

Employee Skill Codes and Skill Codes Search

The Employee Skill Codes and the accompanying search are now available in all versions of the Scheduling Manager.

You can store the Skills for each employee by clicking on the Credentials/Training button on the Employee Information Screen.

When adding a job, you can click on the Find Available Employees button to search for employees that are available and who have a particular set of skills:

NEW Open Transactions Statement

Open Transactions

Statement Date: March 29, 2009

Bill To
 Jenny Rutherford
 Apex Mountain Homes
 1023 Coney Island Ave
 Brooklyn, NY 11230

Date	Type	Number	Original Am	Amt Paid	Amt Due
10/17/2006	Invoice	18236	\$1,031.94	\$353.88	\$678.06
10/18/2006	Invoice	18239	\$1,031.94	\$0.00	\$1,031.94
11/01/2006	Invoice	18238	\$1,031.94	\$0.00	\$1,031.94
12/01/2006	Invoice	18241	\$1,031.94	\$0.00	\$1,031.94
01/01/2007	Invoice	18244	\$1,031.94	\$0.00	\$1,031.94
02/01/2007	Invoice	18288	\$1,031.94	\$0.00	\$1,031.94
04/08/2007	Invoice	18347	\$1,031.94	\$0.00	\$1,031.94
05/23/2007	Invoice	18441	\$56.00	\$0.00	\$56.00
08/13/2007	Invoice	18474	\$943.00	\$0.00	\$943.00
01/14/2008	Invoice	18538	\$222.84	\$0.00	\$222.84
02/21/2008	Invoice	18548	\$201.84	\$0.00	\$201.84
04/01/2008	Invoice	18559	\$1,031.94	\$0.00	\$1,031.94
04/17/2008	Invoice	18620	\$1,031.94	\$0.00	\$1,031.94
10/17/2008	Invoice	18707	\$186.84	\$0.00	\$186.84
11/03/2008	Invoice	18712	\$32.59	\$0.00	\$32.59
11/06/2008	Invoice	18715	\$24.99	\$0.00	\$24.99
02/12/2009	Invoice	18740	\$2.50	\$0.00	\$2.50
Total:					\$10,604.16

This new statement lists all unpaid invoices and all unapplied payments for a particular customer. This statement is good if you want to send your customer a basic list of all their outstanding invoices. The traditional statements would list all activity on a customer's account, regardless of whether the invoices were unpaid.

To download this new statement, visit our web site and log in to the Customer Center, download the latest Update and then go to Reports and download the Open Transactions Statement.

Do I Really Need a Web Site?

Recently, I was asked a strange question from a person who was thinking of buying our software:

“Do I need a website?”, she asked. A surprising question, indeed, in this era of internet communications. No one under the age of 40 these days will ever use anything else besides the internet to find goods and services, when looking to purchase something. In informal interviews I’ve conducted, I find that most young people have never used the Yellow Pages at all! There was a time, before the 1990s, when your Yellow Pages ad was critically important to the success of your business.

For a business such as a maid service, pest control business, window or carpet cleaning business, etc., it was the Yellow Pages and possibly local advertising in the Pennysaver which constituted the main part of your advertising strategy.

These days, most people will begin their search for a service by searching on the internet. A website is therefore a must!

Of course, one can use other advertising means, such as door hangers, leaflets, etc. to encourage new clients. I won’t explore those media here in this space. I will concentrate here on focusing on a few important points to consider about your web site.

1) Looks do count! Your web site reflects your business, and your image. It’s your online storefront. You wouldn’t have a messy or ugly looking store front, especially seeing that you’re in a service business, where it’s important to make a good impression on customers and prospective customers. Of course, you need to provide an excellent service, and have good, emotionally intelligent people dealing with prospects. But no one will even know about what it’s like to work with your business if they are not encouraged first to walk through the door.

I am still amazed by the unattractive, badly designed sites I encounter from time to time. And, no one is going to tell you. Your friends and clients probably won’t want to risk offending you. Your competition certainly isn’t going to tell you! So, make sure you get some sort of independent evaluation of the look and feel of your site by an independent, objective person, or persons. If you want to see some examples of really badly designed sites, go to a site called “Web Pages That Suck”, at: <http://www.webpagesthatsuck.com/worst-web-sites-of-2008.html>. You’ll be amazed at some of the things that people do in designing bad sites.

Some tips from Nikkie, in our Web Design division:

a) Use flash sparingly. A user is looking to find a good cleaning service, for example. She is not out to be entertained, and doesn’t want to wait while some fancy flash movie plays when she comes to your site, before she can start exploring, to find out what you offer, prices, booking policies, etc.

