



Career
Solvers

Ultimate Guide to Resume Writing

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As a resume writer I have come into contact with thousands of people who do great things at work every day. But you would never know it if you looked at the resumes most people write for themselves. There seems to be an enormous disconnect between the work people do and their ability to document the value of that work on a resume. Most resumes I see read like job descriptions.

People can usually articulate what they do, but they generally don't convey why what they do is important or who derives value from their actions. They neglect to tie their job tasks to impact. They fail to create a compelling argument for why a hiring manager should give that candidate a chance.

Below are recommendations for building a stronger resume so you can lock in more interviews.

1. Create a resume headline.

Headlines sell newspapers, and they can also sell job search candidates. Since hiring managers don't really read resumes, but rather scan them to determine the candidate's fit for the job, help make that fit more obvious by creating a resume headline that tells the reader your professional niche. Examples of resume headlines are "Award Winning Television Executive Producer", "Entry Level Public Relations Assistant", or "Information Technology Product Developer." Include business environments, distinguishing degrees or special skills that will be of interest to your reader.

Resumes that lack a headline are more likely to be misinterpreted or passed over by the hiring manager because the job seeker has not quickly defined the match between their candidacy and the hiring authority's open position. Headlines can be changed depending on the opportunity to best fit the job you are applying for.

BILINGUAL FINANCIAL SERVICES MARKETING PROFESSIONAL

Marketing Campaigns ▪ Product Training ▪ Client Servicing ▪ Sales Support ▪ Fluent in Spanish

2. Add a tagline or branding statement.

Communicate what you are known for and where you add value underneath your headline. Examples of branding statements include:

WEB DEVELOPER AND ONLINE BRANDING SPECIALIST

Combining knowledge of online marketing, branding, consumer search patterns and leading-edge technology with visual and artistic sensibility to deliver Web solutions that generate sales leads, measure and increase key sales metrics, and deliver sustainable ROI to shareholders.

3. Include a quote.

Quotes help personalize the document and give the reader a window into the applicant's thought leadership, knowledge and passion. They help create a connection between the applicant and the decision maker.

CONSTRUCTION PROJECT MANAGER AND GENERAL CONTRACTOR

"Understanding and implementing budget, scheduling, aesthetics, and technical practices: to balance and proactively manage these components is my top skill."

4. Include testimonials.

A testimonial about your work from satisfied supervisors or clients can add enormous credibility to a job seeker's candidacy. Testimonials showcase the candidate's strengths from the perspective of another person and help validate the candidate's core competencies and accomplishments. They personalize the relationship that the candidate is trying to build with the hiring manager and offer a more intimate look at the value the candidate can bring to an employer.

"Victoria proactively takes on her responsibilities and she looks ahead to work on upcoming requirements and tasks. She is able to develop and manage a working schedule that delivers tasks and products on time and to quality expectations." --Supervisor

5. Don't use an objective.

Objectives tell the reader what the candidate wants. Hiring authorities are not really interested in what the job seeker wants. They have a position to fill and are interested in how you can leverage your competencies and knowledge to fill that need. Objectives tend to be loaded with fluff -- personal attributes that while important, are not substantiated within the body of the document. Examples of such fluff include phrases like *Dedicated sales professional with excellent interpersonal and communication skills* or *Detail-oriented accountant capable of working in fast-paced environments*.

These descriptions are overused, tired, boring and they do nothing to differentiate candidates since so many people put the same hackneyed phrases on their resumes. In addition, they lack authenticity and rob the reader of the chance to truly understand the value the candidate can bring to the organization. If you are an entry-level job seeker or career changer, consider using a category labeled Career Target or Career Focus instead. This strategy allows you to target a particular job function or industry without using a stale and useless objective.

CAREER FOCUS: SUBSTITUTE TEACHER, GRADES 1-6

Current Childhood Education Master's degree candidate with theoretical and practical experience in elementary education. Proven ability to engage students, keep learners on task, manage diverse learning styles and present materials in a fun and creative way.

Previous experience managing operations for a small business.

