



Powerful Resumes Are as Easy as A-B-C

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Looking for a job, even when it's an employee's market, can be intimidating. In a tough economic period, when there are hundreds of applicants for each position, it also can be frustrating, exhausting, and demoralizing.

Whether you already are in the market – or are thinking of preparing your resume "just in case" – here is an alphabet of 26 tips designed to make you more competitive by focusing on your most powerful asset – you. And some of the diverse things that make you different, just might be counted among your strengths.

Achievement-based – Your resume should showcase your accomplishments and achievements, not simply recount your duties at a previous job, says job-search guru Richard Bolles, author of "What Color Is Your Parachute?" In each case, state the problem you faced, what means you used to overcome it, and how your results contributed to the bottom line.

Benefits – Research each company before you send your resume off (Note: this eliminates spam resumes on the Internet) and determine how you will be of benefit to the company to which you are applying – and then communicate that. Note whether your prospective employer has a diversity department and what professional affiliations, experiences and connections you have that would benefit the company.

It is important to view your ethnicity, gender, age and diverse background as a benefit to your prospective employer and communicate that, says Trent Perry, Atlanta-based regional president for Bernard Haldane Outplacement. "Minority candidates need to promote that value to the business community in terms of benefits. For example, there are many companies, vendors and contractors with government contracts. It is of benefit for them to have a widely diverse employee base," says Perry.

Customize - Each resume and cover letter – HR directors and CEOs are being swamped with hundreds of resumes for each position advertised. Tom Jackson, author of "The Perfect Resume," says the quickest way to grab your target's understandably limited attention is to "Say something personal. Write something that is uniquely associated with the person, department or organization that will show the reader you invested the time to investigate them."

Dates - On or off? This is a matter of huge debate and depending upon the industry, the area of the country, and your level of experience, only you can be the judge, says Carmen Rice, founder of Arizona Resume Experts. The most important aspect is to be accountable for consistent time periods. No one notices actual dates if you grab them with your skills, says Rice.

Exaggeration – Don't! It may seem like a small thing to fudge some experience, educational background, or reference but the small lie could come back to bite you on your assets and bring down your whole profile. Remember that "microcosm begets macrocosm" says Bolles. That is, employers will judge your overall character by the small slice they see. In short – no lies, no exaggerations.

Focus – Know the difference between a resume (a summary of your accomplishments) and a curriculum vitae or cv (which lists all publications, classes taken and taught, articles written) – and focus on which is needed. Focus on the target job and make the resume fit the need.

Goals & Objectives – Eliminate these as the first thing on your resume, says Rice. "The new thinking is that the first thing on your resume should be what you can offer the employer, not what you want from them. Why put a demand at the top of your resume? Always start with a summary of your experience; it's much more powerful."

Hobbies – Sure, it looks cute to say that you've collected clown banks since you were 9 years old, but unless your hobby adds to your qualifications for the job, leave it off.

Include – That summary of your qualifications at the top of your resume, highlighting three to five of your greatest strengths. For diverse candidates, this could also encompass any particular hurdles you have identified and surmounted. "Most workers are insensitive to their own uniqueness and value," says Peter Paskill, founding partner of Career Makers, a Portland, Ore.-based outplacement firm. "Many are more biased against themselves than any potential employer. None of us is perfect. And most of us have some sort of handicap to overcome. The trick is to play up our strengths. That's what counts in the job market."

Job Description – Read it carefully before applying. One of the biggest wastes of time is sending off a resume tailored to a job for which you do not have the qualifications and experience. While job descriptions are "wish lists" and there is often some leeway, companies in this tight market are being very picky, says Valerie Frederickson, president of the Menlo Park, California-based Frederickson and Company, an executive search firm which serves Silicon Valley.

Key Words and Phrases – These used to be called "buzz words" and every profession has them. Using them on your resume not only conveys your knowledge of the field and summarizes a breadth of experience succinctly, it also allows your resume to pass the scanning technology that many companies use to vet applications. For example, if you are applying for a position as a financial officer, your resume should include such key phrases as "strategic planning," "crisis management" and "best practices."

