

## **Using a Visual Resume for Job Development**

A visual resume is a tool for introducing a job seeker to a prospective employer that shows off who the job seeker is at their best. It is made up of photographs and narrative information about the person including their skills, abilities, experiences, contributions, and tasks they can do for an employer. The visual resume can be used to make a first impression on an employer instead of a more traditional path of a job application or an initial interview. Marc Gold and Associates uses the visual resume as one component of a two-part Representational Portfolio. This training segment will focus solely on the visual resume component using information developing by Marc Gold and Associates.

### **Why the need for an alternative strategy?**

Many people with disabilities don't compete well for jobs when more traditional comparative strategies are utilized such as completing an application for a job opening. While many people with disabilities have skills and can make distinct contributions to businesses, when lined up against other people with and without disabilities the person with the most significant impact loses out. The visual resume enables a job developer or the job seeker to show off their talents, skills, experiences and tasks without being compared to other applicants or an existing job description. The process draws the employer's focus to this one individual and enables the employer to envision this particular individual within their business.

When creating a visual resume, it is recommended that facilitators take time to plan out the type of information to include, how best to represent that information in narrative form and in pictures, and how to sequence the information. Most important to keep in mind is that the visual resume is a marketing tool, not a scrap book.

During Discovery information is learned about the job seeker's: strengths and abilities; particular areas of interest and knowledge; activities that the job seeker and their family participate in within their community and or school; and life and work experiences. All this information may be relevant to whom the job seeker is and the extent of the contribution they can bring to the work place. However, a limited number of pages are

available to communicate the message that this individual is a competent worker who can make a contribution and to provide the employer with an idea of what the job seeker could do within their business. Involve the family and or job seeker in deciding the which are the most powerful images and information to share and how best to display the information.

### **How is the Visual Resume Presented?**

A good length of the Visual Resume is eight to ten pages. If it is too long you risk losing the attention of the employer. Use a stand up, presentation binder. Some binders come with clear plastic sheet protectors in them but having the 3 ring type enables you to easily change the choices of pages to individualize the presentation to each employer. Microsoft Power Point Presentation software works well to create Visual Resumes. You have a choice of backgrounds and color schemes, and already created layouts for each slide. After the resume is created electronically it is easy to print out each sheet, place it in the sheet protector then into the binder. The resume can be easily edited for future job development with little cost to the job seeker.

Some job developers are using technology such as laptops, DVDs and or iPads instead of a hard copy presentation binder to share the visual resume with employers. Whatever format is used make sure it is reliable and working when it is needed.

### **What is the Structure of a Visual Resume?**

The visual resume extends the format typical used by job seekers by blending aspects of an artist's portfolio with a negotiator's selling points. The best structure is simple and not too lengthy.

- Introductory portrait photo
- Images of performance related to past employment, employment experiences, hobbies, competencies, talents (see What pictures should be included, below)
- Narrative pages using brief, clear phrasing
- The job seeker's Task List (when customizing) or job goal (when competing)

## What pictures should be included?

Start the visual resume with a nice portrait picture. This is the one picture where you want the person looking at the camera and posing. The remainder of the photos should be action photos that demonstrate skills, quality performance, experiences and potential contribution to the employer. Take time to plan out what the intended message of each page is and select photos that would best represent that information.

*Types of photos to include are:*

- Portrait Photo with person looking at camera
- Performance photos from work experiences, responsibilities at home, service learning with person looking at task
- Photos that display connections to the community (4-H, FFA, Church, Sports teams)
- Hobbies, extracurricular activities, volunteer work, community service
- Photos that show off particular skills, interests and or knowledge

*Photography tips:*

- Shut off the date and time stamp on your camera
- Use good quality pictures so they don't get fuzzy when you enlarge them
- Take extra time to ensure that the person looks their best for the photo
- Encourage the job seeker to wear different clothes for different photos (if you need to take multiple photos in one day)
- Take photos throughout work and life experiences
- Choose photos where the job seeker is exhibiting competent performance
- Take mostly landscape oriented shots (with width longer than height) rather than portrait oriented shots (with height longer than width) to allow a better fit with PowerPoint slides
- Take many shots and cull stringently to get quality
- Think of the story the image shows so you can relate it to employers
- Avoid cluttered, busy shots that distract from your person

## What narrative Information should be included?

Include information from past work experiences; list the tasks the person performed and the skills that they demonstrated during that experience. For the purposes of drafting out the information you gleaned from the experience here is an example.

Work Experience- Mandy worked as an office aid at High Prairie High School.

Tasks performed: filed student paperwork, alphabetized staff time cards, made copies to order, and delivered supplies to teachers' classrooms upon request.

Skills demonstrating competence included: alphabetizing, arranging and organizing, following written instructions, navigating the school building, moving from one task to another, completing tasks across various areas.

