost always fail when you are trying to make a shift to a new career. Most people are trained to read resumes to identify how your past experience matches with their current needs. You need to approach executives in a completely new and different way – showing what you can do rather than what you have done. Our e-portfolio is one option – but there are many others. For more information on job search techniques, check out our guide to “the Creative Job Search” which you can find on our website at www.blueskyresumes.com. More importantly – find your own creative ways to get yourself noticed.





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Making a career change is both challenging and exciting. If you follow the steps outlined above, you will be successful in making your career change. But your move into your new industry will not come via job advertisements or postings or from posting your resume online. Instead, it will come with time and commitment as a result of the marketing you have done and the network you have built.

GOOD LUCK!

