12 tips for landing a job in digital

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Working in digital offers creative minds the best possible balance of work and play - not only because of the innovative nature of the industry, but also because of the laid back culture that surrounds it.

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Stereotypical agencies with ping pong contests, after-hour beer drinking, and beanie wearing millennials lining up at the espresso machine are popping up across most big cities. So, how do you gain access to the magical land of digital? Once you've gained a bit of paid or unpaid experience, complete the following simple steps to sail through the recruitment process and land your first agency job.

1. Don't use a CV template

Since you've chosen to read this article, you probably know that the perfect CV (Curriculum Vitae or resumé) is a slippery beast, and the more creative the job you're applying for, the subtler the requirements.

First, you'll want to steer clear of templates. The digital industry is creative at its core, and regardless of the position you are applying for, recruiters and human resource managers want to see that you know how to put together a presentable document on your own. This doesn't mean you need to add bells and whistles; using an ordinary word processor is fine as long as you're producing your own work.

On the other hand, web and graphic designers may want to use a photo editor or design programme to create an original document. As long as a portfolio of work accompanies the application, this isn't strictly necessary, but remains a good way to grab the recruiter's attention at first glance.

2. Include only relevant information

Unless specifically requested by the employer, include only your name, email address and preferred contact number in the personal details section. ID numbers, birth dates, religions, ethnicities, photographs and other personal information have no place in your professional profile, and only add clutter to an otherwise streamlined reading process. If you're an immigrant, it helps to indicate whether or not you've received your work permit as this will prevent awkward questions later on.

Along with personal details, your CV should contain your objective (a paragraph detailing why you're applying for the job), one or more sections relating your qualifications and/or experience, and examples of your work if you have any (more on that later). If a cover letter has been requested, you won't need to include an objective as it is likely to be redundant.

3. Acknowledge the requirements

If the job ad demands knowledge of particular operations, be sure to mention whether or not you have obtained relevant experience. If you haven't, say so, and add that you're interested in learning more about the given subject. Ignoring or failing to mention a certain requirement will force the recruiter to waste their time scouring your CV for applicable information, and they may penalise you for the inconvenience. This means that you will have to tailor your CV to every job you apply for.

4. Focus on experience

In the digital industry, experience is much more relevant than a qualification. Of course you should mention your degree or diploma if you have one (no high school marks, please), but if you're self-taught, make it count in your favour by including all of your best work, even if it wasn't a paid job. The plus side of sending recreational work is that it shows that you're passionate about what you do and don't just think of it as a job.

Hint: If you don't have a required qualification, you should apply regardless on the condition that you include ample proof of your competence. Showing is better than telling!

5. Maintain clarity and honesty

Present all qualifications, experience and expertise clearly and honestly. Recruiters don't want to have to infer any information. Being vague about your capabilities may also imply a lack of truth, so instead of saying that you have experience in web development, mention that you've worked with HTML, CSS, JavaScript, etc.

On the same note, try to shy away from terms like "guru" or "expert" if you don't have the credentials to back it up. If you're unsure whether or not your capabilities merit such a description, leave it out. There's nothing worse than a "pro developer" failing their entry test.

6. Up your credibility

In order for you to be considered eligible for an interview, you will have to avoid certain "rookie" mistakes such as typos, poor language use, broken links, outdated or shoddy work, or failing to convert your CV to PDF or similar professional format. You don't want your prospective employers' first impression of you to be sloppy.

Perhaps the greatest credibility killer is sending a CV that has clearly not been tailored to the specific company or position, or addressing the application to Company X and sending it to Company Y (this happens more often than you'd think).

7. Research the company before the interview

Once you've submitted your CV to a handful of agencies, you will hopefully be contacted for an interview. If possible, ask to be given a few days to prepare and get your head in the game - it's important to have a fairly solid idea of who it is you're looking to work for. You don't need to go as far as finding out what year the company was founded or who their five top clients are, but you should at least have an idea of the sort of work they produce and what role they fill in the industry.

8. Make sure you like the culture (and the culture likes you)

Knowing the company culture is very important. Take a look at their social media pages, and talk to one of the employees if

you can. Is the work environment relaxed, high strung, competitive, image focused? Asking these questions will give you an indication of what to expect on the day of the interview, and perhaps even alert you to a culture clash.

If the culture appears stiff and professional with a dress code, for example, and you enjoy rocking a Ravenclaw hoodie with flip flops, this probably won't be your ideal match. Likewise, if you're looking to climb the corporate ladder starting yesterday, the beanie clad bunch might only cause frustration.

9. Don't try to fit their mould (but don't insult it either)

As with any representation of yourself, it's best to be honest about who you are. You don't want to work for a company that forces you into a box that doesn't fit. So wear that Ravenclaw hoodie to the interview. Chances are they'll love it, and if they don't, you'll be doing your future self a favour by giving the job a miss.

On the other hand, while it's great to have your own methods and creative niche, don't be arrogant. This should go without saying, but some interviewees still insist on dismissing the interviewer's methods. Think the company's choice of development language or internal communication system is cumbersome and outdated? That's fine, but don't try to "educate" the interviewer or your new colleagues. That's not what you're there for.

10. Be prepared to go through your work

If you've provided examples of your work, or been given an assignment or admission test, be prepared to talk about it. What was your strategy, what did you struggle with, what are you most proud of, how did you execute X, Y, Z?

11. Come with questions

Remember that while they're interviewing you, you're also interviewing them. Ask the interviewers about growth opportunities, their own experience at the company, where the business is headed within the next five years, company culture, flexible working hours, or whatever it is you might want to know before making a serious commitment.

12. Relax

Although you might be bursting with jitters, remember that you have every chance of impressing. These people want to meet you - they're setting aside their time for you because they believe you could be The One. That's a lot counting in your favour. Now take a deep breath, and be as true to yourself as possible.

And there you have it. The application process is but a fraction of your career, but, if done right, may open all the right doors to secure a long and rewarding career in digital. May the odds be in your favour.

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