

Careers

Tips for Older IT Job Seekers  
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**The older you are, the longer it can take to get a job, a situation that is exacerbated in the ever-changing world of tech.**

What is considered "old" by employment standards these days seems younger every year. In industries such as IT this is especially apparent, as the stereotypical tech guru is rarely envisioned as being in the 50-plus set, yet statistics suggest that this would be a more accurate depiction of an IT professional.

According to the AARP, by 2012 almost 20 percent of the U.S. work force will be 44 or over. Americans are predicted to work longer than ever before. There were 5.5 million people 65 and older in the labor force in 2006, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, a number which is projected to reach 10.1 million by 2016.

Unfortunately, the older you are, the longer it can take to get a job. Compared to 18.9 weeks for younger workers, it took workers 55 and older 25.8 weeks on average to find a job in 2004. But for an unemployed or under-employed professional, or one that has needed to get back into the workforce after a premature retirement, this can feel like an eternity.

"Part of the struggle is that it is difficult to recast yourself. The markets are always changing and the customer needs, especially in technology, are always changing so you need to find a way to make yourself relevant in the marketplace. The trick is how," Jim Lanzalotto, vice president of products and marketing for Yoh Services, a tech employment firm, told eWEEK.

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Lanzalotto and workplace experts suggest that older workers in need of new employment embark on a strategic and tailored job hunt, one that deemphasizes the downsides of age and plays up experience and stability.

"People might have prejudices against hiring an older candidate. But once you get in front of someone, show that you know your stuff and show enthusiasm for the job. Make it so they'd be crazy to say no," Jeremy Lappin, CEO of BountyJobs, a service which connects businesses with headhunters, told eWEEK.

**Know What Sets You Apart**

Most of what has been written about job hunting for older workers plays on the generational differences between Baby Boomers and Generations X and Y, who might be seen as more ambitious and willing to work harder than someone who has been working for decades. But this is a disservice to older job seekers, as everything that sets them apart can be seen as a bonus through a different lens.

For example, while a younger employee might be hung up with job titles or the need to build up a resume with the right experiences from the right places, an older job seeker is typically past that. Discussing a willingness to help an organization in any area that they need will win an older job seeker more opportunities.

Generation X and Generation Y workers are also known to change jobs every 24 to 26 months, at a great cost to organizations with a constant need to find new talent. This gives Baby Boomer the ability to sell themselves as a person in a more stable place in their life, explained recruiters.

Older workers also have the unquestionable advantage of experience, and knowing their own limitations better.

"More experienced workers are going to understand the nuances of their responsibilities more than younger

workers. They're going to have a better idea how to meet people where they are and be more experienced in negotiating with difficult partners.

They can leverage their experience building relationships," Julie Zinn, executive director of project management and business skills development at ESI International, a global training firm. Selling this self-awareness to an interviewer shouldn't be difficult.

"When you know your strengths and weakness, you can collaborate better with others and build teams that capitalize on your strength," said Zinn.

#### **Know What to Play Down**

As important as knowing your selling points is knowing what information to take focus off us, such as gaps in employment, several career paths or resume items that will play up a senior age.

Recruiters advise older IT job seekers not to advertise expertise in out-of-date technologies.

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"If you've only been and still are only a [Windows] NT pro, shame on you for not updating," said Lanzalotto.

"However, if you are, you should position yourself as a skilled IT resource working in a customer support environment. Make sure they know that you know how this stuff gets done."

Referencing all 12 or 20 jobs one has had in their career is also ill-advised, say workplace experts, not suggesting that it should be hidden, but that it is more important to get the most relevant and impressive experience to the top of a resume.

"Don't show every bit of experience that you have. Get yourself in the door, land the interview. Show that you know your stuff and show enthusiasm, something that is so often missing from interactions," said Lappin.

#### **Know How to Adapt to the Current Market**

If you haven't sent out a resume in 12 years, you might not know not to send one in paper-and-envelope format. You also might be leaning on outdated notions of networking. Though networking is as big as ever, it is rarely done through group organizations and largely launched online these days.

"You don't need a support organization, you need a job. You'll get that by shoe leather networking," said Lanzalotto.

"Work off a relationship you already have. Don't send a recruiter an unsolicited e-mail—let them get it from someone else they know who wants to help you out. They'll be more likely to respond to Mary XYZ who asked them to give you a call."

If you've been out of work for some time, either because you had prematurely retired and changed your mind or because you have had trouble getting back in the game after a layoff, it may have taken a toll on your confidence, making the job hunt more daunting.

"You're going to get dealt roadblocks in any career and you overcome them not by wallowing in self-pity but by looking at ways to keep yourself relevant. If you've got a lot of experience, you've got to find the organization that will benefit from that," said Lanzalotto.