Scannable Resumes: Your Ticket to a Job

By Diane Burns

With technology changing at warp speed, we need to stay current of changes in the employment market. Today we need a few different types of resumes: the traditional paper resume, a "scannable" or keyword resume, and an Internet resume.

A well-crafted traditional resume is a presentation package to behold. It should look great on the desk of an employer and invite their attention to your major accomplishments. A "scannable" resume is not attractive. It does not have an appealing appearance, but it packs a punch in keywords. For many years, seeking employment was sort of a formula: type a one-page chronological resume on white or cream paper and mail or deliver it to a prospective employer, sometimes with an application attached. While that method has not been completely phased out, a new method of applying for jobs and submitting resumes is upon us with the advent of the Internet. Many employers are using resume-reading software to qualify their candidates, yet employers state that most of the resumes they receive in the mail are still the traditional, high quality presentation resumes on colored or textured paper. The qualities that are so desirable for a traditional paper resume are job busters for companies using computer software to scan and rank the resumes they receive.

Keywords

Keyword resumes are simple presentations and not appealing to the eye. The focus of a keyword resume is to please the reader (the software) and obtain as many "hits" as possible as the software compares the keywords on the resume with the keywords coded into its data bank to rank the candidate against specific criteria for a specific job or career field. The keyword resume focuses more on specific skills and qualifications as opposed to a traditional resume powerfully written with active verbs. A traditional resume may contain such active verbs as coordinated, developed, recruited, contracted or organized, compared to a key word resume that will contain such qualifying words as Business Management, Inventory Operations, Total Quality Management, Construction Superintendent, Investigator, Accountant, Asset Acquisitions, and the like. Change sentences from "Mastered a number of disciplines and obtained vast experience in the construction, petroleum supply, and finance industries," to a keyword sentence like "Supervised personnel in construction, petroleum supply and finance." Likewise, "Successfully coordinated and organized loan packages and contract negotiations worth $2 billion," would score better as "Negotiate and monitor contractual obligations. Manage construction loan packages worth $2 billion." The more keywords you have on your resume, the better score you will obtain in the ranking process. Keyword resumes require a special format and the rules cannot be broken or the documents will not score.

- Only use basic fonts (Ariel or Times New Roman in 10-12 point)
- Do not use bold, italics, underline, shadows, bullets, vertical or horizontal lines, tabs or other enhancements (tip: if the character you are using is not located on your keyboard, the scanning software cannot read it)
- Use 1 inch margins on all sides
- Do not use columns (the scanning software reads from left to right across the entire page)
- Do not use acronyms (spell out all words)
- Do not misspell words (if you misspell manager as manger, you will not score)
- Do not allow text to touch (write phone numbers with dashes instead of brackets and put a space between slashes)
- Do not fold, staple, or paper clip the paper for faxing or scanning
- Do not use colored or textured paper
- Print your resume on laser white paper with a laser printer (avoid dot matrix and bubble jet printers).

Some companies will request that you mail your resume, then they will have it scanned for qualification with computer software, without your knowledge. When this happens, you probably will not qualify if you send a traditional paper resume with a high quality presentation. If possible, contact the company before sending your resume to determine if a human or computer will be reading it. Then you will know which resume to send. Make sure that scannable resumes sent in the mail are kept flat and protected from rips or folds. Remember, though, to always carry a masterfully prepared traditional paper resume to your interview. At that point, a human will be reading your resume package and you will want to make a grand impression with the hiring authority who already likes your skills. Now, he is evaluating your personality, professionalism and knowledge of the job. It starts by presenting him with a well-composed traditional resume on high quality stationery.