

Your Reference List Is a Marketing Tool

Julia Jobseeker knows the value of professional references.

After she interviewed for a sales manager position, the employer asked her for the names of three references. Julia knew she was among the top candidates and the reference check could seal the deal.

She carefully selected her references, and then spoke with each of them to ensure they fully understood her skills and accomplishments, and could effectively sell her to hiring managers. Her diligence made the difference.

You, too, can transform a simple reference list into a powerful marketing tool. Follow these steps:

General Reference Tips

- Choose references who know the value of your work and will speak positively about you. Don't include references who have impressive job titles but don't really know much about you. Your references should also have good communication skills so they can convince hiring managers you would be a valued employee.
- You don't need to confine your references to current or former supervisors. When selecting your references, consider the message you're trying to convey. For example, if you're a sales manager trying to prove your leadership and account management skills, you might select your supervisor, a contact from a key account and one of your employees. Other possibilities include vendors, customers, instructors, professors, advisors, community leaders, colleagues, mentors and other business acquaintances.
- Avoid family members and friends -- unless you worked with them in a business capacity.
- Ask your references for permission to supply their contact information to potential employers. Provide an updated copy of your resume to all of your references to help them sell you.
- If you've been asked for a set number of references, it's a good idea to provide a couple more than requested. This way, if the employer isn't able to reach one or two of your contacts, he may continue trying to reach other contacts on your list. Availability of references might speed up your job offer.
- The number of references you should provide depends on your profession. Most job seekers should have three to five references, but in some fields (such as medicine and academia), a longer list is typical.

Set Up Your List

Create a new document for your references with a header like "Professional Reference List," and follow with your references' names, addresses, phone numbers and email addresses. You might also provide a short synopsis of your relationship with the reference and the number of years you've been acquainted. Keep the design consistent with your resume and cover letter, using the same heading, fonts and general layout.