



So you want to... write a killer CV

By Margie Sheedy
Sydney Morning Herald

Getting your CV to stand out in a pile of applications used to be easy. Coloured paper was always a winner. A bright new red binder the hot accessory. Adding a splash of graphics and fancy typography won you some points.

But in these days of email responses to job ads and recruiter databases, do the old tricks stack up? Or are there new bells and whistles that will make your CV stand out from the crowd?

John Little, founder of Successful resumes, says that before you even start typing up a resume, you should be thinking about it as a strategic document.

"A CV isn't just a list of your work history," he says. "It's a marketing exercise. After all, at the beginning of the process we're all just white crumbly powder. But put a box around us and you have a brand. Getting the really relevant information across in a dynamic way is the key."

Instant gratification

Little remembers some research done about seven years ago by then recruiting force Morgan & Banks. It found that recruiters and employers take from 15 to 45 seconds to decide whether a resume goes into the interview pile or not.

"The important information must come first," he says. Don't stick to CV formulas that have been around for decades, with your name, age, marital status and religion listed at the top. "This is enough to bury 99 per cent of all applicants," he adds.

Be dynamic

Little says you should mix up the order: "If a piece of information is important, make sure people see it. Make sure they see the information that's really going to turn them on quickly." Start with your most recent job or the last one that is most likely to be of interest to the employer.

"There's almost nothing of interest that's more than 10 years old. There's no point saying you were employed by Price Waterhouse in 1968. It doesn't do you any favours. Back then the computer systems were clunking mainframes."

Replicate the skills and attitudes listed in the job advertisement in your resume. "Today employers tend to select as much on a person's values and their capacity to fit into the organisation [as on their experience]."

Work your positive personality traits into the first part of your resume if you can. But, more importantly, "make it easy to read with headlines and bullet points, like in the job ads in the front section of The Sydney Morning Herald," Little says.

"This is how the recruiters attract talent. So use these devices on the first page of your resume. You are then employing the same strategy and attracting the attention of the recruiter or advertiser with their format."

Say cheese

Putting a photograph of yourself on your CV is one of the bells and whistles that Little thinks is worthwhile. With a photo CV, a candidate becomes a person, not just words on paper. It also adds a type of graphic icon, he says.

"I've sat on government recruitment panels and the number of times people refer to 'That one, or those two with the photo' is amazing. People remember a photo."

Buzz words

After resumes are entered into a recruiter's database, they are usually revisited using a keyword search. If a job specifies auditing, this will be entered into the database and all CVs that contain the word will be listed.

Little says you should scan job ads in your sector and see what sort of terminology recruiters are using. Then find ways to incorporate the buzz words into your resume. But what if you don't have relevant industry experience to draw this jargon from? "If you're an accounting graduate, you get the jargon, such as management accounting and auditing, in by making sure your [university] subjects are listed."

Another tactic is to put down your planned studies, such as a bachelor of law degree, starting 2007. "This will at least help you rise to the top in a database search," he says.

Covered with care

When it comes to a cover letter for your CV, the trick is to tailor the letter to the employer and the job

"Generic cover letters are no more use than writing your resume on a scrap piece of paper. Large organisations spend millions on their reputation. They want to attract the best quality customers, suppliers and staff. So tell them why you want to work for them," Little says.

"Talk about [your] similar values and their mission statement. All this is easy to find out these days - just do your research. Then, if you like the sound of them, tell them. This almost invariably results in an interview."

How to get started

"The first 10 seconds of someone picking up your resume is critical," Little says. He gives these tips for success:

- Think about what your CV says, how easy it is to read and the order you put it in.
- Be dynamic in how you present your work history and skills.
- Use positive language about yourself.
- Make sure there's a well-designed front page.
- Put a photograph of yourself on the first page of your resume.
- Put your name in colour
- Present it in a good quality binder.
- Remember, you get only one chance to make a good impression.

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