

The Use of Professional Biographies in Your Attorney Job Search

By Emily Sanderson



Many attorneys these days employ professional biographies to network with professional contacts or to use as marketing tools to build new business in an existing solo practice. Different from a resume, a professional bio speaks to a broader audience

than just potential employers and provides a way to make people aware of your qualifications and accomplishments without the solicitation factor of a resume.

One of my former clients, whom I will call Calvin, purchased a professional biography from our company to use as a networking tool to enter a new legal practice area. He intended to forward the biography to a colleague who, in turn, said he would submit it to his boss as a way of casually mentioning Calvin's skills and accomplishments. His colleague, upon receiving a favorable response, would then ask his boss if he would like to meet with Calvin, at which meeting Calvin would provide a formal resume.

In a competitive marketplace networking with the use of professional biographies, if introduced correctly, will give you the advantage over other

candidates. Professional biographies may be distributed through a third party, as in the case of Calvin, or in person. They may also be used in seeking placement at a firm or as a company counsel, or they may be used by sole proprietors and partners at small firms as marketing tools to build new business.

Formats for professional biographies vary depending on their purpose. What we recommend for a client who is seeking a job placement is a one-page, five- or six-paragraph document that follows the structure of what you would find in a conference agenda about a speaker giving a seminar. A professional biography includes your personal letterhead at the top with contact information like a resume or cover letter would, but it uses third-person verb structures and discusses career goals accomplished, work done for previous employers, your educational background, pro bono work, and even hobbies, your city of residence, and information about your spouse and kids. Brief bulleted lists of accomplishments are appropriate.

These documents are much more personable than a resume or a cover letter, although strategically and carefully written with the right tone and with the right emphasis of transferable skills relevant to particular practice areas in which you would like to pursue work. Since the document has received a verbal introduction through a colleague or even just a cold call and the potential employer has personally agreed to review the information, you can be more personable in a biography. However, the document should be as concise and power-packed as possible and should be free of spelling, punctuation, or grammar problems.

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You may think a cold call or approaching a colleague to act as a third party is intrusive, but a lot of potential employers are eager to learn of qualified talent that could help build their business. You have much to offer these folks, and your efforts should be considered a viable business proposal instead of a solicitation.

Be careful about how you present job pursuits, particularly when it comes to details such as your current unemployment or a recent layoff. Although not entirely taboo, such information must be presented in a way that doesn't leave them feeling sorry for you, or worse, indicate that you feel sorry for yourself. Certainly keep the introduction of the professional bio a sales pitch of what you can do for them instead of what they can do for you. Keep your tone active, enthusiastic, zealous, confident, and unique in some way. Include information that will set you apart from competitors. Steer away from humor, though, as humor may not always be interpreted by a potential employer in the way it is intended.

If you are relocating in the near future, plan a business trip to your location of interest and book appointments in advance so that you can make the most of your travel investment. In the biography discuss your plan to visit a particular city in the near future because of your interest in career opportunities in the area.

If you are a sole proprietor or a partner in a small firm seeking to build your business, use a professional biography as a marketing tool, following much the same format as that described above, although some present the same information in a more sophisticated pamphlet. A pamphlet, however, would need to also include a cover letter.

Attorney Resume can help you draft your professional biography for a reasonable price. For more information check out our services at www.attorneyresume.com.