



# Will Gimmicks Gimme the Job?

*Can you bake, bribe, or billboard your way into employment?*

## Is the risk worth the potential reward?

In their quests to land a gig, job seekers have employed innovative to inane tactics to capture an employer's attention. Just Google job search gimmicks for entertaining to eye-rolling stunts candidates have used to stand out. Among the famous—and infamous—are buying a billboard with a “hire me” message, purchasing a Google ad, creating artisanal beer with custom résumé labels, spelling out a résumé in Christmas lights, offering a foot massage if given the job, slipping the interviewer a monetary tip, even showing up in a gorilla suit with balloons.

So, is it okay to use a non-conventional approach to gain an employer's attention? After all, the first three examples above *did* land the candidates the job. Experts say “No,” and advise against using any stunts. In fact, even less-than-outlandish ploys can backfire. For example, bringing baked treats to an interview, even if well-meaning, is inappropriate. There may be food allergies and, worse, you can be perceived as being immature and currying favor. Using scented stationery for your cover letter and résumé can offend sensitive noses and takes attention away from the important content of your message. Also, while it might be okay to drop off your résumé at a restaurant, make it a point *always* to first follow the employer's instructions for submitting your information. Organizations often have guidelines and protocols, including applicant tracking systems (ATS), for handling job applications. This means, dropping off your materials in person or overnighting your cover letter and résumé does not guarantee that you'll get your name in front of the employer any faster. In fact, just the opposite can happen. Not following procedure might result in your application ending up in the trash.

Unless you're pursuing an organization or field that lends itself to the novel or offbeat, taking a less than traditional approach is risky. Employers might wonder if you're trying to distract or deceive them and question your professionalism. It can be difficult to be taken seriously. If you *land* the job, you're “innovative and brilliant.” Be escorted out by security, and you become a viral example of what *not* to do.

## More rewarding, less risky.

According to experts, your best job search advocates are an impeccable cover letter, a well-crafted résumé with plenty of experience and accomplishments, and a solid interview. Still, a tough job market or prolonged job search may prompt you to explore other options. If creating a knockout marketing campaign is not in your wheelhouse, there are other meaningful ways to channel and align your creativity with the job opportunity, and impress. For example:

- a smart infographic in your career portfolio that outlines how you will bring value to the organization;
- a well-designed self-promotional website, blog, or brochure that combines strong writing skills with good design and typography;
- offering ideas and concepts that show you did your research for ways that benefit the organization;
- digging deep at the end of the interview and asking thoughtful questions that demonstrate your earnest interest in and understanding of the role.

There will always be unique, well-executed, and unexpected approaches that score a home run with the employer. Just ask the candidate who repaired some company equipment at a first interview, the MIT grad who donned a sandwich board, or the internship seeker who created a résumé using LEGO® pieces, marketing herself as the “missing piece” for the organization.

So, can gimmicks land you the job? Yes. Maybe. It depends. With those odds, you can't go wrong conveying your credentials in a professional, universally accepted manner. Plus, once you gain the employer's attention, you'll still need solid qualifications to keep it. Ultimately, substance outperforms stunts.



## **i** n a nutshell:

What's wrong with being original? Nothing, so long as it gets you the job. Here's why gimmicks aren't recommended:

- **Not every organization or employer is open to them; creativity can be subjective and backfire**
- **They don't conform to all application processes**
- **Your résumé, cover letter, and interview are the undisputed trifecta of your job candidacy**
- **There are other effective and professional ways to capture an employer's attention**
- **Gimmicks won't save you if you don't have the substance to back up the lure**

When in doubt, stick with the tried and true. Don't be so caught up in trying to stand out that you become remembered for the wrong reasons.