

Dos and don'ts of a Killer CV - Part 2: The

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CV's are marketing tools designed to do one thing: make the phone ring. They are a "sales document".

In this article we will focus on the things that will get you noticed in the rapidly changing world of employment.

Keep it real

An average of eight seconds is spent by employers looking at your CV. This has driven the most widely accepted CV length to be two A4 pages. Our experience shows however that two pages does not provide enough space to adequately describe some people's experience and skills. One key to keeping it shorter is our next point.

Tailor it for each job application

There is no such thing as your standard CV. If a CV is a sales document aimed at getting you the interview then your CV must be modified for every job application. This will help you keep it as short as possible but more importantly will enable you to focus on selling your skills and experience relevant to the current role.

Writing a CV is not an easy task, it can be time consuming. Don't whiz out the same CV to lots of jobs to save time. Extra effort taken at this stage will be noticed and get you in the pile for a second reading.

Include a personal statement

There is some debate on the value of a personal statement in your CV if you are providing a covering letter. Don't just assume an employer will see how your experience relates to their job. If you are early in your career, a personal statement can be a useful tool to flag an interest and skills for a particular career path, particularly if you have little or no relevant qualification or work experience. There is often overlap between the personal statement and the covering letter but if the employer chooses not to focus on your covering letter the personal statement provides you a brief opportunity to explain why you are the best person for the job.

Do the maths

This may sound dull but by backing up your achievements with numbers makes selling yourself much easier. When writing your work history, don't just say that you increased sales: tell them you increased sales by 70% over a six month period. Get it? Big numbers are especially good.

Energise it!

Using active, positive words in a CV or in an application form can give it additional impact and make a stronger impression on potential employers. For example, rather than writing:

"For my final-year project, I had to carry out a survey of patients' attitudes to health care services for the elderly. This involved interviewing patients in hospital and in their homes. A database was used to keep track of data collected. This project was finished on time and was awarded a 2.1 grade."

You should instead write:

"Devised and prepared a survey of patients' attitudes to health care services for the elderly as my final-year project. Interviewed 70 elderly patients and obtained a substantial amount of data. Created a database to analyse and interpret this material. Completed this project three weeks ahead of schedule and achieved a 2.1 grade."

The first example starts with a number of weak and passive verbs whereas the second example contains strong targeted active verbs such as devised and created. Action words help to give an impression of a positive, motivated person who knows how to present themselves.

Give an employer what they want

In previous articles we have talked about the top competencies employers are looking for. These competencies differentiate those who will excel in the future world of work. The commonly held Top 10 competencies for job success are

- Acting with integrity
- Accountability
- Work ethic
- Dependability
- Building relationships
- Critical and strategic thinking
- Leadership
- Oral communication skills
- Workplace communication

If employers seek these competencies then make sure your CV includes examples of when and how you exhibit all or some of these.

With modern interview questions now being behaviourally based, interviewers will be checking skills and competencies by asking questions that require examples. For every claim you make in a CV you need to have a strong example of when you exhibited your competency.

finishing touches

Make it Keyword friendly

Increasingly, employers and recruiters are using technology to find and assess you. They are using Boolean searching in CV job sites such as Seek.co.nz and so keywords have become critically important.

Job titles and buzzwords will help a search engine pick out your CV from the pile. If you're not sure, have a search online and see what words are commonly mentioned when you input your job title. When you have completed your CV, review it and input the buzz words that describe what you do.

Also think about synonyms for your job title etc. For example if you call yourself a Food Technologist and someone is searching for a Product Development Technologist they may miss you if you haven't included both titles somewhere in your CV.

The more buzzwords the higher your ranking in a digital search.

The Death of the CV?

A common discussion point since the emergence of social networks and our online existence has been the replacement of the CV by such things as Facebook and LinkedIn profiles. The first phase of this change has been the simple process of applying for jobs via LinkedIn or similar, where the job application technology allows you to replace a CV with a link to your LinkedIn profile.

The current phase involves people being found rather than having to search and apply for jobs. Big data from a range of sources will enable us to be identified as potential employees without the need for a CV. Websites such as www.HiringSolved.com use complex algorithms to pull information from a wide range of social platforms to create an online profile of you when an employer searches the internet using relevant keywords. Continuing improvements in machine-learning that enable computer programmes to automatically analyse large bodies of data and decide what information is most relevant will speed up the move to being found rather than finding a job.

This places increasing emphasis on the need for us all to be active and networked to ensure we can be found both now and in the future

In the meantime however, the CV survives as the most common job application document.

We know your opportunities will improve through the time and effort you invest in making it the best sales document you can.

John Lawson is founder of Lawson Williams Consulting Group. He initially studied Biotechnology at Massey and is a professional member of NZIFST. He now enjoys leading a team of recruitment consultants, helping people like you develop satisfying careers.

