Skill Development

by **Jack Wilson** [an error occurred while processing this directive]

ACM's career consultant, Jack Wilson, answers questions from students about their forthcoming careers in computing and information technology.

Q: I want to develop further my object-oriented programming skills and become as proficient as possible in at least one language, but I can't decide on whether to concentrate on C++ or Smalltalk. Is there any difference from a hiring or salary point of view?

A: Both languages enjoy continuing demand in the job market, but C++ is considered a mainstream language, while Smalltalk is still considered a niche, but gaining. There is probably a bit more hiring in C++, along with a slightly higher salary premium. While these factors are worth noting, I believe you should also think about your own satisfaction and long-term interests in making a decision: which would you most enjoy using? with which are you going to be most satisfied? and in which can you develop a higher level of competence? I believe these are important considerations in any kind of career decision.

Q: I'm doing independent freelance work before starting on a job search. My question is whether I should use my own name or give my business a different name, and what are the legal implications? How do I know whether the name I give it is already "taken"?

A: First, you should know that I can't give you legal advice, as I am not a lawyer, but I can tell you what my own experience is. If you are thinking of using a fictitious name, let's say "XYZ Consulting", I strongly suggest doing that through an attorney, who will know the requirements for registering that name in your jurisdiction. If you choose to be a sole proprietor (vs. incorporating), the fictitious name is known as a "DBA (Doing Business As)". If you incorporate, your attorney will do that through a department in whatever state you incorporate, and they will know whether that particular name is "taken". I firmly believe that for anyone intending to be an independent freelancer, consultant, or contractor, your first best friends should an attorney and an accountant, each of whom is familiar with small business matters.

Q: In one of your monographs on the web, you suggested using a letter instead of a CV. Is that true in all cases?

A: No. The monograph you mentioned is entitled "Selecting and Targeting Potential Employers", and I was referring to a particular technique to use in introducing yourself and eliciting interest from a particular manager in an employer's organization. You may also remember that I emphasized the letter must be well-written.

Put yourself in the place of a busy executive, who in many cases, simply does not have the time to review all the resumes people send; so his/her default option is to have the secretary who opens the mail send anything that remotely resembles a resume to the Human Resources Department, where it will probably be rejected or filed awaiting some requisition that matches the applicant. Of course, there is always the chance it will match some existing need. On the other hand, a well-written personal letter may not only get past the screener, but actually get read; and if it tells an interesting story, you may actually get a positive response, like asking you to send in a resume, in which case you now have a receptive audience that is predisposed to read it.

I still believe strongly in having and using a good resume. Certainly you need it in responding to ads or approaching recruiters, although there are some who disdain its value entirely. If you want to read more about this, try Bob Weinstein's book, "Resumes Don't Get Jobs", McGraw-Hill, 1993 (for information, see **http://www.inforonics.com:53311/cgi/getarec?mgh21244**).

Q: I'm interested in exploring job opportunities in higher education. Are there any sites available via the Internet that I could check out?

A: Yes, there are a number. Two that you may to check out through your Gopher or Web browser are (1) *The Chronicle of Higher Education* at **http://chronicle.merit. edu/.ads/.links.html**, and (2) the *Academic Position Network*, **gopher://wcni.cis. umn.edu:11111/**.