Creating An Effective Resume For Today's Market

By Diane Hudson Burns

A resume is a sales brochure. You have marketable qualifications, and those skills and experiences need to be "sold" to a potential employer. Since you are competing with potentially hundreds of other applicants, your resume must shine above the rest. The resume of yesteryear had an objective at the top that said something like this: Seeking a challenging position with a large corporation allowing for growth potential to management. Today's resume objective is highlighted--indicating a main area of expertise and desired skills: Business Management, Financial Planning, Contract Negotiations, Compensation & Benefits.

The difference is yesteryear's resume focused on what the company could do for you. Today's resume focuses on what you can do for the company. Recruiters tend to pull the good-looking resumes to the top of the pile. A recruiter is looking for an objective or some indication of intent, because he or she is trying to fill a specific position. The top half of your page needs to expose your objective and highly notable accomplishments in order to meet or exceed the requirements of the recruiter.

Components

The purpose of a resume is to obtain an interview. You must project a professional image--take extra care to provide extraordinary accomplishments. Areas of emphasis or headings you may want to include: Career Profile/Executive Summary; Professional or Executive Experience; Notable Accomplishments; Education; Public Speaking; Licenses/Certifications; Business Associations; Training; Security Clearance; Foreign Languages; Computer Competencies. Any order is acceptable; select the order that best enhances your qualifications.

Dates can be a plus if your climb up the career ladder is in order. Employers like to see dates. In this instance a reverse chronological resume (experience listed in descending order from current to past) is the best strategy. A resume, however, is not a job application listing every job you had since high school--only list those experiences that are applicable to the job for which you are applying. When you are changing career fields, converting from military, a recent graduate or a "domestic engineer" reentering the workforce, a functional style resume (highlighting expertise and significant skills with dates at the end) is often the best strategy. Focus on functional areas of expertise, and list a progression of employment, including volunteer work, at the end.

It is not necessary to write "References available upon request" at the bottom of the resume. It is understood that if a hiring authority is interested in you, he or she will contact your references (with valid phone numbers and addresses) to the interview. Also, if you have a university degree, large corporations will contact the university

directly to obtain certification of your degree. Never change or enhance your credentials.

Word Smithing

Presentation is only half the battle. The other half is wording. Never use the words "responsibilities included" or "job duties." In fact, after you have written your resume, go back and cross out those words. Then on a separate sheet of paper probe your background and list all accomplishments--big and small. Use dollar figures, numbers and percentages. Plan to impress the recruiter with your accomplishments. Change "responsibilities included" to actual accomplishments and results. Write short sentences for each accomplishment using positive action words. Accomplishments with results:

- Supervised 14 personnel
- Formulated policy that was implemented nationwide
- Executed a budget in excess of \$2M
- Jumpstarted declining operations turning around
- Programmed workloads decreasing 30 man hours per shift
- Consistently improved operational performance boosting annual profits by \$2.6 million in first year
- Implemented successive quality improvements resulting in a savings of \$50,000
- Created impressive growth strategies exceeding previous year revenue by
 14%
- Handpicked Team Leader
- Critically evaluated requirements resulting in a 27 percent increase (\$417M)

There is only one steadfast rule in writing resumes: the document must be free of grammatical and spelling errors. Always edit your draft, and do not trust spell check. Common mistakes include: "Bank Manger," "Too Million dollar budget," "Planed the corporate meeting," "Witch resulted in a \$3M savings." Perfectly good words with perfectly good spelling, but it changes the entire context and meaning. Recruiters seek impeccable documents. And when you are attaching a computer 'scannable' resume, spelling errors can make the difference between being accepted into the system for a specific position and being rejected. For example, if the computer is looking for 'Bank Manager' and you wrote 'Bank Manger' it will not score. Other assumed rules are to be broken:

- Resumes run from one to several pages, depending on the companies they are being sent to, or the nature of the business (medical professionals can have curriculum vitas up to 10 pages or longer).
- Pictures can accompany a resume for candidates in the fashion/entertainment field. Usually a resume is attached to an 8 1/2x11" picture.
- Don't list personal information (height, weight, marital status, age, hobbies or religious affiliations) unless it specifically relates to the job for which you are applying. It is illegal for a hiring authority to ask personal information.
- Do use textured and/or high quality colored stationery for mailings.

- Use lines, bold, and italics (just not all at once).
 Use shadows or other small enhancements/graphics where appropriate.
- Use vertical left side blocks for skill lists or high caliber quotes from supervisors.
- Be creative and catch the attention of the hiring authority.