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Aggressively Written Resumes

By Alesia Benedict

When writing resumes, it is important to remember whom it is you're trying to please – (is it you, or the hiring authority?) In this article I will present my ideas of what makes up really aggressive documents, based on my many years in the industry, and my career in owning and managing a successful resume writing and career marketing firm.

Who Is Reading Your Resume?

Make no mistake about it, aggressive documents are necessary to be successful in today's competitive job search. But first, some history. Let's examine some of the "hiring authorities." Before my career in the resume writing industry, I spent several years as an executive recruiter, placing mid- and senior-level executives in top corporations. Eventually, I managed that firm, which employed 24 recruiters working 10 "desks." A "desk" is a specialty: finance, banking, engineering, information systems, legal, are all known as "desks" and each recruiter (or team of recruiters) specialized in placing upper managers and executives in a chosen field.

I no longer place candidates, and devote all my energies to resumes and the career marketing industry as a whole, and my own firm in particular. However, I still have many connections with recruiters, and have respect for the really great ones, and distaste for the all-too-often bad ones!

I think it's important to remember that these days, people in career transition are driven to explore many methods in their job search. In the past, it was much easier to look for a job – individuals simply read the classified ads, called the telephone number listed and chatted with the person over the phone, setting up an in-person interview for the next day. What a snap!

These days, however, the job search is much more complex. Competition for employment has never been greater. The entire process is often drawn-out, depersonalized and hard, hard, hard! Resumes are no longer just asked for, they are DEMANDED. In reality, they are a prerequisite for a job search.

My point is, you have to remember what the resume's purpose actually is and write accordingly. The dynamics in this field are very exciting but also very volatile. The buzz words are forever changing.

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Companies, for example, were at one time laying-off, then downsizing... rightsizing... reorganizing, and now reengineering. Whew!

Recruiters, company hiring managers and human resources professionals are all components in your job search, and it is the resume's job to land interviews.

I routinely speak with professional recruiters, H.R. professionals and hiring managers to get their reactions and opinions to resume styles, formats, contents and verbiage. Remembering that resumes are actually marketing pieces designed to sell you to potential employers, aggressive resumes are NOT simply a listing of your work experience or your biography (life on paper).

What Makes A "Winning" Resume?

Here are some of my methods and suggestions for writing aggressive resumes, based on my own

experience as a recruiter, my interaction with hiring professionals and employment specialists and my clients' success rate in obtaining interviews within 30 days.

Successful resumes need to SELL you over and above your peers and they create a sense of urgency for the reader to pick up the phone and call (or email) you to arrange an interview. Otherwise, the alternative is the reader scans the resume, thinks, "Yeah, this person has a good background," and then moves on to scan the next resume, pitching your resume in the old "circular file."

So let's examine some ways to write aggressive, up-to-the-minute resumes that really SELL you.

OBJECTIVES

There are lots of opinions about whether or not to use an objective, or just how to do so, if one IS used. The only "given" about the use of an objective, is definitely NOT to use one on senior level resumes. A CEO, CFO, COO or other executive's resume actually looks/reads silly when an objective is used. But for the mid-level or entry-level candidate, an objective can be useful. Here are a few ways to incorporate the concept into a resume...for a very targeted client who knows exactly what she/he wants:

BUYER...PURCHASING MANAGER...PROCUREMENT AGENT

or, for someone seeking to remain in their career pattern: EXPERIENCED COST ACCOUNTANT seeks a position with a progressive organization that will utilize a successful career to meet/exceed company goals.

or, for a client who has several fields she/he want to pursue: Results-oriented manager seeks a position with advancement opportunities; areas of interest include retail, electronics and communications technology.

or, if someone wants to change careers: AGGRESSIVE individual seeks a career in sales utilizing

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strong interpersonal skills to penetrate untapped markets and build a loyal client base.

What you'll notice in the above cases, is what's stressed in the objective: the BENEFIT the COMPANY will receive if they hire the candidate. What is not stated is what YOU want. Companies don't care what you want – they want to know what you can do for THEM.

