

Creating a Cybercounseling Practice

By Sandra Lim, CPRW, CCM, CECC

I have been involved in cybercounseling activities since 2001 as Canadian Career Advisor for Going Global and CareerPerfect.com, as well as serving as the former Online Résumé Editor for EssayExpress.com. For each, the cybercounseling experience has been in the form of e-mail-based career counseling and résumé/cover letter services.

Aside from my Internet-based roles with Going Global and as a professional résumé writer for CareerPerfect.com, I have run my own business, *A Better Impression*, for four years, in which I meet with clients in person.

This year, I plan to transform my résumé writing and career counseling business to a completely virtual one by conducting client communication and career counseling sessions through real-time, online chats.

I have spent many months educating myself on cybercounseling. As evidenced by the resources available, the U.S. is leading Canada in terms of cybercounseling practice, research and codes of ethics.

My e-mail-based cybercounseling experience has helped prepare me to interact with multicultural, global clients. I have received inquiries from as far away as the Philippines and Brazil, from clients whose first language may not be English. This has required me to research what I will communicate to potential migrant clients to avoid inappropriate encouragement under the Canadian immigration process.

In this article, I will share what I have learned through my research on cybercounseling, my recent completion of the Certified Electronic Career Coach (CECC) program and my personal experience.

Cybercounseling Start-Up and Business Issues

If you already have a web site, or one currently under development, one way to get started is to include a link to a "Cybercounseling Room" (chat room). If you already operate a long-distance business, it would not be difficult to make a transition to performing all your services by chat or Instant Mes-

senger and accepting secure online payments over the Internet.

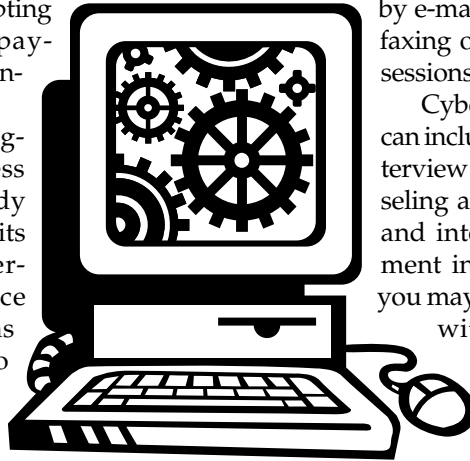
Current long-distance business operators already know the benefits of reduced overhead for office space, as well as the ability to seamlessly conduct business from anywhere, should they decide to relocate. It also allows you to work with clients from all over the world, and thus provides cybercounselors not based in the United States the opportunity to charge fees in U.S. currency (in my case, as a Canadian company, I look forward to reaping exchange rate benefits) and avoid long-distance telephone costs.

Currently, prospective clients contact me by phone or e-mail, and I initially provide an in-person 30-minute consultation. If you provide a consultation as part of your normal practices — either by phone or in person — this process can be translated into a single chat session.

Upon first contact, you can direct prospects to peruse your web site and register with their e-mail address; then select a username and password if they are interested in an online consultation in the Cybercounseling Room.

If they decide that your services suit their needs, you can then set up an appointment date and time to meet in the Cybercounseling Room, where all they will need to do is log in for each private session. The registration process will ensure access only by authorized users and enable you to track contacts for your client database.

The information-gathering process can also take place through chat instead of by phone or through the use of worksheets. Résumé writing and career counseling contracts can either be faxed or e-mailed to clients in Adobe Acrobat for their signature and faxed back before client services will start. The cybercounseling can also be supplemented



by e-mail communication and faxing of documents between sessions.

Cybercounseling activities can include résumé writing, interview coaching, career counseling and the administration and interpretation of assessment instruments. Although you may likely choose to work with online clients privately, one-on-one, there is also the possibility of providing online workshops for groups of clients in the Cybercounseling Room.

In order to personalize your cybercounseling encounters, your photo can be displayed on the Cybercounseling Room web page, or you can add a web cam (especially if your client also has access to a web cam).

You may also encounter clients who are not technologically savvy, so you should have your webmaster (or yourself) introduce these individuals to chat and provide them with a practice session. You'll also need to answer their technical questions and deal with forgotten usernames and passwords.

A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page link in the Cybercounseling Room would also be beneficial. There would also need to be a provision for printing a transcript of the cybercounseling session for your client files.

You will need to work closely with your webmaster to ensure compatibility with users of various browsers (Internet Explorer, Netscape, AOL, etc.), and monitor technical issues. Possible solutions to address the need for confidentiality include digitally encrypting transmissions and password-protecting access to the Cybercounseling Room. Professional liability insurance policies should also be examined for coverage of online counseling.

We all realize that some people will prefer meeting with a live career counselor or coach, rather than a virtual one, so be prepared to refer these individuals to other firms.

continued on page 12

Resources for Conducting a Cybercounseling Practice

continued from page 13

Portfolio of Assessments and Resources

Knowledge management is essential to the cybercounselor. As such, I have developed a folder of Internet links to career counseling resources that I can recommend to clients, including providing them with homework assignments between sessions.

