

## So you have an education, can you get a job?: Marketing yourself to employers perhaps one of the most important skills to learn

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Illustration: Colour Photo: PIERRE OBENDRAUF, THE GAZETTE / Marketing student Jennifer Zimmerman, 23, took advantage of the Marketing Yourself online course to plan her career strategy. Finishing school this semester, she particularly liked the self-evaluation element of the research into career planning.

For years, marketing professor Harold Simpkins would shake his head at graduating students dropping by his office in April, asking his help in getting contacts.

The veteran Concordia teacher was shocked at how little planning these highly motivated students had done for their future careers.

Then, he remembered how he had started, fresh out of school, in industrial relations. After two days he realized he hated it. And his lawyer buddy who needed two years to come to terms with the brutal psychological environment in the law firm where he started to work.

"You simulate the field when you're in school, but nothing can duplicate the real world," Simpkins said.

The answer, of course, is to check out the nuts and bolts of any career that interests you. Speak to lawyers to understand the atmosphere, talk to people in industrial relations to see that it takes a lot of patience to work in that field.

"No wonder I didn't like it. I'm an impatient personality," Simpkins said with a laugh.

"If students buy a pair of skis, they do the research," said Cherine Zananiri, director of the Career Placement Centre at the John Molson School of Business. "But if you ask about careers, they don't know."

She recommends that students take a variety of classes, read a lot about the world and broaden their knowledge.

"It's very basic, but very few people do it," she said.

But it's too late to start this research when you're about to graduate, Simpkins argues.

To this end, he and colleague Jordan Lebel have created Marketing Yourself, an online course from the John Molson School of Business ([www.marketingyourself.ca](http://www.marketingyourself.ca)) that won the 2005 Award for Excellence and Innovation in Instructional

Design given by the Canadian Association for Distance Education.

"Marketing is satisfying customer needs at a profit, and that involves working with your product, which in this case is you," Simpkins said. "The resume and cover letter are the final piece of promotion."

But before you get to that stage, you have to know the product - yourself. And how it fits into the market. You need to know whether you want to be a professional, entrepreneur or artist, whether you want money or recognition, or both.

"You need to discover what you value as a means of helping you identify what you like to do," Simpkins said.

Only when you have a clear idea of what you want to do can you identify potential customers or employers.

In the Simpkins/Lebel program, students are taught to apply marketing concepts to themselves.

"The first step is getting to know your products, which in this case is yourself," Simpkins said. "Students reflect on themselves and identify values and personality types."

While the course offers about 20 assessment tests, there are others you can take free of charge online, he said. Check sites like [www.positivepsychology.net](http://www.positivepsychology.net) or [www.authentic happiness.org](http://www.authentic happiness.org) for assessments on personal and work interests.

The next step is to get to know your potential customers.

"If your goal is to be an employee, then identify those areas like banks and universities," he said. "See how many people they hire, how they go about hiring, what they look for, how you stack up relative to what they seek."

It's amazing what one can discover.

One student in the course, who was studying fine arts, told Simpkins she wanted to be a portrait artist.

So she went to the Yellow Pages and looked up portrait painters, he recalled.

"She called them all, found out how many sales they had, how much they charge and, from that research, she determined that the market was big enough to sustain her," he said.

The other personal objective - and a critical one whether your choice is financial analyst or portrait painter - is setting goals and strategies for what you must do in terms of education and personal development.

"Let's say you decide you want to become a consultant," Simpkins said. "One of the traits to be successful is to be a very good networker. But if your social skills are not quite there, you have to work on those skills."

Once they've got objectives and broad strategies, the third step is to commit to a marketing plan, with timelines, Simpkins said.

In other words, "If I'm going to become fluent in French or Arabic, how am I going to do it and by when?"

The best idea, he said, is to have a five-year view and work back to accomplishing some elements of the plan within one year.

"With the deeper knowledge that you have of yourself, you'll be better equipped to evaluate the situation," Simpkins said. "We can't control the future, but with planning we can prepare ourselves for it."

dnebenzahl@thegazette.canwest.co m