

Resumes: Create the Bait that Gets Jobs

Steve Garriott, SJ Garriott, Tech Writing

Abstract

Effective resumes act as bait to bring in potential employers. By developing a comprehensive list of skills and achievements, and then tailoring your resume to fit your job hunting strategy, you develop an accurate advertisement of who you are.

Disclaimer

I'm going to say this to ensure we start off on the right foot with no misconceptions. Please realize these comments and suggestions reflect my personal opinion and shouldn't be taken as gospel by any means. As I tell my customers when I do reviews of technical communications, if you don't agree with what I suggest, ignore it. I don't take it personally. Like a dog trainers said to me, "If you get five dog trainers in a room, you'll get six different philosophies." The same goes with writing resumes.

On With the Show!

Ready for some tips on writing resumes? Not worried that they may not fit into the way you've done it in the past? Cool! Here we go!

Realize an HR person or recruiter or the person who got saddled with the chore of going through a huge stack of resumes will only take on average 15 to 30 seconds to look over your resume and make the decision on whether to pass you on or pass you up. They have probably exhausted their list of people they received from internal recommendations. That's what is called the hidden job market. Some jobs are never posted. Often, it's the last resort to go through the pile of resumes.

The Resume as Bait

Basically, your resume is like bait on the end of a fishing line. It's not supposed to be a complete meal; only a taste. You wouldn't tie a t-bone steak to the end of your line unless you were fishing for sharks. Instead, we just want to tie a worm to the end to see if we get a bite. But our worm needs to be lively, not dead.

Selling Yourself: Let Mental Recordings Prepare You to Get that Job

At the end of this process, you will produce is a tailor-made resume directed one of two ways (both of which I've used):

- A resume specifically directed at one specific company and the job that company is trying to hire for. It is based on research you have gathered about the company and the job they are offering. It is time-intensive, but it works like a laser beam.
- A resume specifically designed for a job you want. You write this kind of resume when you know what job you want and are most likely throwing out the bait to the hidden job market. You create the perfect resume for the job you want, and you will only get reactions from companies that are offering that job.

The Uber-Resume

Your first task is to create an *uber* or *universal resume* that includes every job-related skill, accomplishment, job title, company, talent, educational background, award, everything that sums up who you are as a person in a job setting. Brainstorm it out. Take your time. Start from that first job at McDonalds or Starbucks or caddying for a golf course. Put it all in. Include dates and places, people for references, anything that could be useful, because all of these experiences, places and people have made you who you are. You have to know the product inside and out to know how best to sell it.

Are you going to use all this information in the resumes you send out? No way! You may have ten or twenty pages of stuff when you're done. But what you will have is all the equipment you need in one place, all the different lures and bait to go job hunting. Once you scope out the territory, you'll know what to use.

The Skill-Centered Way

At this stage we'll assume you've completed your uber-resume. It may not be pretty, but at this stage we don't care. This is the raw material we need to build our resumes. Diamonds don't look pretty to start with.

How do you interpret all this information? My recommendation is to think of it in terms of skills. Skills follow you from job to job no matter where you work. These are the items potential employers are going to want to see. What can this person do for me? Activities don't always give a clear picture as to what you can do. It's just a result of your skills.

For example, I can say: Created Online Help systems for applications. That tells someone what I did, kinda, in terms of my activities. If it's an HR person who's looking at my resume, he or she may not know what is involved in doing that. It's often these "alligators" who knock us out of the

Selling Yourself: Let Mental Recordings Prepare You to Get that Job

running right from the start. If they don't understand our skills, they may not think we have the ones they are looking for, even if you would be the perfect candidate.

So how can I change the activity description into a clearer picture of the skills involved that could transfer to any job I want to go for? I could say instead: Used effective interviewing techniques with developers and technical subject matter experts to identify Help topics.

If you are an expert at organizing groups of people into effective teams, you can do that in any company that needs effective teams, whether it's a credit union, or a software company, or a construction job.

What you'll need to do is look at each of your job experiences and determine what skills you used/developed in that job.

So for me, I have to look at how a tech writer's skills are different from a senior tech writer's. There should be things that the senior position does that the junior one doesn't, abilities I have now that I didn't when I started. My skills transfer no matter whether I work for a bank or a software company or an IT department.

The great thing about skills is that you only have to identify them once. And a great way to present them in a resume is to list them right up front in a bulleted list. The bait is clearly seen in an easily accessed format. People love bulleted lists. Keep your skill descriptions as short as possible. Think of your resume page as very valuable real estate. If you have only 30 seconds to get a reaction, how are you going to use that page?

Achievements: Skills in Action

You now have a list of skills to choose from. Great job! The next step is to identify the activities and achievements that are a result of using your skills in a job setting. In each of the jobs you've had, there have been concrete successes that you should identify. The key to creating a useful list of achievements is to base them on factual information: amounts, percentages, and numbers. Opinions or interpretations don't turn heads; numbers do.

For example, saying you were a part of a team responsible for creating a software product that came in on-time and under budget provides someone with tangible results.

The Dreaded Blank Page

You now should have the following, created in no particular order considering that resume writing is a very organic, divergent activity:

- Brainstormed uber-resume
- List of skills, activities and achievements, education, references, companies, and who knows what else.

Now comes the tough part. Based on the plan you've set up as to how you are going to a prospective job, select only those items from your lists that apply to that job. Include nothing else. If every word you used costs you ten dollars, how would that affect what you included. Remember, you still have to communicate effectively who you are to the person reading your resume in 30 seconds.

Identify which of the skills apply to the job you are applying for. Your task at that point will be to cut this list that could go on for pages down to at the most two pages. As William Faulkner said, you will have to be willing to "kill your darlings." It's tough, but you'll benefit from it in the long run if it brings someone to you.

White space is your friend, as are bulleted lists and bolded text. Note: I realize bold text is controversial, but I use it all the time and have had no complaints. The contents will be dependent upon the company you are applying to. Yes, you will probably have to review your resume each time you send it out to make sure it is tailored to the specific company you are sending it to, unless you are using the chumming technique: fill the water with bait and see what comes up to take it.

Your Personal Advertisement

Resumes are advertisements for you. I know 30 seconds doesn't sound like much, but TV commercials don't run much more than that mostly because they are expensive. And so is your resume. You are selling a product and the product is you. Take a step back (which I know is hard) and ask how you would sell this person.

Here's something to consider; maybe a different way to approach the whole resume issue. As an introduction to a new manager who had no idea what I did and had only anecdotal information about me, I created a tri-fold brochure about me and what I could do. I tried to make it as concrete as possible. She was very impressed with it and decided to send it out to all the other managers in her group so that they would know what I could do for them as well. I have since used it in other job hunting situations with great success.

Conclusion

Resumes represent the beginning, and first impressions are important. They are the foot in the door, your marketing material to sell yourself. You want your resume to stand out, to make the job easier for that person with the task of finding the best candidates for the job. It's tough out there, but if you use these techniques, you'll have the tools you need to get noticed. The rest is up to you.

ABOUT STEVE GARRIOTT

Mr. Garriott has been a writer since he can remember. His experience includes ten years as a secondary education instructor in composition and drama. For the last 15 years, he has been a technical writer working as a consultant (*SJ Garriott, Tech Writing*) and employee in the high-tech industry with extensive experience in the dot-com world. He currently resides in the Puget Sound area of Washington State, and is working towards a part-time career as a fiction writer.

You can contact him at sgarriott@gmail.com.