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Short-term gain

The temp sector's adding jobs — here's how to land one

By LINLEY TABER

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Let's face it: Few people dream of being a temp when they grow up. But with recent job numbers showing a surge in temporary staffing, what was once regarded as the bottom of the office totem pole may now be a golden opportunity in a tight market.

So how to land a spot on the temp train? Basic job-search etiquette — punctuality, professional appearance, a polished resume — is more important than ever, but there are some other key ways to work the system to your advantage.

* Browse, but beware The quest for temporary work in New York invariably starts with an Internet search of the city's myriad agencies, which have plastered the Web with job postings. Go ahead and browse these to get a sense of the kinds of positions an agency traffics in, but don't be fooled into thinking you've found your dream job: Most are merely generic posts crafted to lure you into registering. Still, if you're interested in the industry a post advertises and you're qualified to work in it, you could be a good fit for the agency (and the agency for you).



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* Be flexible Once you've submitted your resume, be prepared for the requisite phone screen, where agents weed out those with poor communication skills and unreasonable expectations. Considering a temp agent's success (and paycheck) depends on placing as many people in jobs as possible, it's no surprise they also consider inflexibility a red flag.

"If an applicant is totally inflexible in terms of pay, type of industry and job length, I won't even bother bringing them in to register," says [Lisa Miller](#) of Atrium Staffing.

On the flip side, being flexible about money makes less experienced candidates more attractive, and can pay off in the long run. Not only will you find a job faster, but once you've proven yourself, you can ask for higher-paying work moving forward.

* Revamp your resume Lest you think jobs like this are easy to nab, insiders warn that competition is fiercer than ever.

"Companies know they can get a perfectly qualified person for every opening," says Atrium's Jessica Nonnemacher. "So they're requiring phone screens and in-person interviews even for jobs that only last two weeks."

To stand out, keep in mind that the vast majority of jobs temp agencies get are clerical and administrative, and tailor your resume accordingly, emphasizing

office support skills such as answering phones, scheduling, transcribing and data entry.

Just don't stretch the truth: Agencies run thorough reference checks and administer tests to double-check your skill level.

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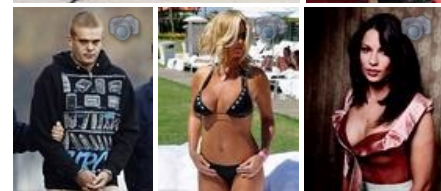
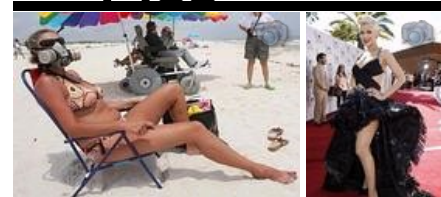
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* Adjust your attitude It should go without saying that a positive attitude is paramount, but applicants in this job market could use a little reminder.

"People tend to let their frustrations run over, and it often shows up in the way they deal with the agency," says Richard Patrick-Sternin of Work Evolved, which specializes in temporary placements in the creative sector.

And given that there are dozens of qualified candidates for the average temp job, personal demeanor can be an even bigger make-or-break factor than usual. So remember: Your temp agent is your designated advocate, and treating him or her poorly is pretty much suicide. Frequently complaining or harassing an agent with phone calls is "a total turn-off" says Miller. Conversely, being warm and personable can go a long way toward moving your name to the top of your agent's list.

* Be ready If you've got the right skills and attitude and still haven't landed a gig, it might be because your **cellphone** is on silent. Due to the last-minute nature of temp jobs, they often go to the first person who answers an agent's call. And since many agencies compete for the same jobs, even the most desirable slots are filled at lightning speed. So make yourself reachable. If you miss a call, ring back as soon as you can and be ready to accept the position on the spot.

* Be invaluable The best way to turn a temp gig into something longer? Do your job well — and don't stop there. Instead, make yourself "invaluable" by going above and beyond expectations, says Patrick-Sternin.

Atrium's Nonnemacher couldn't agree more. She recently sent an applicant — a college grad looking to break into p.r. — to a top publicity firm for a forgettable three-day job.

"That was six weeks ago, and she's made herself such a part of the team that they keep extending her assignment," she says. "If a permanent position opens up, she's already proven herself the perfect candidate."

— Linley Taber is a former recruiter for a New York City temp agency

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