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Résumé boosters for job seekers

Stay active, productive during search

By **DEBRA AUERBACH**
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Being unemployed is tough enough as it is, let alone enduring unemployment for an extended period of time. Yet long-term unemployment is a reality for many Americans today. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 42.9 percent of those unemployed as of January 2012 have been out of work for 27 weeks or more. Month after month of not working can leave job seekers feeling intellectually unchallenged and can wear on their self-confidence. Plus, it creates a résumé gap that will need to be explained to prospective employers.

"The employment market has been tough for the past five years, and rarely are jobs found within just a few weeks anymore," says Lauren Milligan, senior job coach for ResuMAYDAY. "A reasonable job search can last many, many months, and the smartest candidates will use this time to not only look for their next job but also spend that time in skill-development activities."

Here are six ways job seekers can stay productive and boost their résumés between jobs:

1. Volunteer. Volunteering has a variety of benefits. It provides a sense of fulfillment while also offering opportunities to network and learn new skills. Rich DeMatteo, founder of job-seeker blog "Corn on the Job" and co-founder of Bad Rhino Social Media, suggests seeking out volunteer opportunities with charities in which your target employers are involved. "If job seekers can investigate where their favorite two or three companies are volunteering, they can start to get involved and look to make

some great connections."

2. Tap your network. Tapping your personal and professional networks is a great way to make connections with prospective employers and boost your résumé at the same time. "Everyone knows someone who runs a small business," Milligan says. "Assess your skills, and offer that business owner your services on a part-time basis for the duration of your job search. In return, ask that employer to allow you to add that company to (your) résumé. Doing this on a part-time basis allows you to keep your skills sharp while looking for your next job."

3. Join an association. Another way to network while also honing your expertise is to join an industry association. Kelly Donovan, career communications strategist and principal of Kelly Donovan & Associates, suggests getting involved with a trade group, because it allows you to do volunteer work that is also relevant to your career. "Employers are often impressed when they see, for example, that a candidate for a marketing job has been volunteering with the American Marketing Association," Donovan says.

4. Take classes. "Being in transition is a great time to brush up on computer skills or any other specific skills or certifications that are valuable in your industry," Donovan suggests. "Review job postings to find out what skills and certifications employers in your industry are looking for and then sign up for the corresponding classes or certification programs."



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Enrolling in classes or programs to enhance your skill set will give your résumé an added boost.

5. Build a website. While the idea of building a website may only seem relevant for those seeking jobs in Web development, management or design, it can actually prove valuable for any job seeker. Anthony Zazo, technical marketing manager at Gamma Scientific, says having website-production skills on a résumé will impress employers, regardless of the field of employment being pursued.

"Another benefit to creating a website is that you can use the site to promote yourself and differentiate (yourself) from other job seekers," Zazo says. "If your career has nothing to do with Web development, I would argue that you will stand out even more. Instead of constantly referencing and presenting your résumé ... you can send prospective employers a link to your website." Zazo also recommends using

the website to present work examples from previous jobs or relevant courses.

6. Seek temporary work. Temporary employment provides value in multiple ways: it delivers a paycheck, builds skills and can potentially lead to a permanent position. A recent CareerBuilder survey found that 36 percent of companies will hire contract or temporary workers in 2012. Of those companies hiring temporary or contract workers, 35 percent have plans to employ them on a permanent basis.

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