

## Q&A Column

Author: Mark Swartz, MBA, M.Ed.

**Email Subject Line: Using Second Languages To Your Advantage**

[workopolis.com](http://workopolis.com) EN home page

**Headline : How To Leverage Your Second Languages**

**Summary:**

Question: Question: what effect does have to employer , if I put in my resume that I speak besides English, russian, albanian and so on?

Rom, Toronto, Ontario

**Landing Page copy**

**Headline : How To Leverage Your Second Languages**

**Summary:**

Question: Question: what effect does have to employer , if I put in my resume that I speak besides English, russian, albanian and so on?

Rom, Toronto, Ontario

**Dear Rom,**

A hearty “здравствуйте!” (hello) to you. This is a great question and many of the clients I coach wonder the same thing: if you speak or write a language in addition to English, do you boast about this on your resume—or should you leave it off because you’re concerned it might expose you to some sort of discrimination?

I’ll tell you my opinion on this, Rom. If you happen to have French as second language, you should definitely brag about it on your resume, in your cover letter, on your transitional business card and in interviews. That’s because Canada is officially bilingual and French can be a definite asset in your job search.

When it comes to other languages, however, it’s not so clear cut. At best, if the employer you’ve applied to *happens* to need someone with Baltic language skills, even though it wasn’t in their ad, you’re their guy!

On the other hand...

Well, ideally all employers would welcome multilingual applicants and embrace diversity. Except we both know that, when relying solely on a resume in responding to job ads, some employers may screen you out merely on the basis of how well you speak English. For instance, in the e-mail you sent me there are several minor grammar and spelling errors (e.g. “russian” and “albanian” should be capitalized when written in English). No big deal, right? Except this could be used as an excuse to eliminate your application.

One way to improve your odds? Have someone with a good grasp of English review your resume and cover letter with an eye to smoothing out major errors. In the end you still want to sound like you, of course.

Another dynamite approach: ***turn your language skills into your key competitive advantage.***

Here's what one of my clients did recently. During one of our chats she casually used a few Spanish expressions. Turns out she speaks English, Spanish, French and Italian fluently, having been born in Europe. But there wasn't a single mention of this on her resume. She was actually worried people might view her as "foreign," though she'd been a Canadian citizen for 30 years.

The strategy she chose was two-pronged:

1) Continue applying to advertised jobs with her standard resume, this time mentioning her English/French bilingualism.

2) Deliberately targeting employers who were looking for people with second languages! In her case, she went after companies doing trade with either Mexico, Spain, Italy, France, Switzerland or the U.S. She began by searching the Industry Canada website, [strategis.gc.ca](http://strategis.gc.ca), using the Canadian Importers database, as well as the Detailed Search portion of Canadian Companies Capabilities. Both of these list Canadian firms doing trade with foreign countries. She also networked with local business groups with links to these specific countries, by visiting a reference library and flipping through The Directory of Associations in Canada.

The lesson here, Rom, is to exploit the differences you offer as a job seeker when they can give you an advantage, and play them down if they don't. So with that I wish you "наиболее наилучшим образом везения" (best of luck).

\*Translations courtesy of <http://babelfish.altavista.com>.

---



*Mark Swartz, MBA, M.Ed., is a [speaker](#), [career coach](#) and [author](#). He can be reached via his website, [www.careeractivist.com](http://www.careeractivist.com). The above article may contain material not included in the edited version.*

© Mark Swartz, 2003, 2007. All Rights Reserved. No part of this article may be reproduced, republished or redistributed without the prior written consent of the copyright holder. See [Reprint Policy](#) on [www.careeractivist.com](http://www.careeractivist.com) for details. Not-For-Profits exempted and may use the article in part or in full without contacting me - but please do, and kindly credit me as shown in the [Reprint Policy](#).