



Don't Throw Away Job Hoppers

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Does this scenario sound familiar? You're a senior marketing head and the decision has been made at your company to create and implement a database marketing program in your division. You have the commitment of the company's CEO, the resources to do the job and you're ready to hire a director of database marketing.

In the stack of resumes you see a promising candidate. He has strong marketing skills, understands analytical techniques and can effectively use the various technologies that contribute to your company's overall database marketing efforts. He can bridge the gap between IS and marketing. He can build the teamwork, impart the vision and motivate the rest of the members of the database marketing team. He's even in your price range. There's only one problem. He's had three jobs in the last five years, and he's held his current position for only one year. Do you put him on your short list of candidates to interview or do you dismiss him as a job hopper?

As some companies rethink their database marketing strategies, the phrase "long-term employment" in the field of database marketing is becoming an oxymoron. Database marketers are increasingly finding themselves caught between a company's need to market more effectively to new and existing customers and senior management's short-term need to see database marketing strategies impact the bottom line. To get a better measure for just how long database marketing employees are staying on the job, we recently reviewed several hundred resumes of candidates including group heads, managers and analysts, and examined the dates of employment for every database marketing related position on each resume.

Our unscientific survey (and I want to emphasize the word unscientific) shows that for positions at the director level and lower -- loosely defined as 10-12 years of database marketing-related experience or less -- the average length of employment was approximately three and a quarter years. Among the more senior ranks, the figure approached five years. These figures are not surprising when you consider recent research shows that American workers entering the work force for the first time can expect to change jobs about 15 times in their working life. Fading are the 9-5 workdays,

lifetime jobs, predictable and hierarchical relationships, corporate culture security blankets and the workplace itself, which is being replaced by a virtual workplace.

We all make mistakes in life and sometimes that includes choosing the wrong job. The best you can do when making a decision about whether or not to accept an employment opportunity is to gather all of the facts and advice you can and then make an informed decision that you believe will be best for your long-term career development.

All too frequently I speak with candidates who feel frustrated and unchallenged in their current positions because the company game plan has changed. The company's commitment to create and implement a database marketing program or its commitment to grow an existing database marketing program begins to falter as resources are shifted toward other corporate initiatives. It's the No. 1 reason database marketing candidates decide to jump ship, and if you see a quick hop on the resume of a candidate in database marketing or analysis it may have more to do with the candidate's previous employer and less with the candidate.

When you look at the resume of a candidate who has held numerous positions in a relatively short period of time, you should be looking first for indications that the candidate is climbing the career ladder and not stepping down or moving sideways. Look at the candidate's last three positions, and look for a pattern of increasing duties and responsibilities from one position to the next.

If a candidate graduates with a B.S. in Marketing and takes his first job out of college as an account coordinator with a full-service direct marketing agency. This gives him his first client experience and introduces him to the full suite of direct marketing services. Three years later he goes to the client side and becomes a database analyst responsible for developing and managing database marketing implementation plans for new product launches and participates in building databases for marketing analysis and planning. In two years he takes on his next challenge on the agency side as account supervisor providing strategic marketing and program management for one of the company's largest clients. He manages a database migration between different systems and develops RFP presentations and responses. In six or seven years, this candidate has held three different positions, an average of only about two years per job. But his movement from job to job clearly shows a pattern of increasing responsibilities.

A relatively quick job hop on the resume of a database marketer or analyst can sometimes be easily explained. Two quick jobs hops of a year or less, however, and you should be asking the candidate much tougher questions and putting the resume under a high-powered microscope. You then need to learn more about how the candidate makes decisions when situations aren't so ideal. The past, like it nor not, is the only decent predictor of the future. Go back and reconstruct each past job and school experience. Maturity, the ability to not allow feelings to distort reasoning, becomes a key attribute when evaluating a candidate who tends to move around.

Jerry Bernhart, president of Bernhart Associates, Owatonna, MN, has recently launched directmarketingcareers.com, a career Web site exclusively for direct marketing.

