

When Creativity Attacks

Making Your Resume Pop Without Fizzling

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Here's a big hint for job seekers obsessed with creating the perfect resume: Don't include a video of you lifting weights or ballroom dancing. One Yale student recently became the laughingstock of Wall Street, cyberspace and the media when he submitted a video resume long on bravado and short on qualifications to one of the country's largest financial services firms.

Ridiculous, yes. But more important, what does doing the cha-cha have to do with financial services?

So, what can you do to make your resume pop but not fizzle?

What a resume is and what it's not

A resume is a marketing tool. Its goal is to entice the employer to call you for an interview. It presents your skills and accomplishments in a concise, compelling way. It offers a solution to a problem: They have a job they need to fill and you have the qualifications needed.

It is not a personal document. Not only is personal data distracting, it also makes the employer nervous about potential lawsuits. Don't include your marital status, religion or exact age.

What separates a great resume from a mediocre resume?

A mediocre resume is a glorified job application. It catalogues jobs you've held and your responsibilities at those jobs. It lists duties, not accomplishments.

A great resume, on the other hand, is all about accomplishments. It shows how you excelled at your job, bringing value to your employer and the company. It is a blueprint of what you're capable of and what your next employer can expect.

If you're stuck on defining your accomplishments, think of positive feedback you've received from your boss and co-workers. What are your most valuable contributions from your current employer's point of view?

Then take those successes and describe them with action words, supporting data and enthusiasm. Phrase them as challenges you faced and the glorious solutions you created. You led, spearheaded and transformed! You doubled, tripled, quadrupled profits! Don't suffocate your accomplishments under a blanket of "responsible for" and "duties included."

A great resume is also targeted to the specific opening and the company. Know how the company makes its money and understand its culture. Stand out by being knowledgeable and focused.

Tell the truth

We've all felt the need to exaggerate our accomplishments. Here's a word of advice: Don't do it. If you get the job, you will be expected to perform at the level you promised. Second, any careful employer will check up on you. Once they find out you've lied or exaggerated, you're toast. Many professional circles are quite small and somebody, somewhere knows someone who knows you. So tell the truth.

Easy on the Eyes

This is a no-brainer. You want your resume to look fresh, inviting, uncluttered. And you want the important points to jump out at the reader. So, use margins and white space, bullets and bold. If you're not satisfied with your design skills, hire a professional.

Be aware of your place in Cyberspace:

There are two kinds of information about you on the Web: Information you've created, such as blogs and social networking profiles, and references to you that appear through the media or other second-hand sources.

Point of View

Be sure there is nothing on self-generated sites that will reflect negatively on your judgment and your capabilities. Also, do frequent Google searches to be sure the information about you is accurate. Conversely, leverage tools like blogs and social networks to create professional profiles for yourself. There is no greater way to SHOW how qualified you may be for a certain position.

The spam filters ate my resume!

This is one of the dirty little secrets of the cyberage. Your e-mailed resume might never make it to the potential employer. This is not an uncommon problem. So run your resume through filters and check off that box that notifies you when the file has been opened.

On your way to your dream job

You have now created the perfect resume. It details your successes with action words and data, highlights your educational and professional qualifications, targets a particular opening and company and looks like a dream! Even better, hopefully you have managed to insert just the right amount of personality without a single video clip of you skydiving or wrestling alligators.