

Portfolio Case Study



The work behind the value

Early-Career Candidates Build Career Strategy, Confidence, and Visibility

The Client or Team

The client was an early-career professional who had recently completed their education and was trying to break into their chosen field.

They were motivated, capable, and ready to work, but they were feeling discouraged by the job search. Like many early-career candidates, they had done the “right things” — completed their education, built experience through school projects and part-time work, applied to roles online, and tried to present themselves professionally — but they were not getting the response they expected.

On paper, they had more to offer than they realized. They had transferable skills, customer-facing experience, examples of teamwork, academic projects, exposure to technology, problem-solving ability, and strong potential. What they did not yet have was a clear way to package and communicate that value to employers.

The work focused on helping them clarify their direction, strengthen their resume and LinkedIn presence, build confidence in their career story, and shift from passive applications to a more intentional job-search strategy.

The Problem

The candidate was experiencing what many early-career professionals face after completing school: they were ready to work, but the job market was not responding in a way that matched their effort or potential.

They had education, school projects, part-time work experience, customer-facing experience, teamwork, initiative, and transferable skills. But from their perspective, it still felt like they “didn’t have enough experience.”

That belief was affecting how they showed up in the job search.

Their resume was focused more on responsibilities than value. Their LinkedIn profile was present, but not positioned. Their applications were going out, but not always targeted. In networking and interview conversations, they struggled to explain how their background connected to the roles they wanted.

The real problem was not a lack of ability. It was a lack of translation.

They needed help connecting the dots between:

- what they had learned in school
- what they had done in projects, part-time work, and volunteer experiences
- what employers were asking for
- what skills they could already demonstrate
- how to speak about their value with confidence

Like many early-career candidates, they relied heavily on online applications and hoped their education would be enough to open the door. But employers needed more than a list of courses, tasks, or credentials. They needed to see evidence of communication, problem-solving, adaptability, initiative, follow-through, and readiness to learn.

The candidate needed a clearer career story.

They needed to move from:

“I am new, and I hope someone gives me a chance.”

to:

“I understand what this role needs, and here is how my education, experience, and strengths prepare me to contribute.”

At its core, this was a **career clarity, confidence, and positioning challenge**: helping an early-career candidate recognize the value they already had, translate it into employer language, and show up more intentionally in their resume, LinkedIn profile, networking conversations, and interviews.

As a University Student, navigating the job market can be both stressful and difficult.

My Approach

I approached this as a **career strategy and personal branding engagement**, grounded in my Certified Career Strategist lens.

The first step was to slow the process down and help the candidate move from job-search activity to job-search strategy. They were applying, but they needed more clarity on where they were going, what employers valued, and how to position their experience in a way that felt both confident and honest.

I used a structured career strategy approach to help them clarify:

- **Target roles** — what positions made sense based on their education, interests, strengths, and early experience
- **Employer needs** — what skills, behaviours, and attributes were showing up consistently in job postings
- **Transferable strengths** — what they had already demonstrated through school, projects, part-time work, volunteer experience, teamwork, and customer-facing roles
- **Proof points** — specific examples that showed how they communicate, solve problems, learn, adapt, follow through, and contribute
- **Personal brand language** — how to explain who they are, what they offer, and where they are heading

A key part of the approach was helping the candidate see their experience differently. Early-career candidates often discount the work they have done because it does not feel “professional enough.” My role was to help them identify the value in those experiences and translate them into language employers would understand.

The strategy focused on connecting three things:

What the candidate had done

What employers were asking for

How the candidate could clearly communicate their value

From there, we aligned their resume, LinkedIn profile, networking language, and interview stories so they all told the same career story. The goal was to move away from generic applications and toward a more focused, confident, and employer-relevant job search.

The human lens was central to the work. This was not just about better career documents. It was about helping the candidate build confidence, recognize their own value, and show up in the job market with more clarity and intention.

Actions and Challenges or Constraints

To support the candidate, I focused on helping them move from “I have experience, but I do not know how to explain it” to a clear, confident, employer-ready career story.

The work was practical and step-by-step. We did not start by writing the resume. We started by understanding the target, the employer's needs, and the value the candidate could already demonstrate.

Key Actions

1. Clarified the target role and direction

We reviewed the types of roles the candidate was applying to and looked for patterns in the job postings. This included role titles, required skills, preferred experience, common keywords, education requirements, and the types of employers that were hiring.

The purpose was to narrow the search from “anything I might qualify for” to a more focused set of roles where their education, strengths, and early experience could be positioned clearly.

2. Built an employer-needs map

I helped the candidate identify what employers were really asking for beyond the job title. We looked at recurring themes such as communication, organization, client service, problem-solving, teamwork, adaptability, comfort with technology, attention to detail, and the ability to learn quickly.

This became the lens through which they positioned their experience. Instead of asking, “What have I done?” we asked, “What does this employer need to trust that I can do?”

3. Completed a transferable skills inventory

We mapped the candidate’s school experience, projects, part-time work, volunteer activities, customer-facing experience, teamwork, and personal initiatives against the employer-needs map.

This helped the candidate realize they had more relevant experience than they had realized. Their experience just needed to be named properly and connected to workplace value.

