

The Must-Have Features of a Winning Resume

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The possibility - or necessity - for a career change can arise at any moment. New opportunities and new challenges could be around any corner. New priorities and new ambitions could also dawn within you! So, whether it be to seize your suddenly available dream position or avoid being a casualty of a failing company, it's important that you be prepared to take action when the opportunity arises. And that means making sure your resume is current, compelling, and ready to market you powerfully.

Don't be caught off guard and miss out on an important opportunity just because your resume isn't up to date. Review your resume now and make sure it effectively represents you. Does it clearly and powerfully communicate the unique and valuable qualities you possess and the direction you want to take your career? Or is it little more than a type-written application form?

Should your resume need an upgrade and you opt to tackle this process on your own, be sure to incorporate the following must-have style and content elements of a winning resume:

GO EASY ON THE EYES

A resume that's difficult to read will likely remain unread. So, invite your reader to quickly and easily learn of your qualifications with a well-designed document. Use an easy-to-read font and size it between 10- and 12-pt. Resist the urge to overload the page with text... this can leave your reader feeling dazed. Employ an appropriate amount of white space by using comfortable margins (.5- to .75-inch) and paragraphs no longer than three to four lines. And, don't be afraid to use - sparingly and with strategy - bolding, underlining, and centering of words and phrases to help guide your reader to what you want them to read.

FOCUS, PEOPLE!

Does your resume have a strategy? Can someone reading it tell exactly what position you are pursuing? Too many people write a generic resume - one more reflective of a career autobiography than the compelling marketing document it should be. A powerful resume has a clear focus and showcases only experience and accomplishments relevant to that focus. So, eliminate or downplay extraneous experiences that are not in line with your career goals. And be sure to highlight skills, responsibilities, and accomplishments that do support them.

WHEN PROFILING IS GOOD

Just below your name and contact information, your resume should feature a Profile - a powerfully-written, promotionally-driven, attention-grabbing summary of qualifications that showcases the unique value you bring to a company. It should make your job focus crystal clear and spotlight achievements and expertise relevant to that focus. Above all, it should compel an employer to read on to the Experience section, where the claims made in your Profile will be supported with specific information.

KEY WORDS ARE KEY

Key words are an important tool for recruiters and hiring managers. They scan for key words and phrases that describe specific skills and areas of expertise in order to filter resumes that best match the criteria for the job they want to fill. For example, in the case of a CFO position, resumes would be scanned for key words such as "budgeting," "forecasting," and "board relations." For your resume to survive this scanning process, include key words throughout that reflect both the needs of the position you are pursuing and the skills you possess.

TELL A STORY

In the Experience section, don't limit your account of past positions to a simple list of job titles, dates and responsibilities. A resume should do far more than timeline your job history. A truly powerful resume guides your reader through your background, illuminating the reasons for your movement from one position to another and describing the challenges you faced when landing each job. For example, your move to your current job may have been the result of an internal promotion, or perhaps a referral from a former manager. And a challenge you faced - and accomplished - may have been to turn around a failing project. Both of these circumstances reflect positively on you and, as such, should be described.

AMPLIFY YOUR EXPERIENCE

Each past position that is relevant to the job you are seeking requires a brief explanation of what you were accountable for. But, resist the urge to simply copy your old job descriptions! A bulleted list of duties won't hold near as much weight as a short narrative describing the scope of your responsibility. For example, if you were a Sales Director, make sure your job narrative includes the number of sales managers reporting to you, the region you were accountable for, and the accounts your team secured. Don't simply tell your reader what you did... offer enough detail to let him/her know the significance of what you did.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS... DON'T BE AFRAID TO BRAG!

Strongly-written accomplishments describing specific projects or actions you took that added value to your previous companies are the linchpin of a winning resume, for they truly demonstrate your unique contribution to your previous jobs. So, reinforce the power of your job narratives by following each of them with a bulleted list of your greatest accomplishments. Be sure to start each accomplishment with a powerful action verb, i.e., "Orchestrated", "Pioneered", "Leveraged", "Spearheaded", etc., and quantify your statements where possible with measurable data. Above all, be brief and to the point.

... AND THEN BRAG SOME MORE

It's possible that not all of your relevant experience, skills, or accomplishments have been gained on the job. So, be sure to include any special training, speaking engagements or community activities that are pertinent to the job you are seeking. Do you have special technology or industry-specific skills? Have you attended any seminars, gained any certifications, or executed a special project through volunteer or professional association work? These should be noted in a special section, typically located near the Education section.

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