

The Online Job Hunt

By [Lisa Schmeiser](#) | [Also](#) by this reporter
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You've read that people are desperate to hire Web developers. Your friends are spending their days pointing and clicking in Dreamweaver and their nights rolling around in the huge piles of cash they take home from their developer jobs. The kid next door has abandoned his paper route in favor of running an e-commerce site from his treehouse. Yet despite your well-developed personal Web empire, you're still not working in a Web-development job.

It's time to look at your job-hunting strategy. Although the tips you've acquired from well-meaning parents, college advisers, or parole officers can provide a great base for a successful job hunt, there are plenty of Web-specific job-hunting tips missing from all the books and articles out there.

Because I've successfully used the Net to find jobs, I figure I'm as qualified as anyone to tell you how to become the ideal job candidate online. Even better, I've also been on the hiring end, so I can tell you what makes a candidate's email or URL stand out in the over-tired eyes of discriminating employers.

There are three areas you need to work on: Writing a great e-résumé, trolling for jobs without offending potential employers, and writing a great e-cover letter. I've compiled the results of my years of observation and first-hand experience (read: embarrassing mistakes) into handy, Miss-Manners-like dos and don'ts for a successful Web-development job hunt.

Many of us have suffered through some sort of résumé workshop where a well-meaning instructor shared the secrets of laser printing and heavy-stock paper. Those tips work well if you're sending out paper résumés, but most Web-development companies expect their job candidates to send [ASCII](#) résumés or URLs via email, and advice about five-pound bonded cream paper just doesn't port well.

Fortunately, your basic online job-hunting strategy is fairly simple: All you need is a Web-based résumé and an ASCII résumé that you can send out via email. The following tips are the products of my hard-earned knowledge of what does and doesn't work in online résumé presentation.

Do invest in a personal Web site. If you're working as a webslinger for a large, faceless corporation, you're probably not going to be able to host your job-hunting efforts on the company server. Spending US\$20 per month on a personal site allows you to build a

product that showcases your skills and convinces future employers that you know what you're doing.

Do test your résumé extensively and make sure it makes sense on a 2.0 version browser and can also be read with the images turned off. If you're really slick, make your resume.html file a conditional HTML file, where you can serve different versions of the résumé to [different browsers](#).

Do include specific URLs of Web sites you've worked on, and list exactly what you did on the site. Nobody is going to be impressed with your work at "http://www.netscape.com" unless you tell them exactly what you did. If you're a steady writer for their developer section, be sure and say so and list URLs that point to the pages featuring your work.

Don't go crazy with the URLs. The person reading your résumé will want to see URLs for the sites you've done, but not for the schools you attended or the software tools you used. The only exception to this rule is if you built the sites for the schools you attended or the software tools you used; even then, the URLs need to be listed under work experience.

If your specialty is interface design or information architecture, **do** include a [click-through portfolio](#) to flaunt how savvy you are with design samples, site maps, or other explanatory material that showcases your in-depth knowledge and experience.

Do offer a printable version of your online résumé. If someone is looking to recruit you, he'll want a hard copy for interviews, and your five-framed, dHTML-driven résumé is going to be difficult to print. The last thing you want is to have your name associated with the frustrating experience of being unable to print.

Do make sure you warn users whether any links in the résumé will launch a new window or take them off the site. This is a user interface courtesy that, sadly, is not often practiced. Win points for being polite.

Do practice good résumé [writing](#). Nobody is going to be impressed just because you're online. Observe the same rules of writing for all versions of your résumé.

Do have an ASCII version of your résumé handy for quick emailing. Remember that most email programs wrap any lines that exceed 72 characters, so make sure each line on your résumé is 72 characters or less. To help you eyeball the amount, here's an example of a 60-character line:

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Designed primary and secondary navigation for online commerce sites.
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Don't send your résumé as an attachment. People looking to fill a position can receive hundreds of inquiries, and they're not going to bother to take the extra time to open and print out your résumé. Put your résumé in the body of the email, after your cover letter.

