

# Why There's No Such Thing As a Single Perfect Resume

**Companies rightfully expect to receive information that's tailored specifically to their hiring needs**

BY TAUNEE BESSON

*Editor's Note: This month columnist Taunee Besson addresses a common job hunting problem. If you have a question or concern about your job search or career, send it to Ms. Besson at the National Business Employment Weekly, P.O. Box 300, Princeton, N.J. 08543-0300. All names are kept confidential.*

The perfect resume. Job hunters pursue it as avidly as Ponce de Leon sought the Fountain of Youth. A single resume format that works in every situation, however, is as elusive to find as the youthful elixir.

Career counselors and corporate recruiters alike agree that one resume can't possibly present your skills and experience effectively to every potential employer. Company interviewers want to know specifically what you can offer that distinguishes you from every other applicant. If your resume isn't tailored to their needs, it isn't likely that you'll grab their attention and earn an interview.

Look at the job search process from a recruiter's point of view. Suppose you place a help-wanted ad for a vice president of international marketing with a heavy background in developing high-tech products and services for the European market. What would you do with a resume that touts superb marketing experience, but doesn't mention expertise in the European or high-tech markets? Perhaps you'd give that person a chance. But what if you have six other resumes that more closely meet your needs? The superb marketer might have the skills to handle the job, but she'll never get a chance to prove it—even if she does have some applicable experience that didn't make it onto her resume.

Before you groan too loudly at the thought of writing multiple resumes, consider your alternative. Richard Bolles, author of the best-selling "What Color Is Your Parachute?" says that the average company hires just one job candidate for every 1,470 resumes it receives. To be sure, the majority of those resumes are poorly written, badly photocopied and often not applicable to the open position. But the odds still aren't great.

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To avoid the round file (and a mailbox full of rejection letters) consider the following suggestions:

- Before you begin writing your resume, be sure you have some key pieces of information: an accomplishments history of all your important paid, volunteer, hobby, educational and other achievements, and a job description for the position you're seeking. Then you can draw parallels between the two. Pull from your accomplishments summary only the items that speak directly to your objective. Omit the rest.
- Use the resume format that best represents your background. There are two kinds: chronological and functional. Chronological resumes give the most recent job first and discuss your positions in reverse order. They are most useful when experi-

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ence is stable (no job hopping or breaks in employment) and increasingly responsible. Potential employers in technical and conservative fields usually prefer this format. Functional resumes concentrate on accomplishments rather than specific jobs. In some functional resumes, job titles are omitted altogether. This less traditional format works best for career changers and people whose work histories have employment gaps. It can also be effective in putting the specifics an employer wants right at the top of the resume.

- You've probably considered having a professional service write your resume. Don't do it! They will produce one "perfect" version (we know its chances for success, don't we!) which, unfortunately, will sound very similar to the

"perfect" ones they're writing for all their other clients. It's human nature to fall in love with certain phrases (bottom line, results-oriented, people person) and use them repeatedly. Potential employers read hundreds of resumes for one job. To make the interview pile, yours must be tailored to and reflect your own fresh perspective, and not rely on a bunch of jargon.

- With access to a computer, adapting your resume to the specific interests of each potential employer need not be time consuming. Changing the objective and emphasizing different areas of your experience by rearranging their order may suffice.
- Begin your resume with your name, address and phone number. If calls at work are a problem, refer people to your answering machine or service. Then check once or twice a day for messages. Don't expect people to call you after business hours.
- State your objective as clearly and specifically as possible. You can even name the company and the job title if you know it. For example, Account Supervisor for Acme Creative Co.
- Remember that a resume is a summary of career highlights. It's not your life story. You should be able to fit your key achievements on one or two pages.
- Prioritize everything. Obviously your name and objective should always be at the top. Move the other facts around according to what's most important. For instance, if a position requires an M.B.A. or law degree, put your education and credentials before experience. If career achievements are more critical, list experience first.
- If you include a summary of your qualifications, be sure it's unique and speaks directly to your objective. Catch phrases, such as results-oriented manager and take-charge executive, are so common they've become meaningless. If you can't think of anything original, leave out the summary.
- Use action verbs to describe your skills and accomplishments. They provide a lot more sizzle than "responsibilities," "duties included" or a first person narrative ("I handled . . .").
- Emphasize your special contributions rather than

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# Resumes

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just reiterate a job description. You want your resume to stand out from the other 200 resumes the employer is receiving.

- Quantify your achievements if you can. Numbers usually describe the scope of your activities better than words.
- Name-drop a little if you're not revealing confidential information. Mentioning specific customers or listing the states or countries in your territory, or the departments with whom you served as liaison, can add tremendous credibility.
- Don't separate volunteer and paid experience. In some instances, volunteer work may be an important component of your background, especially if community involvement or a wide array of contacts are job requirements.
- Use jargon selectively. If you've noticed certain buzzwords in your networking, include them in your resume. Just be sure your jargon matches that of your potential employer.
- Be neat and error free. One typo can be deadly.
- Don't list salaries or reasons for leaving. It's much better to discuss these in person. Putting them in a resume puts you at a distinct disadvantage.
- Education may or may not be an important qualification for your position. Often your non-credit professional development courses may be more impressive than your for-credit credentials. Think about the job you're pursuing and tailor your education section accordingly. If your degree field doesn't match your career, just say, "B.S.-Penn State," and omit your major.
- Personal data is tricky. If you really think being single is in your favor, mention it. Otherwise leave it out. It's possible a fellow gourmet cook or avid baseball card collector may be the decision-maker screening your resume. When he sees you share his passion, you'll probably get an interview. But he may see your inclusion of this information as a lack of professionalism. It's a risk you may not want to take. ●