

High-Tech Career Services Offer High-Yield Returns in a Tough Job Market

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by

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With tuition rising, job markets tightening, and fewer employers recruiting on campus, “high-touch” career development services are quickly becoming a must-have for prospective college students. And not just in the months before graduation, but from the moment they hit campus. So in an effort to stay on top of the demand, while keeping a lid on the cost, institutions of higher education are turning to “high-tech” solutions.

In fact, online technologies offer a number of extraordinary advantages for campus career programs of any scope or size.

By making it easier to reach large numbers of students with fewer hands on the ground, these technologies help free up valuable staff time for such other essential activities as personalized career counseling. They also help colleges connect the ever-important dots between academic advising and career planning, thus enhancing the return on tuition investment. Likewise, online services can be readily customized for special student populations, such as working adults and transitioning veterans.

From the student perspective, digital technology affords far greater control over the career development process, by providing *anytime, anyplace* access to a growing pool of effective resources and professional networks. Consequently, students can choose what they need, when they need it. Even more important, there are a variety of web-based tools and services that transform time-limited career support into lifelong professional advancement opportunities.

With these benefits in mind, a growing number of institutions are harnessing the power of technology to build career service capacity. Many of the larger campuses now furnish online job search assistance, linking students and alumni alike to everything from job banks and recruiter websites, to sophisticated resume-writing and interview preparation tools. College career centers are also taking advantage of social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn to furnish a reliable avenue for exchanging relevant information.

But as technology evolves, new options have emerged, some of which I have found to be especially promising. For example, virtual career fairs offer a commonsense – and certainly cost-effective – alternative to the conventional face-to-face job expo.

Using a customized website and a variety of interactive technologies, prospective employers set up virtual job booths that students *and* alumni may “visit” at any time, from anywhere in the world, to submit resumes, “chat” with recruiters, and schedule follow-up interviews. These events generally target specific industries (i.e. financial services or IT), and take place over several days. Moreover,

access can be limited to one campus or open to multiple institutions, which in turn promotes such other advantages as cost-sharing and regional collaboration.

For job seekers, virtual career fairs eliminate the need for standing in long lines and commuting from great distances. They also reduce the time to employment, by connecting applicants to actual job postings. For companies, these fairs broaden the talent pool without the added expense and aggravation of recruiting from campus to campus. In addition, they serve as an excellent pre-screening device, allowing prospective employers to zero in quickly on the most qualified candidates.

Interactive career planners are yet another innovative way to ensure a higher return on tuition investment. These user-friendly, “intelligent” systems typically combine self-assessment with career exploration and academic mapping to facilitate career-enhancing decisions at each phase of the academic life cycle – from enrollment through transition.

By incorporating a variety of research-validated instruments, interactive planners enable students to choose an appropriate career path, based upon their unique interests, attributes, and skills. They also generate a personalized academic blueprint for meeting professional goals, thus bridging the gap that often exists between career development and academic advising.

Needless to say, these systems produce a wealth of valuable information for career center staff to use in providing one-on-one counseling and other wraparound services. In addition, they save students precious time and money spent switching majors or even institutions midstream. Even more important, however, they pave the way for graduates to enjoy a lifetime of benefits that come with pursuing a career that engages their strengths, as well as their passions.

Finally, e-portfolios have become an impressive tool for today’s tech-savvy jobseeker. While we have plenty of evidence to support their efficacy within the learning environment, they are also gaining momentum as a viable platform for career enhancement.

Digitized resumes and e-portfolios offer a convenient and dynamic way to showcase career-relevant knowledge, skills, and experience. What’s more, they can incorporate a variety of text-based, graphic, and multimedia elements to make them even more appealing. And by posting their e-portfolios online for prospective employers to see, students and alumni have a unique way to self-market an online identity that is positive *and* professional.

Of course, as we expand our digital horizons, it is always important to remember that technology will never take the place of human interaction. Still, by balancing between the advantages of high-tech with the need for high-touch, we can provide our students with a blended career development experience that is as empowering as it is rewarding.

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