

Your resume may be the most important tool in your toolkit when you are searching for a new opportunity, but when is the last time you brushed off this important document and made some updates? If it's been more than a year, it's a pretty good bet that your resume will need some updating, even if you're not looking for a job right this minute. Your resume can be the differentiating factor between whether you get the job, or whether it hits the round filing cabinet—that would be the trash can! Learn more about optimizing this most important piece of your background puzzle for prospective employers.

### **1. Customize Your Message**

Having a resume is actually a misnomer; what you should say is that you have a resume *base*, because if you're doing your job search right you will be customizing your resume and your cover letter every time you send it out to a new organization. These days, you're unlikely to even get your resume in front of someone in the hiring department before it goes through the company's ATS (applicant tracking system). These complicated cloud-based websites have one job and one job only—and that is to see if you have enough of the similar keywords to what is in the job description in order to think that you might be a logical fit. This is where you need to assure that your resume is not falling down as an SEO tool, but is in fact driving people to view your profile online and send you a message.

A resume should be a living, breathing document that you take the time to update on a regular basis, and certainly every time you're applying for a new job. Your resume also needs to be of a reasonable length, and certainly no more than three pages total. Successful resumes are creative without being childish (no resumes in crayon, please!) and need to find a way to stand out from the crowd of perhaps hundreds of resumes that are received for key jobs.

### **2. Include the Basics**

There are certain parts that nearly every resume should have, depending on the type of positions that you have held in the past. You will almost certainly have a summary or objective, that lets the organization know exactly where you feel your key experience lies for this particular job. By being very strategic and detailed in this area of the resume, you will project the feeling that you're ready to hit the ground running and have thoroughly researched any current constituents within that position and understand their core responsibilities as well. Share your education and your experience in separate sections that give you space to define specific results-oriented action items that you have accomplished in the recent past. Don't go back much further than 5-7 years as that experience becomes less likely to be relevant the further you go into the past.

### **3. Resume Blunders to Avoid**

There are several different reasons a hiring manager may take a pass on your resume, but your job is to assure that you have done everything possible to create a good first impression with the HR team. Assuring that your resume is less than 3 pages is a great start, as hiring managers will not have time to wade through all of that information to find the few pieces that they feel are pertinent to the current situation. Proofread your resume carefully to ensure that you have caught any and all small errors in punctuation, capitalization and spelling. If you have gaps between jobs or are remarkably over-qualified for the position for which you are applying, then your cover letter is the time to

address these issues within your resume. There are many reasons to apply for a job that you may be considered over-qualified for, including an interest to stay home with your family, possibly welcoming a new baby into the home and any number of different reasons. Frequent job changes on your resume could also spell defeat to an outsider looking in, so be sure to adequately explain why these gaps in your employment history occurred (school, secondary job, etc).

#### **4. Getting Through the Robot**

Knowing that your first step towards your next big job is a robot can be frustrating. Assure that you have fully read and studied the job posting and researched the hiring manager, and address the letter to the hiring manager if at all possible.

Keeping your resume updated both as a Word document or PDF as well as fully updated on LinkedIn.com gives you the best opportunity to lead with the right foot when someone is looking for your particular skill set.