

Career makeover: Filmmaker seeks stable, creative job



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By Michelle Archer / NWjobs

Two years ago, Mary Kawamura graduated from the University of Washington with a degree in digital and experimental art.

"After months of searching, I couldn't find a full-time job to use my highly technical and creative degree," says the 25-year-old Seattle resident. "So I became a freelance filmmaker to pursue my dream and make a living."

Though Kawamura enjoys running her own business, she says it's far from stable. Wedding and event videography is paying the bills, but what she prefers to do is create online advertisements. She's longing for a steady paycheck, co-workers and the opportunity to start saving more. But full-time creative jobs in advertising or marketing seem quite hard to come by, she says.

"Part of the problem is that it seems pretty opaque to get in, and there's not much hiring," Kawamura says.

To get some clarity on breaking into advertising or marketing, Kawamura submitted a form to be considered for a NWjobs career makeover and was selected to receive one-on-one input from three local experts: Lisa Quast of [Career Woman, Inc.](#); Seia Milin, a human resources professional; and [Kathryn Crawford Saxer](#), an executive coach.

Get it right on paper

Quast spotted a few flaws in Kawamura's résumé. "Mary has over seven years of work experience, but her résumé was in the wrong order and also didn't adequately explain her freelance work experience," Quast says.

Placing education as the first section on a résumé is a giveaway to recruiters and hiring managers that you have little work experience, Quast says.

"That wasn't Mary's situation, so it's important that she reorganizes her résumé to better showcase her work experience first, and place the education section after her experience," Quast says.

The section of her résumé where Kawamura described her freelance experience was too short, Quast says. It should be expanded to include specific examples of the work she has done for clients, which include a gaming company and an animal-rights nonprofit.

Milin agrees, adding that Kawamura's description of her work should say what she did, how she did it, the tools she used and the impact she had.

Once Kawamura's résumé is reworked, Milin says she should update her LinkedIn profile, too.

"After that, Mary will need endorsements from former customers and colleagues that present her credibility as a marketing professional," Milin says.

To get those endorsements, Kawamura should ask her key contact from each of her freelance jobs for help, Quast says.

"Contact only those people who know you well and can provide specific examples of your strengths and differentiators," says Quast.

Provide them with two or three skills that you'd like them to discuss, Quast says, and ask them to include how long they've worked with you, background on how they know you, a description of the skills you asked them to discuss and at least one specific success example.

Capitalize on connections

Saxer, whose time with Kawamura focused on her networking efforts, was impressed with Kawamura's extensive professional contacts.

"You've worked with fairly high-level people in your videography work. They like you," Saxer told Kawamura. "They're the ones who are, in all likelihood, going to help you find this next thing."



After running her own business for a few years, Mary Kawamura has decided to seek the stability of full-time employment in her field. (Michelle Archer / NWjobs)



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To help Kawamura keep track of her networking efforts, Saxer shared a strategy she calls "The Wall," in which Kawamura should place the names of 10 of her most-connected contacts on a sticky note on a wall at home. Kawamura should then schedule a coffee with each person, which hopefully yields an additional name or two to talk to next. Those names go on additional sticky notes on The Wall. The goal is for The Wall to grow exponentially, Saxer says.

Saxer also told Kawamura to put the names of 10 organizations where she'd like to work on The Wall, then figure out who she knows there and how she can learn more about the company.

"This is where LinkedIn comes in," Saxer says. "The larger her LinkedIn network, the more likely she will have a connection to someone at a [target] organization."

Since she met with the experts a few months ago, Kawamura has focused on sprucing up her résumé, which she realized was preventing her from getting interviews.

"It used to be pretty lackluster before, and now it's very dynamic and engaging, and I think people look at it differently," Kawamura says. "It's a lot more indicative of my skill set."

She says she learned a lot from the experts. "I got a lot of encouragement, which is vital," she says. "In any job search, especially if you're in a lengthy one, it's easy to get demoralized and not keep going."

Keeping at it has paid off: Kawamura is now working full time as a contractor at a Bellevue gaming company, with a schedule flexible enough that she was also able to accept a new short-film project.