Resources can also be e-mailed or faxed to clients. I also plan to use online assessments that clients can take over the Internet 24 hours a day, seven days a week, from anywhere in the world. Since I will only be using validated assessment instruments, I will factor in the price of online assessments into my fee structure.

With regard to online assessments, one cannot assume credibility and quality just because an instrument is available on the Internet. Care has to be taken to verify that the assessment is standardized, valid, reliable and from a reputable test developer.

There are two types of tests. Level A assessment instruments are available to any purchaser. To purchase and receive B-Level tests and materials, you must hold a degree from an accredited college or university and you must have completed one or more of the following types of courses: test interpretation, psychometrics and measurement theory, or educational statistics. I have investigated the following Level A and Level B instruments with established reliability and validity:

- **Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® and Strong Interest Inventory® (Level B).** Online service is now available through Career/Life Skills Resources at www.skillsone.com, where clients can take the instrument over the Internet at the secure site <http://online.cpp-dp.com> and the client's results will be e-mailed to the career counselor in PDF format.

Cost: *There is a per-use fee to administer instruments, ranging from \$13.60 to \$28, depending on the report generated (a variety of reports are available).*

- **Self-Directed Search® (Level A).** This instrument is based on Holland's RIASEC theory (also referred to as Holland Codes) and is available online at

www.self-directed-search.com. However, a disadvantage is that the client will receive the personalized report, which means that the client will see it before the career counselor.

This carries the risk of the client's self-(mis)interpretation of the results, though I will request the client to print the report and fax it to me (or e-mail it in Adobe Acrobat format) for interpretation.

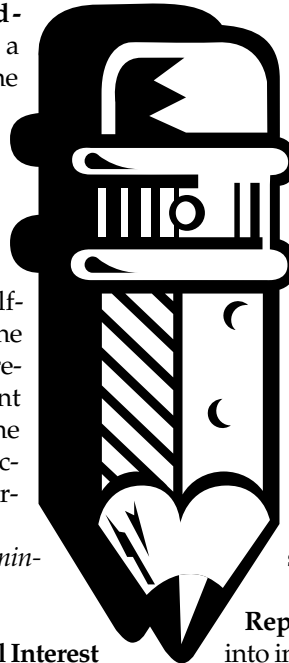
Cost: *\$8.95 per administration.*

- **Jackson Vocational Interest Survey (Level A).** JVIS.com is the online version of the Jackson Vocational Interest Survey (see www.jvis.com/counselor/default.htm).

A JVIS.com account will allow career counselors to remotely administer the JVIS 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by purchasing passwords in bulk. Each password allows one client to take the JVIS. The report is available immediately after completing the survey; it can be accessed by the client or the counselor online. A JVIS.com account allows the pre-purchase of access passwords — which will allow clients to take the JVIS and view their report from their browser at any time — and allows counselors to track the use of the Access Passwords and view the responses and reports of clients.

Cost: *There is no set-up fee, but a minimum purchase of 10 access passwords at \$10 each (\$10 for 10-49 passwords; \$8 for 50-99 passwords; \$7 for 100+ passwords).*

- **DISC® Personal Profile System (Level A).** This instrument, based on the research of William Marston, Ph.D., boasts a validated accuracy of 91 percent. Variations of the instruments and reports are at www.profilingpro.com. These include: Employee-Manager, Sales, Executive, Interviewing Insights (Sales and General), Successful Career Planning, Time P.L.U.S. and Sales Strategy Index.



Cost: *\$30 activation fee for administrators; prices for assessments/reports range from \$16.25 to \$39.25.*

- **The Testing Room (Level A).** This Canadian web site, www.thetestingroom.com, by test publisher Psychometrics Canada Ltd., allows online access to the *Work Personality Index* and the *Work Personality Index Career Transition Report*. These instruments are valid and reliable measures of work performance and task effectiveness, and can describe an individual's style in terms of job-related strengths and weaknesses.

The **WPI Career Transition Report** is designed to provide insight into individuals' personality traits, the kinds of work they enjoy and how they manage career change. They are available for clients to take securely online, and the report generated is e-mailed to the career counselor in Adobe Acrobat.

Online access to the **Career Values Scale** has just been added, and there are plans in place for the addition of various other career interest inventory and aptitude tests.

Cost: *\$99.95 administrator set-up fee (Note: The administrator rate quoted above is in Canadian dollars.)*

Moving Forward

The CECC program provided me with the opportunity to gain experience using chat for interview coaching and online job search coaching, which has armed me with confidence in taking the plunge into cybercounseling.

— Sandra Lim is a Certified Professional Résumé Writer, Credentialed Career Coach and Certified Electronic Career Coach. Visit her web portfolio at www.mylifecalling.com. Sandra provides résumé and career counselling services to help her clients create a better impression.

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