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Making the application

There is a vast amount of material available, both in print and online about career objectives, applications, interview techniques and the like. Much of this is written for the domestic job market but can be adapted for the international job seeker. The one thing to remember is that the purpose of the covering letter is to get your CV (or resume) read, the purpose of the CV is to get an interview and the purpose of the interview is to get the job. One thing at a time, don't try to get the job with your covering letter for example. The more senior the position (in terms of technical skills or experience) the more rigorous the process and often the length of time taken to make an appointment. If you are a member of your professional association contact them to see if they have any material on working overseas or on applications and interviews in general.

Applying for the job

When it comes to submitting your application (i.e. the covering letter and CV), there are several different avenues to do so. The following cover most of the options:

- applying through a recruitment agency for a particular position
- working through a recruitment agency by placing yourself in their database of candidates
- applying directly to the employer for a particular position
- placing yourself in an employer's database of candidates
- writing directly to an employer telling them you'd like to work for them
- applying for a position overseas with your current employer

- tendering for a contract position or project
- placing your CV on an employment website that can be searched by employers
- negotiating through a friend or personal contact.

Recruitment agencies

Before approaching recruitment agencies to either apply for a specific position they have advertised or to put yourself on their database, you need to prepare yourself. (If you place your details in their database keep them up-to-date and remove them once you are no longer looking for a position.) The consultant you deal with is not a neutral party, they need to be convinced that you're worth 'selling' to potential employers. The agency makes a considerable investment in their job placements; it's not unusual for agencies to guarantee the people they place. If the person doesn't live up to the expectations of the employer or leaves, then the recruitment agency may have to refund all or part of their fee or find a replacement at no cost to their client. It is not uncommon for the agency to be just as thorough as the employer when it comes to selecting candidates to put forward to the employer.

It is therefore worth finding an agency and consultant within that agency you can work with. If you're working with an agency and they're interested in you then they should assist you to prepare for positions that attract your attention. If they don't, move on. You may need to shop around to find an agency that seems to match your expectations.

Don't play agencies off against each other but you may need to work with more than one if things are moving slower than you had hoped. (You do need to be realistic about your prospects and you should discuss this with your consultant.) If you are with more than one agency make sure they don't both put your name forward for the same job. Be straightforward and honest, you may wish to work with them again especially as work is increasingly short term and contract based. In exchange, you should expect them to be the same.

Put yourself in the consultant's shoes. What are they looking for from you? A strong and appropriate CV with your achievements in quantifiable terms and without the jargon that may be common in your discipline. The more senior the position you wish to apply for the more thorough they will be. This can include a detailed look at your CV and an in-depth interview. They may also wish to speak to your referees. Ask for feedback, particularly on your interview technique if they interview you. Be open to their suggestions.

If you intend to have a recruitment agency put your application forward when vacancies arise discuss how this works. Do they consult you each time? Can you see the information they are sending about you? Are you able to provide a list of companies you don't want to work for or countries you don't want to work in? Sort this out early so there is no misunderstanding at a later stage.

There are many recruitment agencies that specialise in recruiting for international positions or have a section devoted to that market. In addition, some agencies specialise in particular industries or regions of the world. A number of these are listed in chapter six.

Employers

There are still many employers not making use of recruitment agencies and who place their own job vacancies in print or online. When applying ensure you provide the information they are requesting in the order they require it. If you are sending out a covering letter and a CV (by email or snail mail) without changing these to meet the requirements of each position, then do not expect much success. Although you are telling the same story with each application, you need to adapt it to meet the requirements of the employer.

It is estimated that over half of the world's largest companies now use their websites to recruit professionals and managers. In addition, many are also maintaining databases of potential staff. Not surprisingly, this began with companies in computer and information technologies but has become widespread across most industries. It has been so successful for some companies that they only advertise elsewhere or hand the recruitment task to an agency, when their own

efforts have not been successful in finding a suitable candidate. For this reason it is an idea to know which companies suit your career plans and keep an eye on the recruitment section of their website. If you already work for a company that advertises overseas positions on their intranet keep a check on available positions. If you are filling out an online application form, especially one with limited space, make sure it's correct before sending and include key words. Check to see if you can update your information at a later time if required.

