Job seekers step up to video

By Barbara Correa, Staff Writer
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Last spring, college seniors worried about prospective employers using Web sites like MySpace and Facebook to track down any hidden character flaws - think racy spring-break photos and anatomically inspired nicknames.

But this year, Web sites are letting job seekers of all ages take back control of their cyber personae with the latest tool for the career-minded: the video resume.

Eager job hunters are betting the in-your-face format will give them an edge over shyer competition.

For the self-confident, these personal introductions carry the upside of giving future bosses an immediate look at their zesty personalities. But with many going on for 20 minutes or more, they can infuriate harried prospective bosses; some companies never even view them.

Jonathan Boush, a University of Oregon graduate who just finished a stint in Tunisia studying human resources management, said he and his brother produced his video resume in about 20 minutes. It's a no-nonsense talking head video of him describing his accomplishments.

In March, Boush posted his video resume on a career Web site called Vault, which landed him one interview at public-relations giant Waggener Edstrom. He did not get the job, but he did get some e-mails from people who were interested in the video resume concept.

Now he's holding out for an interview at Google's headquarters in Mountain View, and plans to hand them the video as part of his package.

"I'd like to surprise them," he said.

The idea of incorporating video elements into a r sum isn't entirely new. But the huge improvement in Internet video quality and distribution in recent years, largely through Web sites like YouTube, has spawned startup companies that post resumes and interviews online.

Many of these sites - the upcoming Vidolio.com, a hybrid between MySpace and YouTube, as well as Vault, Jobster, HireVue and My Personal Broadcast - say they only have a few hundred resumes up now, but the trend has just begun.

"Impossible is nothing"

In addition to more sophisticated technology, the video resume concept got an unintended boost by some priceless reverse P.R.

Last year, Yale University student Aleksey Vayner sent his video "Impossible is Nothing" - a montage of his sporting prowess including downhill skiing, karate chopping and ballroom dancing - to investment banking firm UBS, along with an 11-page resume.

Someone at UBS leaked the video to other firms. When the video later appeared on YouTube, Vayner became the laughingstock of Wall Street.

But his fame has focused massive attention on the video resume industry.

Randy Bitting, co-founder of a company called InterviewStream, explains his venture as the opposite of an Aleksey Vayner video. He said his software lets job applicants upload an interview responding to specific questions prepared by the prospective employer - not an embarrassing, homemade production like Vayner's.

"Anyone can upload their video resume on YouTube, but it's not (answering) the questions the employer wants to see."

"This is the next step in the future of recruiting," said Mark Steinke, vice president of staffing for SAP, the world's third-largest software company. "It won't eliminate meetings, but instead of flying in five people for interviews, you'll fly in two."

While he is certain that video resumes are here to stay, he said they need to be done the right way to be effective. "I don't want YouTube clips about how they want to be in HR because they like people."

"That's irrelevant to me."

Instead, he said, the growth of the industry will be in controlled videos in which a job applicant answers specific questions prepared by the employer. That capability, he said, helps recruiters choose candidates more efficiently.

A survey by Vault of more than 300 companies found that 89 percent of them said they would watch video resumes if they received them.

Protection for potential employers

But not all employers are embracing the trend toward digital job hunting, and many say it's nothing more than a photo attached to a resume.

Barbara Rafael, senior recruiter at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, said her department sometimes receives video r sum s, but they don't open them - mostly because she thinks it could expose them to a discrimination lawsuit.

"We don't want to allow for any possibility for discrimination, so we don't look at them," she said.
It’s also time-consuming to open and play a bunch of CD-ROMS.

Concern about discrimination based on someone’s appearance is an issue, said Mark Steinke. But he points out that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission said in 2005 that an electronic job applicant is not necessarily a job candidate. That ruling takes some of the liability off the employer in the event of a claim of discrimination based on a video appearance.

The other hurdle to employers embracing digital resumes is that they are so new that human resources departments aren’t sure what to do with them.

“When I speak to employers, I’m finding that ... they don’t seem to receive it favorably,” said Patricia Gaynor, assistant director of employer services at Cal State Northridge.

The exception is for jobs in graphic arts, interior design, or anything visual, where digital portfolios of work have long been the norm. Artistic video r sum s and portfolios usually don’t even feature the job applicant at all.

A scan of some of the video-r sum Web sites reveals that most of the people posting who say they are from Los Angeles are involved in the arts in some way. Actors, filmmakers, musicians and dancers dominate the entries. Then, of course, there are the consummate self-promoters.

One video clip posted on MySpace by an Angeleno is described as a video r sum to qualify as a contestant on the TV show "Survivor."

Multiple uses

Another video r sum titled "Giggelicious" shows Heidi Selexa, a radio host on Star 94.1 who lives in Hollywood, cavorting on the sidewalk and drinking wine in the bathtub. The video, posted on Jobster, features the command: Hire Me!

Richard Heiman, a choreographer in Los Angeles who has video r sum s up on multiple online channels, said he uses certain sites for certain purposes. YouTube is the best for overall exposure for his dance company, he said. Jobster is good for advertising his dance teaching, and MySpace is the best for networking with other artists.

For the more buttoned-down professions, the structured video interview is being used more than the free-form video r sum . For instance, people who post on HireVue, a two-year-old company based in Salt Lake City, have already sent a traditional r sum to an employer.

After that initial interest is established, HireVue sends candidates a Webcam either to their home or a career center, or the employer’s office, where the job applicant sits and answers specific questions from the employer. There are no dress rehearsals, and the interview is done in one take.

Back to the basics

The advantage to a service like HireVue is that it is working with employers who are already interested in a particular candidate. That gets back to the basics of job hunting.

Posting a video r sum out in cyberspace hoping to attract an employer is a bit like sending out printed r sum s in matching envelopes to 300 companies that don’t know you from Adam, said Paul Fornell, associate director at the California State University, Long Beach, Career Development Center.

“How do you know that they want any of this from you?” he said. “The most effective use of a r sum is some kind of communication. Job fairs will always continue because of the face-to-face meeting. After that, then we can say, ‘Would you be interested in seeing my portfolio?’ or ‘I have a video clip of me doing a presentation in class.’ Then you’re negotiating appropriately.”