

## **Indispensable Information and Distance Career Counseling**

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The degree to which a career counselor has to help clients apply knowledge of their personal characteristics with educational, curricular, and job choice is intensive yet fundamental to the practice of career guidance and counseling. Unlike MH counseling, career counseling requires one to help clients identify what information they need, where to find information, ensure the information is accurate and current, and help the person know how the information can be used to inform decisions (e.g., Herr & Cramer, 1996). In other words, career information either about the self or the world-of-work helps fuel career, education, training, and employment decision making (e.g., Herr & Cramer, 1996). I've come to compare face-to-face career counseling to working with clients who are dually diagnosed with MH and substance abuse because there are dual processes always present. When I think of distance career counseling, I think there are three processes –the distance counseling process, the career counseling process, and incorporating distance career information in the counseling process.

In practice distance career counselor must carefully think about distance career information delivery. One of the biggest challenges is determining how to get reliable career information that is accessible from a distance. Traditionally when meeting with clients face-to-face, there is a collection of books and employer materials (e.g., in college career libraries, on private practice shelves) to inform people about activities like interviewing, applying to graduate school, career options, job outlook & salary information, job hunting skills, etc. Although there is no exact replication of traditional resources, there is some history of computer applications and a newly emerging impact of Web 2.0 technology that I want to review briefly to assist distance career counselors as they deliberate how to incorporate career information into the career counseling process.

Three trends come to mind that I believe need to be contemplated for current practice of a distance career counselor. Within these points I will offer a cursory history.

First, and most obvious, there is a rich tradition of computer-assisted career guidance systems (CAGS). CAGS have been defined as a “computer-based system of inter-related components meant for self-assessment, generation of work & training alternatives, and use of occupational and educational information” (Sampson, Reardon, Wilde, Norris, Peterson, Strausberger, Lenz, & Saunders, 1994). As early as 1966 career development professionals were discussing how computers can be used for career guidance purposes (Harris-Bowlsbey, 1985) with computer assisted career guidance systems, such as ACT’s DISCOVER system being field tested in the 1970’s (Rayman, Bryson, & Harris-Bowlsbey, 1978). Initially career professionals had software on their computers; now most CAGS are available on the web (e.g., [FOCUS](#)). Several systems were designed to be “stand alone” guidance systems; however, there’s been research about efficacy of the systems outside the counseling relationship. Research seems to support effectiveness of some CAGS as standalone (e.g., eDISCOVER from ACT, [Itmar Gati](#) ‘s work from Israel, among others). CAGS are typically improved even more when they are done within counseling for a variety of reasons (e.g., Harris-Bowlsbey & Sampson, 2005). Distance career counselors interested in a comprehensive source on CAGS can learn more at the Florida State University [tech center](#) website. The Center for the Study of Technology in Counseling and Career Development was established in 1986 at Florida State University to assist “practitioners, researchers, software developers, and policy makers in improving the design and use of computer applications in counseling and career development”, which is “institutional, state, national, and international” in focus.

Second, there is a trend toward the storage and delivery of career information on the internet, which are cousins to some CAGS but that are distinctly different. What would traditionally be accessed in a

book is in some instances now available on the internet. This can be in the form of virtual libraries (e.g., [WetFeet](#), [VAULT](#)), which attempt to replicate a library with downloadable books, and also offer videos, blogs, and job listings with a subscription. There are some public sources of career library information such as [CareerOnestop](#). In the 1990's career information available on the internet began being catalogued such as by [The Riley Guide](#), [QuintessentialCareers](#) and [job-hunt](#). Another obvious trend in the 1990's was the development of job board/ career information sites (e.g., [Monster](#)). The National Career Development Association offers guidelines for using the [internetin counseling](#).

Third, there is the current trend of social media that is available with Web 2.0 technologies. I'll digress briefly before getting back on topic. Put simply, Web 2.0 is the movement away from the internet as static to [interactive](#). There is not a lot of research on Web 2.0 technology and career development (e.g., Benson, Filippaios, & Morgan, 2010). Nonetheless there are now technologies that provide another set of tools that are changing the career landscape. For instance, there are new methods for job search, which tends to confuse people. Said another way, the tried and true job search methods still apply, and additionally there are new ways to network (e.g., LinkedIn) and learn about job leads earlier than the competition (e.g., recruiters post jobs on twitter before they will buy job board advertisements). Likewise, there is a the plethora of career advice blogs from many who self- identify as career experts, which has created no shortage of career advice and resources but that comes with its own challenges. Related, there is a lot of personal information on the internet with a large number of [hiring managers](#) (79%estimated in 12/09) who look up prospective employees on line, such as Facebook, creating new discussions on digital footprints between the career counselors and clients. Conversely, people can look at [socialmedia to research](#), for example the person with whom they have an interview.

I'm now back on topic - a few ways that career counselors at a distance might access current career information using Web 2.0. You can use social media information to create static information or as intended (i.e., social and interactive). I'll first offer static information examples. One of the social media I've been using is [twitter](#), as a way for me to share career related information that I find. While Twitter is ever-changing, my tweets are static and focus on topic. With that I also started using [paper.li](#), which uses my career focused twitter feed to create a daily "newspaper" format. I also organize my career-focused internet bookmarks using [Delicious](#) to index resources; this allows me to collect web-resources and then find them easily when clients need the information, though I can also send people to the bookmarks directly. Often there is static information, such as a career [advice blog](#), that is augmented by a "community", such as a place to offer your opinion that allows others to comment. Again, this is relatively static. There are no doubt other ways to make the information accessible for clients not included here.

On the other hand, Web 2.0 allows for an entirely new social realm. There are interactive processes for career exploration and job search. For example, if we consider LinkedIn, you can access [Career Explorer](#) to follow the career path of an individual (in beta phase). Or you can follow a company perhaps to learn about the corporate culture or when employees have left. There are other networks, too many to include here. But more important, there are communities accessible for networking like never before. When people give back and offer help to others, and this is literally at your fingertips on your keyboard, the potential is phenomenal. I've learned that the rules of engaging with others are parallel to face-to-face career networking. So as you do distance career counseling, the networking concepts are the same. It's how you network and find others that are new. It becomes global relatively easily. Again, these are options IMHO, and by no means exhaustive.

PRECAUTIONS when using social media that I'm not covering here, but that warrants mentioning. The nature of social media is to interact, and doing this as an online counselor is full of ethical and practical issues that you have to consider and plan for prior to engaging in its use. A thoughtful source to review exists by Dr. [Keely Kolmes](#).

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