If you're approaching a firm with a plea to employ you (for a whole lot of good reasons) make sure you're making contact with the right person. If you're lucky enough to have met such a person at a conference or similar you'll be in a better position than 'cold calling'. It's highly unlikely that you'd find that person in the area of human resources or personnel. You're more likely to find someone who is prepared to bat for you in the area where you'd like to work such as engineering, finance or the like.

Tendering

This is not the place to discuss the way to successfully tender for positions or projects but clearly a success here will lead to employment. While some international tenders are open to small operators with the appropriate qualifications and experience, most tenders are for medium to large multi-disciplinary consulting and project management firms. Keep an eye on tenders issued by various bodies—such as AusAID and the Asian Development Bank—and find out which companies have been awarded tenders. Approach those companies if possible work opportunities match your plans.

Placing your CV on a employment website

The web is an increasingly important tool for employers seeking to fill vacancies. It is also true that the web is a large and complex organism (the biological analogy is no longer out of place) and it's easy to become lost or distracted. Websites run by employers have

been referred to above, the employment website, or jobsite, is run by a third party and includes vacancies from many employers. The largest such sites in Australia are www.seek.com.au, www.mycareer.com.au and www.careerone.com.au. However, all of these sites focus on the domestic job market, though Seek does have a UK job section.

If you want to work overseas you'll need to spend time on those websites with jobs from around the world. However, to be most effective you need to make sure you are using the site according to the rules of the site, as not all run the same way, so check the search methodology of the site. You'll normally be able to expand your options by using 'and' and 'or' or limit it by using 'not'.

Many of the large sites will have tens of thousands of vacancies listed so be clear about your selection criteria. From experimentation (generally going from the more general to the more specific) you'll find how to get the best results both on one website and across different websites. Of course, finding the job that suits you and getting the job are quite different things.

Many of the employment websites offer a range of services including a listing of vacancies, a database to place your CV, self-assessment tools, and career centres offering a range of advice, employer information, news, links, message boards and the like.

If you place your CV online, either at an employer's company website or an employment website, be aware that increasingly sophisticated screening tools are used to select possible applicants. This is particularly the case where you fill in online application forms. Make use of appropriate keywords so you highlight the things you wish to focus on. Don't waffle and wherever possible be quantitative.

Towards the end of 2001 Olivier Recruitment Group (www.olivier.com.au) released some research that showed that almost 50 per cent of job applications made online did not receive a reply. This research looked at how Australian companies recruit staff on their websites but when looking for international positions one can safely assume that the results of such a survey would be no better, even two years later. This is reinforced by questions and comments received by one of the authors when they managed the overseas work section of

www.monster.com.au before it folded in 2003. There was substantial disappointment and frustration with the online application process. Not only were people not receiving replies but they weren't getting the jobs.

The first problem was that it was apparent job seekers were expecting too much. Employment websites are not an easy option for finding work overseas. If someone does not have adequate professional qualifications and experience to walk into a recruitment agency then trying to circumvent these requirements using a jobsite won't work.

The second problem is that most employment websites consist of jobs posted for the domestic market, not for foreigners wishing to work in the country. It was not unusual for someone (say an Australian seeking to work in the US) to receive a reply from a company to which they had applied for a job, along the lines of '... you're really well qualified for the job but we haven't employed anyone from overseas before and it's all a bit too hard, but thanks for your application anyway ...' The response to these problems is to have appropriate expectations and a mix of job hunting techniques; don't depend only on the web, and second, make sure you're applying for the right positions. In the international job market having the right qualifications and experience are not the only considerations for employment. Other considerations could include citizenship, marriage status and children, language and social and cultural mores.

Negotiating through a friend or personal contact

It is not inappropriate to include this possibility. Despite all the ways in which one can go about planning to find work overseas, it is often the case—as it is in many aspects of life—that it is who you know, that gets you across the line. All the more reason to join groups, make a contribution and meet people who may be able to assist you. The key issue in these circumstances, is that you are dealing with someone who is realistic in terms of what they are able to achieve. Are they really in a position to influence the outcome or are comments from such people idle promises?