A flaw in writing objectives, is that they sometimes just say the same thing that 78+ other resumes sitting on the hiring authority's desk state: Seeking a challenging position that will utilize my skills in editing, proofreading and copy writing.

Oh, that's exciting...makes you just want to jump to the phone and give that person a call, doesn't it? Stating that the person is seeking a challenging position is ridiculous. Would you ever state that you were seeking a boring position? Of course not – so don't state the obvious – it's a cliché.

REFERENCES PROVIDED UPON REQUEST

Using this phrase at the end of the resume is archaic. It's a given (talk about a cliché!), and contemporary resumes omit this. The better approach is to generate a prepared Professional Reference sheet which you can bring with you on interviews and leave with the interviewer when

references are requested.

RESPONSIBLE

This word is often so over-used in a resume, that at GetInterviews.com, we never use it. Recruiters employed at retainer-only search firms have told me that the word "responsible" signifies mid-management and below, not executive-level candidates. Personally, I believe the word "responsible" is actually useless in a resume. Instead of writing, "Responsible for all departmental functions including accounts payable/receivable, payroll and invoicing..." I would suggest to use an action word that best depicts what that person actually does – for example, "Perform all departmental functions, including..." or "Oversee all departmental functions, including..." or "Review all departmental functions, including..." See what I mean? "Responsible" doesn't really SAY anything, it doesn't give a clear indication of what you actually do. Do you perform the functions or direct them? "Responsible" is too vague to say which.

MY, MINE, THIS, I

Using words like this in the resume indicates you are writing in a narrative voice, as if you are having an actual conversation, a dialogue with the reader. This is not the case: you are presenting your achievements, skills and credentials to a potential employer. My suggestion would be to keep the resume more business-like, more professional. In descriptions, the word "a" could be substituted for the word "this," as in: "Promoted to a \$30 million division of an international widget manufacturer to expand sales into untapped markets" as opposed to "Promoted to this \$30 million division...."

ALSO

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I have seen this word used when describing daily functions: "Control and administer annual budgets totaling \$12 million. Also, interface with vendors to negotiate more favorable terms and gain higher profits." Again, the "also" is a dialogue word, and quite unnecessary. In writing resumes, it is best to do what my Creative Writing professor called "tight writing." That is, to eliminate as many "an's, the's, also's, a's," etc., as possible. They typically aren't necessary and can be cut from the resume without loss of meaning.

NUMBERS

Contrary to the rules of grammar, EXCEPT for academic resumes, it is best to use numerals in a resume rather than spell out the number, even when that number is 10 or under. I know that grammatically, we are taught to spell out numbers like three, five, seven, etc., and write 12, 14, 16, etc. The numerical version, however, jumps off a page, whereas the spelled out version often gets lost. Because resumes are often only scanned by the reader 15–20 seconds, the actual use of numbers helps to capture the readers' attention – they are drawn to the numbers, which means they are spending more time looking at and reading your resume – and that's a GOOD thing! I made the reference above to academic resumes, because teachers, principals and superintendents are very sensitive to grammatical rules, even in resumes. It's best to spell out any number under 10 for these types of resumes. I would never recommend, however, that the words "percentage" or "dollar" be used ("30 percent" or "12 million dollars") – instead, use the symbol, as in 30% or \$12 million.

EDUCATION VS. EXPERIENCE

Knowing when to highlight someone's education vs. experience is important. With certain fields (teaching, for example), the general preference is to lead off the resume with the client's credentials and educational background, even if they have considerable experience. Recent college grads should also have their education first, as it is typically their greatest achievement. However, someone who returned to college (part time nights, for example), while concurrently employed full time for the past 9 years as a travel agent, should have their resume lead off with their experience, and NOT emphasize they just obtained their Bachelors degree. They are not entry-level candidates – their experience is more vital to a company than their education. Remember that all resumes do NOT have to lead off with the client's education.