Length – Throw out the old notion that a resume should be one page, says Rice. "This one-page phobia is so stupid. A resume is – and always was – a competitive document. You are competing against others for the same position. One page works fine for a recent college graduate, but by the time you've hit your 30s or beyond, how could you possibly compete by limiting your experience and accomplishments to one page?"

Kim Isaacs, executive director for Advanced Career Systems, agrees and suggests that a one-page resume is fine if your experience is less than 10 years. A two-page resume is more appropriate for those with 10 years of experience related to your goal or your field requires you to list specific technical or engineering skills. A three-pager is acceptable if you are a senior-level manager, are in the academic or

scientific field, and you have an extensive list of publications, speaking engagements licenses or patents.

Money – Brings up a number of issues and controversies, not the least of which is how you should respond when asked for your salary requirements. Note the difference between a request for your requirements – to which you should communicate a well-researched range – and a demand for a salary history which, says Rice, is blatant discrimination. "No one has the right to base your salary on what you used to make. Companies use this to low-ball people," she says. "This is unethical. Instead, give a broad range and say, 'Depending upon the benefits, etc. I am looking for something between -- and --.'"

Numbers – Use numbers whenever possible to quantify your contributions to your previous company. Saved them some money? How much over what period of time? Increased sales or staff? How much? "In an economy that has become more bottom-line focused than ever before, companies are looking for those who can not only add to the bottom line, but know how to take it off the top in the way of expenses," says John Touey, a principle in the Wayne, Pa.-based Salveson Stetson Group, which specializes in placing high-end management and financial executives.

Optimize – If you only have two pages to present your history of achievement, the benefit you will bring to the company, and your professional credibility, you need to prioritize the best of your assets and create a look that is both clean and utilizes the space to your greatest advantage.

Proofread – This is a must. And you cannot simply rely on your computer's spelling and language program to do your work for you because it will not pick up such common errors as the misuse of words like "effect" and "affect." Make sure your resume reflects who you are and that image is one that is careful and direct.

Quaaludes – Or marijuana, acid, ecstasy or any of the other drugs of choice. No matter how friendly the interviewer appears, don't mention them, discuss them or feel like a cute reference should be made. This is neither a bar nor a therapy session. It is a job application.

Readability – Think about this: after all your work, the person reading your resume will give it approximately 10–15 seconds before deciding whether it made the first cut or hits the "delete" button – either real or figurative. Readability goes to the overall design of your resume. Make sure your fonts are consistent. Understand that this is not a novel; you must get to the heart of your experience in a way that will speak to the reader – and quickly.

Style – Applying for a job in the financial department of a conglomerate? Then they probably won't appreciate a colored paper with an artistic splash in the upper left corner. No matter what your personal style, keep in mind the industry and company to which you are applying and use a design style that is appropriate to the field. This is not the time to make a stand for individuality unless you are looking for a job in a creative arena.

Transferable Skills – No matter what your age and job history, you have skills that are transferable to any number of other industries. Great at organizing? Thrive on deadlines and juggling multiple projects? These transferable skills should be stressed in your summary at the top of the resume.

Unsolicited Resumes – These are rarely appreciated and even more rarely read. Don't "spam" your resume on the Internet. It cheapens your skills and your image.

Voice – You have a unique voice. Make sure this comes through in your selection of strong, energetic action words to describe your accomplishments and your philosophy. Don't fall back on street lingo, MTV-references or cutesy words. Your first impression should be professional all the way.

Who, What, When, Where, Why – Double-check that all of these pieces of information are included both in terms of your contact information and your previous work history.

Xerox – OK, we cheated a bit. So "print out" a couple of extra copies of your resume and take them with you on your job interviews because you never know who will sit in on them. Besides, it's always more impressive to have clean, hard copies in hand. It goes to preparedness.

You – Remember that the resume is your sales tool. Keep the cover letter and resume focused on you – not on past companies, trips to the Alps, or your dream of "someday."

Zenith – Assess the accomplishment of which you are the most proud and make sure it is included on the resume. Whether this was achieved in the work world, church arena, community or school, be clear and direct about articulating how your impact was made.

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