To save time and prevent having to cut-and-paste your 72-characters-or-less-per-line résumé below every cover letter, save your résumé as a .sig file in your email program, then select the .sig when you're mailing out the cover letters. [Eudora](#) is an excellent program for this if you're not comfortable with pine or elm.

Don't point potential employers to your Web-site journal where you talk about your explicitly photographed bondage sessions, illegal drug use, or extramarital affairs. There are [documented instances](#) of current employers getting hot and bothered over employee Web sites with less controversial fare. If you force a potential employer to assess whether it wants to have its name associated with the author of such a Web site, you'll probably find yourself on the short end of the stick. Try to get a feel for the company culture before sending URLs out, so you can either practice discretion or opt to pass on a job opportunity if you feel like the company and you won't see eye to eye on personal Web sites.

Now that you have a résumé that works on even the most arcane browser and computer, it's time to work on diplomacy. Email discussion lists are excellent places for picking up job leads or posting your availability, but the job hunt must be conducted carefully, lest you inadvertently tick off an entire city's worth of Web-site developers by committing some sort of faux pas. Here's what I've learned in six years of cleaning email out of my in-box.

Don't post anything like this to an email list:

"I am looking for a job. My skills include X, Y, Z, and many more. If you have any leads or want to hire me, my email is chrissy_doe@newbie.com."

Not only did you wrongly assume that it is your right to have a job handed to you by the online job fairies, you didn't outline what makes you different from anyone else with skills X, Y, and Z, what specific job you wanted, or where people can find your résumé for further details. Moreover, you didn't ask nicely or offer anything in return, so all but the most altruistic of people are going to delete your mail on first read. Make all your job queries specific, informative postings, like this one:

"Are you looking for someone with X, Y, Z and four years of corporate Web experience? Do you know anyone who is? Please visit my résumé, and see my work at <http://www.newbie.com/chrissy/resume.html>, then email me at chrissy_doe@newbie.com. First five job leads get free site Q&A from me, redeemable at a later date."

When you're writing a job appeal to an email list, **do** read the archives to see how other people post for work before adding your plea. This kind of legwork will give you a feel for how useful the mailing list is as a hiring resource, as well as the proper etiquette for job queries.

Do ask nicely. Very nicely. You are requesting a favor and are in no position to start making negative impressions. If you're going to ask an entire mailing-list community to do something for you, be prepared to contribute to the community.

Do remember that potential employers are reading the list and will want to see cover letters and URLs to résumés. Laundry lists of credentials without context are useless.

Don't post a cover letter and résumé to a mailing list in response to one person's job notice post. All you are doing is annoying the list, alerting your competition to your qualifications, and telling the potential employer that you aren't detail-oriented enough to read the "To" field in your email.

So your months of reading mailing lists finally bore fruit: You've found the job posting of your dreams. Now, how to make a favorable impression with your email cover letter?

Don't include [smileys](#), frownies, or any other emoticons in any electronic postings. This labels you as the electronic equivalent of someone who would put Barney stickers in the margins of their cover letters. Odds are high that your potential employer is not looking for the wacky-yet-competent type you see in sitcoms, but a bona fide professional.

If you are responding to an email job posting sent to a list, **do** mention the email, sender, and date in your cover letter. Employers like to know how you got hold of the job listing.

Do send a cover letter whenever you respond to a job posting on a mail list. Simply hitting reply, keeping the original message intact, and tacking on your résumé is inadequate.

Do practice the art of writing a [good cover letter](#). Although email allows a quicker turnaround time than snailmail, it also permits your prospective new boss to delete unlikely candidates more quickly. Your email cover letter is your strongest selling point -- use it to impress and intrigue potential employers so they will want to look at the stellar online portfolio you built after reading this article.

Once you've spent a little time fine-tuning your site and your personal sales pitch, you should have no problem attracting the attention of your prospective employers. Of course, this may entail actually leaving the treehouse where you've been leasing computer time from your entrepreneurial neighbor, but it's a small sacrifice to make for a great job opportunity.