

Is my resume OK?

Often people ask me a seemingly simply question. “Can you look over my resume and tell me what you think?”. I can, I do, and very often my response is the same. “You look like a person with a lot of skills, valuable experience and a lot to offer a potential employer”. But so what. The question is not the right one to ask.

The question that really needs to be answered is not how a resume looks or if it contains enough or too little information, the question that should be asked is:

“Does this resume adequately reflect the skills and experience for a particular job and does it give the person reading the resume the information they need to see in a format that makes it easy for them to call me for an interview and what do I have in it that may get me eliminated in the resume screening process?”

That is the correct question to ask but to answer it there is a lot more information that is required, such as:

What is the job?

Who is the company?

Was it advertised and if so where?

Who is reading the resume?

Are you sending it to a specific person or the “Human Resource Manager”?

Do you know someone in the company?

Is it going to a recruiter?

Is it a small, medium or large company?

Do they use scanning software?

What does the company value in it’s employees?

What skills do they need to see in a potential employee?

Are you sending it to human resources or to a department head?

These are some of the questions than need to be thought about before pen gets put to paper (or finger to keyboard). Let me illustrate my point, with a few examples, taking a look at only a few aspects of the potential problem.

Example One.

You are responding to an ad in a newspaper from a large metropolitan city that distributes to thousands of households and also posts job ads on the internet. Odds are that one ad will draw 300, 400 maybe even 500 responses which means, your resume is competing against 500 others. Do yourself a favour and complete this little exercise. Read a resume you sent out recently along with a cover letter and time how long it takes to read the whole thing. If it is a two page resume and a one page cover letter it will take about 3 minutes. Now put yourself in the position of the person screening the resumes. Take 3 minutes and multiply by 500 resumes and divided by 60 minutes. That will give you the number of hours it would take for a single person to read every word they were sent. 25 Hours.

This brings us to an important truth: **Not every word you send gets read** so choose your words carefully. Generally speaking, in this case, shorter is better. Two pages maximum, one page may even be better if you can get the right information onto it highlighting what the screener is expecting to see (the right skills, qualifications, experience). I will guarantee you sending a 3 or 4 page chronological resume will get you eliminated every time.

Example Two:

Lets take the situation above but this time, you happen to know one of the Product Mangers with the company and they are buddy buddy with the HR Manager. Now you can (almost) guarantee that your resume will get a little more time that the 15 or 20 seconds that the other 499 are going to get. So you have a little more to work with. A good cover letter addressed to the right individual with a two page functional resume is probably reasonable.

Example Three:

Same situation as the first two but this time it is an placement agency is doing the first round of screening. Although the same problem exists as in the first example (500 other people competing for the job), the solution from the first example (a short one page resume highlighting what they HR Manger needs to see) probably is not your best bet. "Why?" you rightly ask. Think about the agencies role. They need to turn over to the company 5 or 10 resumes for them to review. If the agency turns over 10 two page resumes and your one page resume, the company is very likely to eliminate you because they don't have enough information about you. In this example the HR Manager will take some time with only 10 resumes to read and probably wants a little more detail about you. They may not want all that detail when there are 500 other resumes they need to screen.

All three examples only deal with one of the questions from above; who is reading your resume. The answers only begin to touch on the content which is another issue all together without even beginning to take into account all the other questions.

All of this leads to one conclusion. You must think through each situation that you are sending a resume to from the position of the people who are reading it. Most people when they begin to write resumes start with themselves when really they should start with the person who is going to read the resume.

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