

Using a Business Card for Networking and Job Search Efforts

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Jack Liles '85

Whether as a student or an experienced professional, using a personal business card during a job search is highly recommended.

Resumes are great tools for those who need to understand more specific details about your background, accomplishments and experience: a recruiter, hiring manager, or someone who is planning to send your resume to a specific person or company. But for initial meetings and interactions with friends, associates and networking contacts, handing someone a resume can often be awkward and a bit too presumptuous. In most cases, you'll want to wait for someone to ask you for your resume before you offer it up. Leading off with a business card is simple, non-threatening and easy.

As a student or young graduate, sharing a business card and saving your resume for follow-up exhibits executive maturity and an understanding of how professionals interact.

Professionals use business cards on a daily basis to pass along very basic contact information. Name, phone, e-mail and web information.

A few notes about a smart personal business card for Cadets or recent graduates searching for a job:

1. There are no set rules for such a card, but it should essentially contain your name, your school year (junior, senior, etc.), expected graduation date, your major, a phone number or two, an e-mail address, and a webpage if you have one. You might also include your LinkedIn profile address. If you hold a significant title or rank (Company Commander, etc) you might include that as well.
2. I don't think you should put an "objective" on your business card. That should be reserved for your resume, based on the company or position you are targeting with that resume.
3. Your name. This is a personal opinion; others may offer a contrary view. My legal, birth-certificate name is Jon Patrick Liles, Jr. But everyone knows me as Jack Liles. On business cards, resumes and anywhere else I list my name, I use Jack. When filling out a government form or other legal type document, I of course use my legal name. Whenever practical, use the name you go by. If your name is Mathew James Stafford, and you go by Jim, don't confuse everybody. You're Jim Stafford. That's what your card should say. The exception...be smart about nicknames and initials. Use common sense.
4. A website called vistaprint.com will create 250 business cards for a \$6-ish shipping charge. You can pay a little more for various upgrades, but there's not much wrong with their \$6 cards. VistaPrint puts their logo on the back, which is ok, or you can pay a bit more to get a card without their logo on it. Do so if you can afford to. They currently offer a very conservative block color style that's white and (almost) citadel blue. Use a format like that which is VERY plain and conservative. No flags, puppies, crazy or "creative" designs. Keep it simple and conservative. The Career Center has some examples of how you might lay out your card design.

5. Be smart about giving out your card. Don't put cards in those fishbowls at cash registers. Use your cards for friends or new people you meet. Utilize and share them professionally.
6. Get a good Gmail account with an address that resembles your name as closely as possible. Don't be cute or silly with your personal e-mail address. Keep this address for life. Whether you switch jobs, internet service providers, move around, etc., you can always keep this address so that your network will always know how to reach you. Same for your cell phone. Try to settle on a number you can keep for a long time without switching. When you change e-mail addresses or phone numbers, you might lose contact with a lot of your network. Not good.
7. Develop a system to always have a few cards with you. If they start getting dog-eared in your wallet or pocket, toss them and replace with some fresh ones. Business cards won't help much if they're sitting in a desk drawer.
8. Storing the information from other people's cards is critical. Our cell phones and smart phones have tremendous memory now... the ability to save up to 1000+ names and numbers is common. Whether you physically save the business cards you collect, or enter them into a cell phone or Outlook database (recommended) do hang on to them. And synch your phone to a backup database like Outlook. You will lose your phone eventually. Don't lose your entire network's contact info along with it.
9. When meeting a lot of people at once, such as at a trade show or Citadel reunion, I'll write down a note or two on the back of their card to remind myself who that person is and/or what we talked about. That makes follow-up messages easier, and really helps when I'm looking at the card 6 months later trying to remember who that person is.
10. I recommend building your own database of your network contacts(MS Excel is fine). Keep their name, phone, e-mail, city, company, and any brief notes that will help you remember them. Looking through a stack of business cards that you collected 2 years ago will make you think you have Alzheimer's. Create, safekeep and constantly update a simple Excel worksheet that contains all your networking contact info and related notes.

Jack Liles is a 1985 Citadel graduate and Business major. He was commissioned in the U.S. Navy and flew combat missions over Bosnia and Iraq in F-14 Tomcats. Following 10 years of naval service, Jack worked for Leo Burnett, Coca-Cola, UPS and several smaller firms around the U.S. He is currently a partner at a transportation industry consulting firm, and President of the Atlanta Citadel Club.