

## The Product is You

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anything, but he wasn't prepared to sell what counted most—himself.

The sales manager apparently felt sorry for the young man. She hired me a few days later.

### Sales and marketing

Few students see themselves as products that must be marketed and sold to potential employers. It's one thing to study the marketing strategy for a new toothpaste or self-cleaning litter box, but hawk your own virtues? In your mind, that probably borders on prostitution.

**Y**et, by taking the "I am a product" viewpoint, you quickly realize that there are only two productive endeavors in any job search: marketing and selling.

Marketing is simply the identification and development of logical opportunities for the sale of a product. Since you can't afford to waste time selling to the wrong customers, your first marketing task is to gain a complete understanding of your saleable features. That is, you have to know what you intend to sell before you determine the potential buyers.

Many new graduates begin the job search without ever investing the time or energy to define their own skills, interests or personal traits. They somehow believe that their educational accomplishments speak for themselves—that it's unnecessary to articulate what they are selling. After a few blown interviews, they realize that it's not the buyer's responsibility, or inclination, to figure out their attributes.

Job seekers must analyze and prioritize their saleable features before someone else does it for them. Some employers will be happy to construct their own interpretations of your skills and abilities. A careful personal assessment can prevent a poor employment match and later job dissatisfaction.

Deciding which skills and educational credentials to market isn't easy. You should begin with a little old-fashioned soul searching. The trick is to identify what motivates you most. Consider your career and academic decisions to date. Why did you make those choices? What projects at work or school brought you the most satisfaction? By thinking along these lines, you not only market what you can do, but what you want to do.

A key part of market analysis is talking with industry professionals about your market value. Review your academic or work background with alumni or family friends in



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potential career fields. Other people's perspectives can help you develop more objective views about your potential contributions. You may be pleasantly surprised by the interest some people take in experiences or traits you previously thought to be unimportant.

Once you dissect, scrutinize and label your saleable features, you must analyze the market and identify likely buyers. Again, it helps to meet with career placement counselors and industry professionals to learn about industry trends and market forces. What's going on out there? Who's hot and who's not? What's cooking and who's looking? By consulting the experts, you can determine the most effective sales pitch.

Don't forget, you must advertise your product as part of your marketing campaign. Tapping conventional sources, such as campus recruiters and classifieds, is important. The best method of "getting the word out," however, is to use the people you already know. Word-of-mouth remains the most efficient means of conveying information about your credentials and availability. Use your imagination in viewing people as potential resources—family friends, professors, last year's graduates—almost anyone can be helpful.

### What is selling?

To sell yourself, you need to translate your features into benefits for the buyer.

Understand that people only buy perceived benefits. Nobody buys a dress because it's blue or a house because it's big. If a blue dress makes a woman look good, she might buy it. If a big house makes life easier for a large family, it will be hard to resist. Nobody buys features in the abstract. People only buy benefits.

"Look at any brochure advertising a new car," says Ken Glickman, a consultant in Lansing, Mich. "Right up front they put attractive pictures to describe the exhilarating experience of driving this particular machine. 'Just think what you will look like in this car. It will make you feel vibrant, sexy and alive.'" Somewhere, hidden in the back of the brochure, are the actual specifications. But according to Glickman, "the only people who ever read that far" have already bought into the visions in the front of the book and are trying to justify their consent.

Unfortunately, most salespeople (including job candidates) fall short of defining the benefits associated with the features of their product. Unless you complete the task of selling by verbally painting a picture of the benefits for the prospective buyer, you may lose the sale.

Don't assume the interviewer is translating your features into benefits. Personnel department employees, particularly, might lack the technical expertise to fully understand the importance and implications of your academic background or experiences.

**Y**ou must verbalize how your strengths can be of concrete value to the purchaser. Nearly all potential benefits, no matter what the product, fall into these categories: Saving money.

Making money. Decreasing risk/increasing security. Saving time. Enhancing prestige/self image. Adding convenience/making life easier. Winning friends/improving relationships. Making life more enjoyable or fun.

Most sales situations or interviews provide opportunities to describe how your traits will benefit the department or organization. The most powerful type of sales statement, however, is directed to the individual to whom you're talking. Watch for openings to personalize the value you'll add. For example, you might tell the hiring manager, "Sounds like you've had some real headaches with