

Marketing Long-Distance Clients

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Assisting a client in finding employment presents all kinds of challenges, but those challenges become more complex when the client is job-hunting long distance.

I am the Assistant Director of a program called the Dual Career Network at The University of Iowa. Our mission is to assist the accompanying partner of newly hired faculty and staff with their employment search. We typically meet a new client when they are making a first campus visit and the outcome of the recruitment effort is yet unknown. Working with this clientele is exciting as I meet people from all across the nation and learn about their different lifestyles and employment experiences. I have an opportunity to educate them on living and working in Iowa-and who better than a lifelong native!

Employers frequently ask: "Is this person planning on staying here long term?" This is a valid question given the transient nature of college campuses. Medical, graduate, and postdoctoral students, and those completing fellowships all are considered to be temporary, and may well leave this locale when their training is over. In order for my clients to be considered a serious candidate, I must help them overcome the natural tendency of potential employers to consider them "flight risks."

The process to recruit a new faculty member typically starts a year before they need to be on-site. While that recruitment effort is taking place, I begin working with the accompanying partner, which can be problematic for the following reasons:

- Employers need to fill a position NOW, not in six to ten months when the client arrives in the area.
- Employers are reluctant to pay for out-of-state transportation expenses for an in-person interview.
- Long-distance candidates compete with local candidates who are less expensive to meet with and have knowledge of local and community information and therefore have the "hometown advantage".
- Employers fear that the spouse/partner will change his/her mind and decide not to move or will accept another position if hired too far ahead of a start date.
- Employers make assumptions about employment candidates coming from larger metropolitan areas.

How do we help our clients overcome some of these barriers?

--Help the long-distance candidate utilize the cover letter to their greatest advantage. I advise my clients to state definitively their move date, when they will be available to start working and that this move is a "career destination" for them. If they are able to move ahead of their partner, they should clearly state that as well.

--Attempt to align client visits to the area with job interviews. By advising the employer of when the candidate will be in town on a house hunting/fact finding visit, you may help the employer avoid having to pay transportation for a face-to-face interview. The employer will be delighted at the savings and will be impressed at the willingness of all parties to make things happen.

--Assist your client in researching the area extensively. Supply them with accurate and up-to-date resource information to gain knowledge of the area. (Consider providing web links to local Chambers of Commerce, economic development groups, Society for Human Resource Management chapters, and local newspapers.) The client should use this information in cover letters, conversations and interviews to demonstrate they have done their homework and help overcome the local candidates' "hometown advantage".

--Client needs to demonstrate flexibility in overcoming the "flight risk" fear of employers. They can propose to begin working prior to their move via telecommuting, or to do requisite training or orientation online. By doing so, they demonstrate commitment and the ability to collaborate for the good of everyone. A dose of flexibility, a little creativity, good interviewing skills, and appropriate demonstration of their skills is the perfect recipe for an employer to decide to wait for them to start.

--Client should point out to the employer their motives for moving to the area. Perhaps the client is moving back to where they have family, or they want to reduce a long commute, or feel the school systems in your area offer more for their children. If these reasons are valid, it may give the employer confidence that they can hire AND retain this candidate.

Helping your long-distance client become informed, articulate and cooperative about a new employment opportunity, coupled with outstanding job search documents will create a level playing field against local candidates. However, none of this will matter if your client is using a shabby resume or cover letter. Clear articulation of skills, accomplishments and quantifiable outcomes remain the gold standard for sparking a hiring manager's interest. A mutually satisfactory outcome for your client may be a little bit of luck and synergy along with a lot of strategic marketing to overcome the "risk" hiring managers often feel when considering long-distance candidates.

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