Search Engine Optimization Tip of the Month

Check the title of the home page of your web site. Make sure this says something about the service you are offering. Search engines (especially Google) take the title as an important indication of the site’s content. Choose something like “Abe’s Pest Control Service for New York” for the title. This reflects the service you offer as well as the geographical area where you offer it. This will help the site rate well in the organic (free) listings in Google.

b) Don’t use old-style flashing bits of text, or images (like old Neon signs in Times Square). I, and most users I’ve spoken to, find it very annoying, distracting and off-putting to be trying to read a page when there is a red flashing banner, flashing on and off every second, advertising some special thing or other. This kind of thing was popular in the very early days of web page design, but now is used only by amateurs and very hype-y sites!

c) Beware of Times Roman. The default font on most programs, including web page design programs, is Times Roman. A site that uses all Times Roman tends to look amateurish. There are articles and studies showing that non-serif fonts such as Arial or Helvetica present a more business-like, professional feel.

For example:

It was designed for the context of newspaper columns, squeezing much Roman text into a narrow space. It’s not butt-ugly, but it’s become an exceptionally dull non-statement. Admittedly I’ve become sensitive to dull or overused design. But even newspapers no longer use Times - nor is it the most legible for the screen - so why allow it as default for material you create?

(<http://biznik.com/articles/beyond-times-new-roman-please-text-talk-from-a-graphic-designer>)

d) Don’t try to cram too much into your page. This will make it unattractive, ugly even! And it may be too formidable for anyone to read at all. Perhaps I’ll just move along to the next web site which will hopefully seem less forbidding. (See an example at: <http://www.havenworks.com/>)

e) If you use talking people, give me the chance to shut them up, if I don't like being talked at. Some people might like these talking figures, which start talking as soon as you reach the page. Others hate them! So, if you're going to use them, give the user the opportunity to turn them off. Also, ensure that the talking head doesn't start talking again each time you return to the home page!

Free Web Site Audit and Evaluation

If you want a free evaluation of your web site, contact Nikkie and she'll arrange a free evaluation. We'll give you a report, giving opinions on the site's look and feel, as well as hints and suggestions as to how the site can be made more search-engine friendly.

Your web site is your most important marketing tool these days, so make sure it's attracting new customers, and not turning them off.

Also, with our Search Engine Optimization techniques, you can make your site attract more new leads without having to commit to spending vast sums of money month to month on PPC (pay per click) campaigns.

f) Don't use frames! Frames were popular for web sites, at some time back in the past. Sometimes, it makes the site look smoother and more consistent as the user navigates through the site. However, such sites will not do very well in the organic (free) listings in major search engines, such as Google, Yahoo and MSN. It's important that people be able to find your site, so you should do all you can to ensure that your site rates well, and is *search engine friendly*.

g) Avoid loud, garish colors. (See <http://www.fabricland.co.uk/> for an example).

h) Choose your hosting service carefully. Some hosting companies tend to overcharge. Some will try to hold you to their service through less-than-honest means. There is a site in South Africa which offers to register your URL for you, as part of the hosting service, but then registers your chosen URL under their name.

When you try to change to another hosting service, you are shocked to find that you don't own your URL – and the hosting company isn't going to release it to you. You might eventually get it back, but it will put you through a lot of trouble! There are good, inexpensive hosting services such as Godaddy which offer a very good service at low cost. (Note: We are not resellers or agents for Godaddy!)

i) Provide feedback mechanisms on your site. We learn through negative feedback. It enables us to understand where we are going wrong, and cause us to think about how we can do better. The more you can hear from people who are dissatisfied, the more likely you'll be to learn from any well-intentioned feedback that's available from people who visit your site.

j) Don't use visible "Visit counters". These were also a feature of many web sites in the early years of the web. Nowadays, I think it looks very amateurish to include a visit counter on your page. There are other ways to obtain the statistics on visitors to your site. Often times your hosting company will offer a free service. Ask them!

k) Make sure you do a spell check and grammar check of your page before releasing it. Some people may overlook bad spelling, but I have encountered some who take such things very seriously – as a reflection of your attention to detail – and may very well decide not to do business with a company that has a site which they consider sloppy because it has spelling or grammatical errors. If you're not sure, ask a friend, or hire a professional to check the site.

l) Be careful of sites developed for free by relatives, friends, etc. I have been told several times by small business owners (often proudly) that their son, or their friend's daughter, or a friend of a friend designed their site. Who am I to burst their bubble by telling them that the site looks like it was designed by an amateur? Even your best friend (or your best friend's daughter!) won't tell you!

m) Whatever site you develop, have a few people review it and give you their honest opinions on the site. If you don't ask, you won't know!