

50+ WORKS

Case Study: Getting a Job at 50+

TAEN - The Age and Employment Network

Anne (53) explains how she went about looking for a job after being made redundant.

When I was made redundant at the end of 2011, I had been the same job for more than eight years and had not looked for one in all that time. I had lost touch with the job market and many things had changed over the period. The credit crunch, the resulting unemployment figures and the economic climate made me feel despondent and panicky. I had not dare move jobs although I had wanted to but then my situation forced me to.

I found that using various simple techniques paid dividends and I was offered a new job within three months. I am delighted to share my experience.

Email and internet

Obviously, my most essential tools were internet and email. The various job search engines, jobsites and agency sites are set up to be easily searched and there are endless pages of useful advice and interview and proficiency tests which I found invaluable. It was easy to make immediate contact with agencies or employers via email without surrendering any personal information and I also set up a profile on the main job sites and uploaded my CV (with address and phone numbers removed, only name and email address visible).

Building my CV and covering letter

These are obviously the main sales tools. Previously I had built my CV in the traditional style, with education and qualifications at the beginning and with a list of positions held in reverse chronological order. I committed the cardinal sin of including my date of birth and date of graduation. After receiving advice from TAEN and reading several books about finding work in today's job market, I soon realised that I wouldn't get a look-in if I included this information. Employers and agencies are looking for simple and quick ways to screen CVs and age could be one of their de-selection criteria (although not for all, of course). Before I had realised that I should exclude my graduation date, I found that I had on one occasion inadvertently applied for the same job twice, once to the employer directly and once via an agency. The agency rejected me outright whereas the employer invited me for an interview.

Functional CV style

I was advised by TAEN to adopt the functional style of CV. This gives a snapshot glimpse of the candidate and is designed to capture the reader's interest in a few seconds, which is apparently all the time recruiters have when flicking through a pile of hundreds of CVs.

Here are the tips that made the difference for me:

CV

- keep to two sides of A4
- do not put date of birth or date of school/graduation
- only include the last 10 years of employment history
- first page to include:
 - Profile: three-line summary of skills and aims
 - Key skills, listed by category
 - Achievements: main outstanding successes
- On the second page, list posts in reverse chronological order. I found that employers wanted a bit of detail about my last post, so I fleshed that out in my CV.

Covering letter

This is a very important document as it will be the first thing a prospective employer sees and it will determine whether they think it worth looking at your CV. This is where you can tell them where you have seen their ad, why you are interested in what they do, and how you can make a contribution if you worked for them. I found that the more I used the same format and words as the employers used in their ads, the better a response rate I received. The summary of the advice I collected is as follows:

- State job title and reference
- State briefly that you are responding to the particular ad, why you are interested and what you have to offer, using key words and tying in your skills and wishes to the purpose of the job/company.
- Five to six bullet-point summary of relevant skills
- Try to show somewhere in the letter that you know who the organisation is and that you know and understand what they do
- Sign off by welcoming a response and thanking them for their time
- Keep the letter succinct (one side of A4 only).

Putting your CV up on job sites

At first, I was rather reluctant to do this, but it was surprisingly effective. Obviously, for reasons of privacy, it is advisable to remove your personal address and phone numbers. Within a week of putting my CV up on various job sites, I began to get speculative approaches and some of them were definite possibilities.

Preparing applications

As mentioned above, it is really essential to tailor each application to the job vacancy advertised. Employers receive literally hundreds of applications and only have a few seconds to scan each one. You have to spend time preparing each application carefully and thinking about what the employer is looking for so that you can make your application stand out from the mundane “give me a job” approach. Judging from the various forums I read, many people make the mistake of sending off lots of applications and the same covering letter and CV without bothering to do this and are then surprised that they get no response. It is far better to send a few, well researched and targeted applications than hundreds of ‘boilerplate’ ones. The genuinely interested and tailored applications stand out.

To make my task easier, I drew up a ‘master’ list of all my skills and experience and then drew the relevant elements from it each time I was drafting an application.

Preparing for interviews

Research the organisation carefully and go through their website to understand where the position you are applying for fits in. Also, consider topics of conversation and prepare questions to show that you’ve had a good look at their website.

Know your CV well and be ready for any questions about your previous posts.

Look at lists of interview questions and practise your answers. The better prepared you are, the less you will be thrown when you are asked certain things out of the blue.

Look at aptitude tests online: some employers use these and they tend to follow the same pattern so familiarise yourself with them. Also, they’re quite fun to complete and I found they served as good brainteasers in my daily routine.

Job sites I found useful

- Monster
- Jobsite.com
- Gumtree
- Guardian jobs
- Jobrapido
- Charity Job
- Third Sector jobs
- Reed
- Agency Central
- Indeed
- TPP Not for Profit
- Vacancy Central