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10 Resume Red Flags

by Erin Joyce
Tuesday, February 16, 2010

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Searching for a job is not always easy, no matter what state the economy is in. And when you're on the hunt, your best weapon is your resume. This document must emphasize the best of your experience, education and skills and sell you to your future employer. It's a lot to ask, but it is possible to get your CV into fighting shape. Don't let your effort go to waste by having these glaring red flags on your resume.

1. It's Covered in Glitter -- Literally.

Yes, it has been done. In an effort to make your resume stand out, you may find that it gets thrown out. Less extreme attempts such as including image files or using non-traditional symbols or fonts should also be avoided. While it may be a nice break for a recruiter reading through hundreds of Times New Roman documents, you run the risk of the fonts or images not loading properly. And you can bet that busy recruiter isn't going to contact you for a simplified copy.

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2. There Are References.

Listing your references on the resume is a definite no-no. References should always appear on a separate page, and should only be produced when asked for. Also, be sure to delete the "References: Available Upon Request" line. It's understood that you will, so save some space and your potential employer's time.

3. It's Written in Full Sentences.

The headhunter has likely received dozens if not hundreds of applications -- help them out! Your resume should be short and sweet and bulleted. You aren't writing a novel, you are trying to catch a skimming employer's eye and prove you are worth a second look -- and an interview.

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4. There Are No Numbers.

One of the worst things you can do on a resume is be vague. Don't just list your accomplishments in a general way -- have the quantitative data to back it up. If you exceeded a goal, by how much did you exceed it? If you created and distributed company performance reports, how many did you do? Adding numbers concretizes your accomplishments and paints a better picture of what you actually did.

Also, make sure you are answering the "how" question. If you completed five projects this year instead of the expected four, how did you do it?

5. It Includes the Words "Duties" or "Responsibilities."

When you are writing your current or former job description, focus on your accomplishments, not what you had to do. As an alternative to "duties" or "responsibilities," flip your tasks into achievements. For example, instead of being "responsible for the sales team," consider "directed the sales team to beat their repeat client objective by 10%" -- remember that number thing!

6. It Lists an Objective.

For the most part, objectives sound insincere and, worse, can limit your options. Let your cover letter do the talking when it comes to why you want that particular job. And remember, each cover letter and resume should be individually tailored to a specific job posting -- not just a specific field. Taking an interest in the specifics of the job makes you look professional and focused and not like you are mass-emailing anyone who might hire you. Desperation is no more attractive to an employer than it is to a date.

7. It Contains Spelling or Grammatical Errors.

We all know to avoid this one. It makes you look sloppy and negates the part of your resume that proudly describes you as "detail-oriented." The best thing you can do for a resume is send it to a professional resume service or a professional editor. If you are a

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student, your career center likely offers free resume counseling or at least free information to help you fine tune your CV before sending it out. At the very least, have a friend look it over and check for basic language errors -- spell check just doesn't cut it.

8. It Lists an Unprofessional Email Address.

In a world where email is free, and most of us have multiple addresses, make the effort to have a professional email address. Keep it simple -- using your name is best. Just make sure you leave the sparklebaby@hellokitty.com for personal use. One more tip? Don't use your current work email unless you are self-employed.

9. It Includes a Picture.

The ONLY time this is appropriate is if you are applying to be a model or an actor, and in both cases, a separate portfolio is preferable. Including a self-portrait could exclude you for not being serious and may make you appear unprofessional. Let your skills and experience speak for you.

10. It Is Too Personal.

Resumes should demonstrate how professional you are -- that means the anecdote about the time you met Britney Spears is not appropriate. That being said, let your personality come through in your resume by including volunteer experience or a (very) short section about your interests.

The Bottom Line

When times are tough, getting a job is a stressful undertaking. Don't sell yourself short. Instead, make sure your resume is the best example of you as a potential employee and before you know it, you'll be employed once again.

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