4. Pulled out proof points and examples

For each key skill, we identified specific examples that could be used in resumes, LinkedIn profiles, networking conversations, and interviews.

For example, we looked for moments where they had:

- solved a problem
- supported a customer or team member
- organized work or managed competing priorities
- learned a new tool or process
- handled feedback or pressure
- contributed to a group project
- showed initiative
- followed through on a commitment

This gave the candidate stronger evidence to support their claims.

5. Reframed resume language

We moved the resume from a list of tasks to clearer contribution-based language.

Instead of simply describing responsibilities, we rewrote bullets to show the skill used, the action taken, and the value created. The goal was to help employers quickly see how the candidate’s education and early work experience connected to the role.

6. Strengthened the LinkedIn profile

We aligned the LinkedIn headline, About section, experience descriptions, skills, and profile language to the target roles.

The goal was to make LinkedIn more than an online resume. It became a visibility tool that helped the candidate show direction, professionalism, and confidence.

7. Created personal brand language

We developed simple language that the candidate could use to introduce themselves. This included a short career summary, a networking introduction, and a few phrases to explain their strengths without sounding scripted.

The goal was to help them answer, “Tell me about yourself,” with more confidence and less hesitation.

8. Built networking and outreach messages

We created practical outreach messages for LinkedIn and email. These were written in a tone that felt natural for an early-career candidate and focused on curiosity, learning, and connection rather than asking directly for a job.

This helped the candidate move beyond only applying online and start building visibility with people in their target field.

9. Prepared interview stories

We selected several examples from school, work, projects, and customer-facing experiences and shaped them into interview stories.

The focus was on helping the candidate explain:

- the situation
- what they were responsible for
- what action did they take
- what they learned or contributed
- how the example connects to the role

This helped move their answers from generic to specific.

10. Practised speaking the story out loud

We practised introductions, interview responses, and networking language so the candidate could hear themselves say the words.

This was important because confidence often comes through practice. The more clearly they spoke about their experience, the more believable it became to them.

Challenges and Constraints

The biggest challenge was confidence. The candidate was underselling themselves because they did not recognize the value in experiences that felt ordinary to them.

Another challenge was helping them move from broad activity to focused strategy. They were applying, but the message was not targeted enough. We needed to make the search more intentional,

the documents more aligned, and the conversations more confident.

There was also a language challenge. The candidate needed career language that sounded professional but still felt like them. The goal was not to overstate their experience. The goal was to help them explain it clearly, honestly, and in a way employers could understand.

In practical terms, the work helped the candidate build the core pieces of an early-career job-search strategy: a clearer target, stronger positioning, better tools, more confident language, and specific examples that demonstrated their value.

If you're trying to figure out what you'd like to do for work or if you're looking to make a change in your career path, I highly recommend you connect with Carrie

Outcomes

The candidate moved from a broad, uncertain job search to a focused career strategy with clearer direction, stronger positioning, and more confidence in communicating their value.

The most important outcome was the shift in how they saw themselves. They no longer viewed their background as “not enough.” They could see how their education, projects, part-time work, customer-facing experience, teamwork, and initiative created a meaningful foundation for the roles they were pursuing.

The work helped them translate early experience into employer language and use that language consistently across their resume, LinkedIn profile, networking conversations, and interviews.

Key outcomes included:

- **Secured a role within their target industry and function within 3 months** of implementing the new career strategy.
- **Moved from passive job searching to a more active strategy**, including targeted applications, LinkedIn visibility, networking outreach, and role-specific interview preparation.
- **Clarified target roles and employer fit**, helping the candidate focus their energy on opportunities that aligned with their education, strengths, interests, and transferable skills.
- **Improved resume positioning** by shifting from task-based descriptions to contribution-focused language that connected their experience to employer needs.
- **Strengthened LinkedIn presence** with clearer headline language, a more confident About section, aligned experience descriptions, and stronger keyword positioning for their target roles.
- **Built a transferable skills inventory** that helped the candidate identify and speak to communication, organization, customer service, collaboration, adaptability, problem-solving, technology use, initiative, and follow-through.
- **Created stronger proof points and interview stories** so the candidate could explain how they think, work with others, solve problems, learn quickly, and contribute in a role.
- **Increased confidence in networking and interviews** by practising introductions, outreach messages, and responses to common interview questions.

- **Reduced hesitation when speaking about their value**, because the candidate had language that felt honest, natural, and connected to real examples.
- **Improved job search consistency** by aligning their resume, LinkedIn profile, networking messages, and interview examples around the same career story.

Business/career value

For the candidate, the value was not only landing a role. It was learning how to approach their career with more clarity and ownership.

They gained a repeatable career strategy they could use beyond the first job search:

- how to analyze job postings
- how to identify employer needs
- how to connect experience to skills
- how to build proof points
- how to speak about value
- how to use LinkedIn with purpose
- how to prepare for interviews with specific examples

This gave them a stronger foundation for future career moves, not just one successful application.

At the human level, this work helped the candidate move from self-doubt to self-recognition. They began to understand that early-career experience still has value when it is named clearly and connected to what employers need.

In practical terms, this work helped an early-career candidate turn scattered experience into a clear career story, build confidence in their value, and secure a role in their target industry and function within 3 months.