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## Job Search: Bringing your brand to market

By: [Kathleen Lau](#) - ComputerWorld Canada (24 Feb 2009)

With many companies undergoing restructuring during the economic downturn, IT professionals who have been laid off, and those who fear they may be, are turning to career services to help boost their images. Career Management Coaching.com and IT-Career-Coach.net share their approaches to job search success

Career coach to IT executives and managers Kim Batson estimates that her customer base is composed of 50 per cent laid-off IT professionals, a noticeable rise from the usual 25 per cent.

Her business, Seattle, Wash.-based [Career Management Coaching.com](#), provides career services primarily to C-level executives, vice-presidents, directors and managers. "There's been quite an uptick in requests for services," said Batson who started the business about a decade ago.

But that uptick isn't solely due to recent victims of technology company mass layoffs, said Batson. Rather, it's a mix of those who have been "laid off or fear they may be, so they want to prepare just in case."

When the economy tanked last September, Batson observed a "quiet time for two or three weeks where people

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were wondering just what is going on” before the floodgates opened, resulting in the past four months being “extremely busy.”

Employee severance packages will sometimes include employer-paid career services like those that Batson offers to individuals. But most often, she said, employers will choose outplacement services that are geared to groups of individuals.

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Among the career services that Batson offers are resume preparation, branding and job search. The differentiating factor in today’s job search, said Batson, is a “value proposition that really outlines what it is they bring to the table that makes them outstanding or extraordinary or exceptional.”

A client, a CEO of a data storage company, after working with Batson, created a value proposition that read: “As a data storage company builder, I bring extraordinary insight into the development of data storage products and services, rapidly propelling companies forward from \$25-250 million to \$250 million and beyond in revenue.” It might be just a statement at this point, Batson noted, but screaming out this message catches the attention of potential employers. And, of course, such claims, she continued, must be supportable with quantifiable achievements.

Batson also helps the candidate create a plan to market, which is essentially a structured framework for his or her job search. Part of that plan is to exude that brand and become known in the market because, she said, “it’s better to be sought out than be seeking a job.”

But while it certainly is an advantage to get prepared through career services (Batson claims a 75 per cent faster employment rate among coached versus non-coached executives), she did acknowledge that success ultimately does depend on the candidate’s degree of motivation.

The first step towards a successful job hunt is believing in oneself, said Kingsley Tagbo with [IT-Career-Coach.net](#), an O’Fallon, Missouri-based career service, owned by Exacticity Inc., offering consulting and online technical skills training programs.

“It’s a bit of a scary situation out there,” said Tagbo, who has observed a “dramatic increase” in professionals, with varying degrees of experience and backgrounds, seeking his career services. In fact, his business, which caters to global clients, has seen a tenfold increase in unemployed IT professionals.

Tagbo said he finds it important to encourage often deflated IT professionals by pointing out that the IT industry is still hiring despite the overwhelming news of mass company layoffs. Just last week, he said he received about 10 calls from recruiters inquiring as to his candidate base.

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The approach Tagbo takes is to focus on skills that are actually in demand. "Don't just go back to college and pick up the skills," he said. "You have to do some market research and find out what IT managers are interested in hiring for."

Tagbo said he helps the client identify those hot skills and puts him or her on a path to learn those skills well "because IT managers are very particular about your technical mastery. You aren't going to show up for the interview until you are an expert."

Once those skills are mastered, the candidate must then learn to present that knowledge, often a weak point for techies, said Tagbo.

But a candidate's skill set, whether acquired recently or over the course of years, must pinpoint a very specific career path, he said, using the example of an IT business analyst being far more focused than a general business analyst. IT managers hire for focused professions, which won't work for the candidate "if the entire portfolio of skills collected doesn't give credence to one specific career path."

Like Batson, Tagbo is also witnessing employed professionals who want to protect themselves against a potential layoff, many choosing to broaden their portfolio and finally get trained on those skills they used to only be curious about.

"Even if the IT industry is still hiring, it has got more competitive," said Tagbo.

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