The application process

As mentioned earlier, the purpose of the covering letter is to get your CV read, the purpose of the CV is to get an interview and the purpose of the interview is to get the job. In preparing your application keep in mind that you will not have much more than a minute, if that, to grab the attention of the consultant or human resources officer sorting all the applications into the 'yes' and 'no' piles. Once it is in the 'yes' pile it will receive a more thorough reading to see if the applicant is worth an interview.

While there is not an agreement on exactly how many pages an application should be, all agree it should be shorter rather than longer and that it should be relevant to the position you're applying for. There is general agreement that the covering letter should be only one page in length and the CV should be only three or four pages with all the contact details of the applicant on the first page. Increasingly the recommendation is that you don't include references with your CV but present these at your interview. You'll find plenty of books and websites on this subject though few look closely at 'across border' applications. In addition to some references at the end of this chapter, the employment websites are probably the best easily available sources of relevant information.

The covering letter should be one page in length, to the point, focusing on key points relevant to the job you are applying for, and importantly, enthusiastic. Don't cut and paste information from your CV, use different words that paint a picture so that it leaves an impression on the reader. Finish with some suggested action from 'hoping to meet you' or specifically asking for a meeting. Ring to see if the intended recipient received the application, using the opportunity to talk about your application and request a possible meeting if this is appropriate at the time.

Three to four pages should be adequate for most CVs. Have your CV well structured and use short direct sentences. Do not include your opinions, have only factual and quantitative statements. The chronological CV should move from your most recent position to previous jobs with a diminishing amount of detail the further back you

go. Highlight your achievements in each position. Don't try to cram too much information into either your covering letter or your CV. If you reach the interview stage (and it may be a telephone interview) this is where you can provide further detail.

When applying in response to a specific vacancy make sure you are clear about the requirements of the job and ensure your response is relevant to those requirements. It is the experience of one of the authors that only a minority of applications actually address the specific criteria set out in job advertisements so make sure yours is one of these.

If your application is going directly to an employer overseas, in particular one that is not part of an international firm, make sure you follow some of the local conventions, such as forms of address and style of presentation. In Japan for example, it is normal to include a passport sized photo with the application.

Before you accept an overseas position have a written contract setting out the rights and obligations of both parties. Make sure you understand the terms and conditions of employment outlined in the contract and if uncertain, seek some expert advice. See the previous chapter for more details.

The following tips for your CV come from Expat Network's (see chapter six) annual *Contact Directory*:

- a good CV starts with a brilliant summary
- key strengths are immediately obvious
- the design and layout are instantly attractive
- information is effectively prioritised
- qualifications are arranged to show relevant ongoing professional development where skills other than qualifications are important
- membership of professional institutions should be displayed
- each phrase of your career will be prioritised so that the strongest and most recent aspects get far more attention than earlier stages
- job descriptions should be expressive and descriptive but include

responsibilities and achievements

- achievements should be linked to the rest of the text and give facts, figures and descriptions
- personal details will be brief and essential
- mention all the different countries you have worked in as these can be picked up by key word searches
- if appropriate, list specific equipment used in each position which can be picked up by key word searches
- additional information at the end of the CV should include: training courses attended, computer skills, language skills and other relevant information such as an in-country driving license.

Resources

In addition to websites listed in chapter six, check out the following American site: www.jobsearch.about.com.

Bolles, R., *What Color is Your Parachute?*, Ten Speed Press, Annual.

De Vries, Mary, A., *Internationally Yours: Writing and communicating successfully in today's global marketplace*, Houghton Mifflin, 1994.

Liebmann, H.G., *The Immigration Handbook for work, investment, study and retirement in the USA*, 1997.

Lomax, S., *Best Practices for Managers and Expatriates*, John Wiley, 2001.

Morgan, G., and Banks, A., *Getting that Job: How to Establish and Manage Your Career*, Harper Collins, 1999.

Thompson, M. A., *The Global Resume and CV Guide*, John Wiley, 2000.