

THE ART OF RESUME WRITING

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In today's job market, advertisements for positions vacant, more often than not, request interested parties to register their interest by submitting a resume. So what exactly is a resume? Should we be sending the prospective employer a detailed and lengthy document that provides data right back to the very first job held, combined with an extensive list of responsibilities for each role? And what about hobbies, interests and other personal details such as date of birth, marital status and number of dependants? These are just a few of the extensive questions constantly asked by applicants faced with the task of having to put together their resume. Another misconception is that a resume will secure you the position, however this is far from the truth, as the main purpose of a resume is to secure you an interview.

To assist you in the development of a professional resume that portrays your expertise in such a way that demands an interview, I have prepared a list of tips to facilitate your writing process.

Consider yourself in the advertising game and imagine that you are marketing a product (or service) to a prospective buyer, with the product being "yourself" and the prospective buyer, the "employer". We know that there is currently a 'need' (because of the advertised position), so your resume will be the marketing document that strategically informs and promotes your expertise to their requirements. You are demonstrating how you can not only fit into the role, but also make a significant contribution which can be portrayed with a succinctly written job scope, quantified with a list of accomplishments and positive contributions made during your employment. The aim is to create a desire by showcasing your expertise and, through building an interest in the benefits and value you bring to their organization, that motivates them to take action (i.e. the interview.)

When developing your career-marketing document, the phrase "sell it...don't tell it" is imperative, particularly if you want your resume to stand out from the other 100 or so candidates applying for the position. Strategic advertising concepts can also be followed within resume writing, and if utilized correctly can catapult your candidacy to the top of the pile.

So just how do we go about developing a document that demands an interview? Following is a list of how to go about identifying relevant content; how to develop high-impact wording in order to portray your abilities as best as possible by identifying dynamic "action-words"; and various sections to include to develop the best format and structure for your resume.

I have taken the word R E S U M E, and associated each letter with a strategic process, which can be utilized to craft a professional and compelling career-marketing document.

Research
Expand
Script
Underpin
Materialize and Methodize
Edit

RESEARCH

Begin by collating all relevant information regarding career and educational history. This includes:

Employment history:

Company name, industry, size of company (i.e.; national/international world-class manufacturing company), dates employed, reason for being hired (i.e. recruited to spearhead development of hydraulic manufacturing division).

Job accountabilities/responsibilities, supervisory capacity (how many people)

Professional Development & Education:

Courses and certifications completed will demonstrate keeping up with the latest trends in your industry.

Memberships & Associations:

Professional association memberships that relate to your current career target (i.e. Accountants would include Chartered Practising Accountants Membership).

IT & Computer experience:

Hardware and software utilized throughout your career or personal use – particularly if the software packages are relevant to your position, i.e. MYOB for accounting.

Awards:

In recognition of achievements that are directly transferable or relevant to your current career goals.

Written References:

From employers or supervisors that may include information regarding a particular achievement or initiative you implemented.

EXPAND

Once you have completed the initial collation of employment details and other transferable data, it's time to expand on the relevant data by digging deeper in order to identify information that will truly separate you from the rest of the applicants. Utilize the process below in order to identify any significant contributions or accomplishments throughout your career.

- C = Challenge – identify the challenges that you faced
- A = Action – identify the steps which you undertook to alleviate the challenge; or solution you implemented to improve/turnaround the challenge, and
- R = Result – the (preferably quantifiable) result

For instance:

Challenge: Staff turnover high, performance levels extremely poor, with overall costs to recruit and train new staff high.

Action: Developed staff monitoring and incentive programs; implemented staff training programs.

Result: Increased staff knowledge base; decreased staff turnover by 66.7%; increased staff morale and collaboration; increased productivity levels by 77%.

This is a great achievement, and written in the right way, can definitely make a powerful impact. (See scripting section).

SCRIPTING

With all your relevant transferable data and corresponding accomplishments, it's time to translate the information to the written word, in such a way that captures and maintains the reader's interest right through to the last sentence.

This is not the time to rewrite your entire position description, but to identify the key accountabilities relevant to your career goal. Also remember to incorporate industry-related key words, as well as attention grabbing, action words. For instance:

Orchestrated, devised, instructed, spearheaded, maximized, led, directed, streamlined, oversaw, managed, motivated, controlled, delegated, consolidated, generated, implemented, proposed, specified ... and the list goes on.

I would recommend that your paragraph of accountabilities outlining your job scope (specific to your career target) be no more than 12 lines. If this is not possible due to the extensive nature of your role,

I would then separate into two paragraphs with relevant tasks appropriately grouped. Again, remember to keep your writing succinct; no long boring sentences that will cause the reader to lose interest.

UNDERPINNING

It is vital to underpin your job scope with a bulleted section of key accomplishments and quantifiable results. These value-added achievements provides the prospective employer with the results your initiatives and expertise have secured as well as presenting the reader with potential cost-savings, increased revenues and market growth that you can contribute to their organization. Remember, you are marketing your competencies while proving to the reader that you can add value to their bottom line.

In order to provide an example of how to create and word such an achievement, I will utilize the above previous example. To recap:

Challenge: Staff turnover high, performance levels extremely poor, with overall costs to recruit and train new staff high.

Action: Developed staff monitoring and incentive programs; implemented staff training programs.

Result: Increased staff knowledge base; decreased staff turnover by 66.7%; increased staff morale and collaboration; increased productivity levels by 77%.

Bulleted achievement:

- Enhanced staff morale; optimized productivity levels by 77%; and reduced staff turnover by 66.7% through implementation of strategic monitoring and incentive programs.

Notice how we deliberately detailed the results first and then how this accomplishment was captured.

MATERIALIZER & METHODIZE

Begin by formatting all of your details into a carefully structured, concise and aesthetically pleasing document. Keep headings and other formatting (i.e. italics) consistent throughout the document. Do not bold one job title and then italicise the rest – bold them all.

Your name and contact details should be at the beginning of the document – don't make contacting you difficult by placing your phone number in an inconspicuous place. Do not include information such as date of birth, marital status or number of dependents. This information is not only irrelevant but in some countries, illegal for an employer to request this data as it could be considered discriminatory.

Next, goes the qualifications profile (also known as the career profile or professional profile), which is a strongly written paragraph that summarizes your expertise in one concise paragraph. This is your hook, with the rest of your marketing document qualifying your opening statement, that you are the best candidate for the role. Many people begin their resumes with a career objective, however this is often a weak statement and seems to focus more on your own needs than that of an employer. Summarizing your competencies into a strong opening statement will seize the reader's attention and encourage them to read on.

For added attention you may wish to follow your opening statement with a bulleted list of core competences, again marketing your expertise.

Employment history should then be addressed with your most recent position detailed first and working backwards, only representing the last 10 to 15 years if these roles are the most relevant to your job target. The information should be a strongly worded, succinct paragraph of relevant accountabilities, followed by a bulleted section of actual accomplishments.

Next, your education and additional professional development, followed by relevant professional associations.

(Note: When methodizing and deciding on the best format to use, this will be dependent on what stage you are within your career. The above formatting would obviously not be the best for someone who is returning to the workforce.)

Edit

Edit, edit and edit again. And just to be safe, get a friend or relative to read through the document to ensure your career-marketing document is free of typos or grammatical errors.

Your career–marketing document is your initial handshake and should not be thrown together without researching your information; expanding and identifying key accomplishments and unique value that you offer the prospective employer; scripting your information into powerfully written statements; underpinning your expertise with quantifiable accomplishments; materializing onto paper and methodizing into a format that is aesthetically pleasing; and finally editing, to ensure your document is error free.

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