One Page in the visual Resume might have a headline such as "Mandy has had a variety of work experiences". Then include a performance photo at one of the experiences; list the experience locations and the tasks she performed at each. On another page Mandy's skills and abilities could be listed (with or without another photo).

"Mandy will bring these skills and abilities to the work place".

putting things in order numerically and alphabetically,

following written directions, being prompt and conscientious

working until all of her tasks are complete

The overall list of tasks should be the last page with a strong statement such as "Mandy can perform these tasks for your business". Include tasks that the job seeker has performed, and, based on what has been learned about them in Discovery, could perform with training. If an individual has numerous job types that the tasks fall into, organize them by job type. As the resume is individualized for a specific employer presentation some of the task ages that are not relevant to that particular business could be left out of that particular presentation.

### **What if the job seeker has very little experience to highlight?**

The visual resume is completed after completing the process of getting to know them. Through this process information about the person's skills, abilities, and potential contributions to an employer has been gathered. If they haven't had formal work experience, explore ways to illustrate their skills and abilities by including a photograph

of them performing chores at home, or participating in an activity at home or in the community that illustrates some skills and competent performance that is relevant to the work place. For instance, Mandy creates charts that list the date and songs she needs to practice on her violin. She checks off that she has completed that song the required number of times each day when she has completed it. A picture of her using such a chart could be accompanied with wording such as: “Mandy is organized, self-directed, and she initiates creating tracking systems to manage completion of her work”.

Wording that is used in the visual resume is critical. Remember this is a marketing tool and your audience is business people. Use competent adult language free of any human service jargon. Avoid “is able to....” and instead use action verbs.

| What not to say   | This says it Better   |
|---|---|
| Mandy can complete simple math and reading  | Mandy matches letters and numbers, and identifies discrepancies   |
| Mandy is rather shy and is working at responding to people greeting her   | Mandy is most talkative when following a script; she acts in plays and makes presentations at conferences.  |
| Mandy helps with chores around the house  | At home, Mandy is responsible for folding and putting away laundry for all family members                   |
| Mandy is able to use the local bus after extensive training and practice if there is only one transfer of buses | Mandy rides the public bus to her volunteer position at the library and to the pool for swim team practice. |

This is a marketing tool for employers. When selecting the power point back ground consider templates that have a mature professional look to them. While in a school environment, we may think the back ground template with crayons in blue, red and yellow colors sends the message that this person is creative and artistic, however, the message sent to employers could be that we are representing someone immature and childlike. It is not a bad idea to have some of your employer connections review your

portfolios and provide some feedback about the pictures and the narrative before presenting to the targeted employer.

### **Details to consider**

- Use a consistent font for the narrative and consistent back ground graphic
- Check spelling
- Make sure when you have enlarged your photographs you do so by stretching the edge of the photo rather than the top or side as that will distort the image
- Review the visual resume when completed and ask, “Does it relay the intended message about this job seeker in the eight-ten pages of the resume?”
- Have the job seeker review the resume for their feedback and input

### **Disclosure for the purpose of negotiation**

Through the choice of photographs the issue of disability and need for accommodations can be strategically introduced. For instance, if a young woman who uses a motorized chair for mobility and an augmentative communication device to communicate is being represented, a photo of her dialing a phone to make transportation arrangements for herself would share powerful information with an employer.

First of all it introduces some information about her impact of disability (not her label but the impact). Instead of sharing information about what she is unable to do you share the information about her disability in a way that shows off how she gets things done in a creative and competent manner. Now that disability is on the table you can have the conversation about how her wheelchair raises and lowers enabling her to reach the top shelves in the store that you are marketing. Her workplace will need to be accessible obviously so you can bring that up and how most workplace modifications are of very little cost if any to an employer. Also you can talk about her communication device and how she initiates asking for clarification or assistance when she is unclear of her supervisor’s direction. At the same time explain that if she hasn’t used the device in the

past ten minutes it powers down and the person talking to her will need to wait a moment for her to turn it back on to answer them.

**Should a job developer represent the person or should the person represent themselves?**

Marc Gold and Associates typically advises people to use a representative on their behalf to perform job development if a negotiated, customized position is being sought. The rationale behind this is that while the individual most likely is quite competent in sharing their own resume, when it comes to the point of answering questions about how to identify unmet needs of the employer, match them to the contributions and skills of the job seeker, and create a unique job description that meets the needs of both parties, a different level of skill is needed. On the other hand if the person is using the Visual Resume to introduce themselves to an employer but is planning to follow the competitive path of applying for a job opening they could be quite successful representing themselves or accompanying the job developer. These are just points to consider; there isn't only one way to use the visual resume.

When the visual resume was pilot tested in 20 states across the county by Marc Gold and Associates staff, the feedback from employers was that this tool increased their comfort level with hiring someone with a disability and enabled them to see a person with a disability within their business. The visual resume is a powerful and effective tool that job developers may want to use as an alternate strategy for introducing job seekers to employers.