



Entrepreneurs

How To Land A Job In Another Industry

Jane J. Lee 09.28.10, 10:50 AM ET

Benjamin Kinney used to spend hours poring over dusty property records in courthouses across Oklahoma. His job: mapping out legal titles to mineral rights at the behest of oil companies.

"It was good to be in the oil business," says Kinney, 31. "I liked the routine, and it really was stimulating work."

But being a field land man lacked one important thing: stability. "You could get called into the office to work on Monday and then get fired on Tuesday," says Kinney. "I was no longer interested in riding the roller coaster."

How to translate his skills into a new, less volatile job in a different industry?

Top Tips: 10 Companies Share What They Look For In Nontraditional Hires

Millions of people are faced with reinventing their careers in this troubled economy. While industry expertise remains important, employers large and small confirm that there is ample opportunity for those looking to make a vocational switch.

Kinney is proof. Last month he interviewed at ONEsite, which builds social-network software and is based in Oklahoma City. With zero experience in the technology industry, Kinney wouldn't have seemed a logical pick. Still, Thad Martin, ONEsite's cofounder, saw another set of skills that his company needed. "Researching property ownerships takes a lot of precision, and so does project management," says Martin.

After three interviews, Kinney got a bid. Three weeks later, he now manages five-person project teams that construct interactive corporate websites. Better yet, he pulls in roughly the same salary--\$55,000 year--as he did as a field man. "I'm ecstatic," crows Kinney. "I feel like I'm finally in a professional environment with endless growth potential."

Kinney has plenty of company. While the U.S. Department of Labor doesn't collect statistics on the number of industry-switchers, economists and human resources experts say they've seen the numbers steadily increase in the past year. "People are considering new fields of work out of need, and they're doing it in droves," says Tamara Erickson, co-author of *Workforce Crisis*.

We asked employers large and small what they look for in non-traditional hires. If you're looking for a new gig in a new industry--be it out of necessity or passion--this is your playbook.

For a full list of 10, see our [slide show](#).

Google **Cupertino, Calif.** **Internet Technology**

You don't need to be a power geek to snag a Google gig if you can demonstrate you're up for a challenge. One recent hire traded a nonprofit job in Africa--where he faced down a cohort of Namibian generals while performing HIV research--for a spot in Google's human-resources analytics department. "Someone who can take on big problems and not be scared--those are the people who are compelling," says Google Hiring Manager Tom Carlisle. Not that you have to save the world: Carlisle says he was recently impressed by a woman who worked nights as a seamstress to support her sister through college.

Allstate

**Northfield, Ill.
Insurance**

Calling all aspiring entrepreneurs, even those who don't know much about insurance: "Our exclusive agents, the ones with the store fronts in your home town, are really the front line with our customers," says Tom Hall, assistant vice president of talent acquisition at Allstate. "Due to the logistical nature of owning your own agency, we look for people who are hands-on and willing to manage their own cash flow and their own team of people." (Important note: New agents need about \$50,000 to hang out their own shingle.)

**Luxury Reach
Chicago
Marketing Consultancy**

Marketing is a catch-all bucket for those with a certain general skill set. "We look for candidates who work well with a large, diverse group of people," says founder Zach Weiner, 30. "Take a personal fitness trainer, for instance. Their job is to motivate people--that's something I would consider." Understanding a particular industry helps, too. "We had an elementary school teacher do wonders for educational-software clients because, after years of parent-teacher conferences, she could speak the lingo." Note: Marketing projects often require dealing with a lot of moving parts. If you're a skilled multitasker, highlight that in your interviews.

**Principal Financial
Des Moines
Financial Services**

No matter your background, if you're a competitor at heart, Principal is interested. "We have an extremely high performer who used be a career advisor for athletes and is now a top recruiter," says Recruiting Manager Kacie Sires. "Sports is naturally a competitive field, so that experience translated into excellent customer-service skills and being able to go above and beyond all the time. We're not looking for any particular major or education; we're looking for the skills that person was able to build."

**Community Options
Princeton, N.J.
Health Care**

No experience working at a nonprofit health care organization? No worries, assures Robert Stack, founder of Community Options, which builds homes and provides care for the disabled. "A lot of our people come from a social services or psychology background, but we have plenty of employees who don't," says Stack, 54. "We've hired managers who were previously unemployed and taking care of their old or infirmed parents. They know what it's like to care for someone with significant disabilities and that understanding is critical in our line of work."

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