



Creativity and innovation: they're always a good thing, right? Not necessarily in job hunting. You may be tempted by stories of people having a bakery deliver a cake with their resume emblazoned on it in icing, but the hiring manager may not be amused by the stunt. Maybe she is on a gluten-free diet, or maybe she has just seen that trick before. Here are some tips for deciding when to stray from the traditional job hunt and try something more off-beat:

Is your industry buttoned up, or is it casual? Are you applying to an investment bank? More traditional is safer. A high-profile advertising agency? The safe thing may be to really show off those wordsmith skills in a cover letter. In all cases, think quality, not flashiness. You don't want to end up going viral because your marketing campaign for your pet parrot is being roundly mocked by hiring managers in New York.

Research is essential when conducting a more creative job hunt. What do the employer's Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other feeds look and sound like? What kind of language are they using in their job postings? How did their representative dress at the information session at the career center? Those can be clues to how to write your own documents and dress for an interview.

Context is everything. If you are applying to Under Armour, signing off in your cover letter with "Protect This House!" would be low risk, but if you are applying to a residential real estate firm, the same signoff might make you seem like you have had way too many cups of coffee.

Let's look at a few other ideas, ranked from lowest to highest risk:

LOW RISK

- Put a new spin on a cover letter. Consider a more creative opening to the cover letter than "I am enthusiastic applying for..." Consider playing up some of the quirkier parts of your background that may still contribute to the company's goals. Were you a lifeguard in high school who saved someone's life after sitting for a month in the hot sun, bored out of your mind? Are you the kind of person who can leap into action when a threat presents itself like that, ever vigilant even in the hot sun? You could craft a cover letter with an anecdote about what you did as an opener.
- Showing your creativity in social media. Behind those avatars on company Twitter feeds and Facebook pages are real people looking to connect. What if you started up a conversation on a topic on Facebook? What if you consistently retweeted the company's message? Showing an interest in the company in creative ways can be low risk and rewarding.

MEDIUM RISK

- Using a new style of resume, like a graphic resume, or one that incorporates color can be a bit riskier. This may be a move that could work in your favor if you do it right, but if you can get the opinion of several people working in the industry your targeting, you will lower the risk. Keep in mind that new styles of resumes are not appropriate for every scenario. Most graphics, for instance, will not be picked up by computer screening systems larger firms may have in place to weed out unqualified job candidates. You may want a more traditional resume when submitting it online.

MEDIUM RISK cont.

- Nontraditional dress or personal presentation. Again, this may be low risk if you are applying to a very nontraditional workplace, but even then, it is best to do your research. Even at the most casual companies, such as Facebook, while your interview may be wearing jeans and a tshirt, it is advisable to look your best, stay on the safe side, and wear business professional.

HIGH RISK

- Politics in general can be a touchy subject, but it has arguably grown more so in recent U.S. politics. Proceed with extreme caution when mentioning politics in your application materials! Never assume you can gauge a person's political views by how they look, talk or present themselves. Likewise, religious views and even certain hobbies can be touchy subjects for some. If you are associated with any of these hot topics on a personal level, it is best to portray them based on your work and skills in the least opinionated way possible.
- Acting like a jerk when you think no one is watching. If you have had a really bad drive in to the interview, are you the kind of person whose bad mood instantly shows on your face? Are you prone to cracking a joke at someone else's expense when under pressure? Be careful how you present yourself to everyone, especially the receptionists, servers and other staff you encounter in your job hunt. You would be surprised who notices and has a voice in the final hiring decision.

HIGHEST RISK - RED FLAG ALERT!

- The riskiest thing you can do is to conduct a job hunt without doing your research. If you have not visited the Career Development Office, gone on some informational interviews, and read the latest industry publications, you are putting your whole job hunt in the riskiest category of all. Reach out for help. As a job seeker, you want to convince hiring managers that you were born to do that kind of work. Sometimes that means standing out, but again, always strive for quality over flash.