PAST / PRESENT TENSE

Writing in the present tense is always more aggressive than writing in the past tense. Verbs in past tense are in a passive voice, so whenever feasible, write in the present tense. Obviously, if you are still employed, your current job listing is written in the present tense (manage, direct, supervise, control, etc).

PICTURES

Unless you are an actor or model, do not include a picture of yourself under any circumstances. Companies these days are so concerned about EEO lawsuits, discriminatory cases and the like, that at best, they will immediately throw out the picture, or at worst, possibly throw away the entire resume,

especially if the picture is printed into the resume. I can guarantee you recruiting firms are highly sensitive to this, as well.

GRAPHICS

Be careful not to make your resumes "too cute." Remember, companies see you as an INVESTMENT – they are spending x amount of dollars to obtain you (salary), and want to see a return on their investment. It is a business negotiation. If the resume appears too "decorative" or distracting because of cute clip art images or overly decorative paper, you may be dismissed and the resume tossed.

PERSONAL INFO

Marital status, date of birth, health, hobbies, etc., are not relevant on a resume these days.

Remember, you aren't writing your biography, you are marketing yourself on paper: why does the employer want to hire YOU above all others, especially when there are 91+ resumes from equally qualified candidates sitting on that decision-maker's desk? Answer that question in the resume, and you will have written a tight, solid, results-oriented resume...in short, a winning, aggressive resume, and the sort of resume that is vital for today's job search – and that of the next millennium.

Published in 25 career books, Alesia has been cited by Jist Publications as one of the "best resume writers in North America" and quoted as a Career Expert in the Wall Street Journal. Serving as the Resume Expert for over 50+ organizations, she has numerous media appearances to her credit and is a frequent keynote speaker.

<http://getinterviews.com>

Sample Resumes

By Alesia Benedict, CPRW, JCTC

Do you ever wonder why resume services post free resume samples on their sites for resume service clients to view? What do sample resumes provide? There is an ongoing argument among professional resume writers that posting sample resumes on websites is akin to giving away their work. True, some visitors to sites rip off the sample resumes they find there to use in their own job searches. Unfortunately for them, these individuals do not understand they are doing themselves a disservice.

If a site visitor likes a sample resume, it's usually not the content that attracts them but rather the style of the writing, the approach to the content, and the strategy that lies behind the writing. Sample resumes are generally chosen by the professional resume writer as stellar examples of approach and strategy, not for the professions or background of the resume owner.

I had a client who sent an old resume to me as part of the process of developing his new resume. The first page was typically self-written but the second page diverged considerably - not only was the entire career background different (he went from a network specialist to a Lawson programmer), but the

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entire approach was different. When I asked him about it, he stated "oh, that was a sample resume that I found on a site. I can't remember which one." I noted that it was a completely different field than his and his reply was that he just liked the approach and style of the sample resume portion.

Without his realizing, he had "snatched" a portion of a sample resume that I had written several years earlier and was posted as a sample resume on Rezamaze.com. To avoid embarrassing him, I did not point it out but I thought it was a good illustration of the purpose of sample resumes. The purpose of a sample resume is to demonstrate how the professional resume writer can take a job seeker's background and craft a document that grabs the attention, promotes the client's qualifications, and projects a professional image that will get the interview.

Sample resumes are not only posted on websites, but there is a plethora of resume books on the market that show sample resumes from different professions and written by different professional writers. A great deal of our work here at GetInterviews.com is published as sample resumes in these books.

If you find a sample resume on our site that appeals to you, give us a call. We'd be happy to discuss how we can construct a professional resume for you that would promote your career so you can get the interview!

Published in 25 career books, Alesia has been cited by Jist Publications as one of the "best resume writers in North America" and quoted as a Career Expert in the Wall Street Journal. Serving as the Resume Expert for over 50+ organizations, she has numerous media appearances to her credit and is a frequent keynote speaker.

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