6. Create a profile section.

Hiring managers tend to focus on the top third of the first page of the resume. They may only read on if your profile grasps their attention quickly. Communicate your value-add in the profile section. List powerful and consistent examples of how you help the companies you support make money, save money, save time, grow the business and maintain the business. Showcase big picture examples of how you do things smarter, faster and more efficiently.

Test the quality of your profile by asking yourself, if the profile is the only section of the resume the hiring authority reads, is it enough to wow your audience and sell your candidacy?

RETAIL SENIOR EXECUTIVE

Turnaround Expert ▪ Brand Vision and Transformation ▪ Global Retailers

- *General Manager/Division Head with experience managing all facets of the retail and wholesale environment.*
- *Adept at returning struggling retailers to profitability by streamlining processes, meticulously monitoring customer pulse and building pay-for-performance teams.*
- *Success reinventing product lines, expanding brand reach and tapping into new lucrative revenue streams.*
- *Collaborative business partner with track record for fostering relationships with third-party retailers, corporations, vendors and employees to deliver sustainable ROI and gain new market share.*

7. List key skills.

One of the first things hiring managers will be looking for is a sense of if you have the skill set necessary to do the job. Your areas of expertise should be displayed prominently early on in the resume. Try to use the keywords and phrases that are important to your job function and industry. If you are not sure of what the appropriate keywords are, look for consistent wording and phrases on job postings for positions in your field to better align your qualifications with potential job specifications.

**SENIOR LEVEL MERCHANDISING EXECUTIVE
CORE COMPETENCIES**

- Apparel Merchandising
- Channel and Brand Management
- Merchandising Strategy
- Production/SKU Planning
- Competitor/Market Analysis
- Cross Functional Team Building
- Purchasing Negotiations
- Costing
- Budgeting
- Account Relationship Management
- Color and Trend Forecasting
- Staff Development
- Product Development/Launch
- International Licensing Relations
- Vendor Sourcing/Supplier Relations
- Product Standardization
- Inventory Management
- Leadership and Mentoring

8. Include brief descriptions of the companies you have worked for.

For each organization you were part of, include information on the company including the industry the company represents, size, and revenues if publicly-held. The company description is particularly important if you have worked for new, small, or lesser-known firms. Refer to the company's website and "about us" page to secure additional data for your description.

Jersey City Legal Aid, Inc., Jersey City, NJ, 2006 to 2008

30-person non-profit law firm providing civil legal assistance to low-income clients.

9. List operating budgets, account size and staff size.

Include information on budget and staff size to help your reader gain a better understanding of the scope of your responsibilities.

Manage \$50M division with 300+ employees in 45 retail locations across the U.S.

10. Minimize descriptions of job tasks.

While it's important to convey a brief overview of job tasks, this information does little to differentiate candidates. Many candidates have experience doing similar job tasks. What makes them unique and memorable is the accomplishment within the task. Spend no more than three-six lines discussing the job tasks associated with

each position and save space for more valuable accomplishment-focused information. Place the overview of your role directly after your job title and create a concise description in paragraph form to differentiate the job description from the accomplishments to follow.

Acted as business liaison and technology specialist to develop leading-edge efficiencies into existing trade support systems. Supported entire team of traders and trade support specialists in a time-sensitive, faced-paced environment.

11. Maximize use of accomplishments.

Employers are interested in reading about your accomplishments. Past accomplishments are a better predictor of success than a discussion of job tasks. Accomplishment statements are those that clearly indicate how you help the companies you support make money, save money, save time, grow the business and maintain the business. Discuss the impact of your actions by describing the before and after picture within the organization and showcasing how you improved a process or introduced a new strategy.

Have you met or exceeded quotas or department expectations? Have you completed projects on time or ahead of schedule? On budget or under budget? What are you known for and what do you do better or differently than your predecessors or peers? Can you showcase examples of being a strategist, thought leader, or evangelist for a product or service?

Scrutinize every accomplishment statement and recognize that they are the engine driving the resume. Choose each statement carefully and audit its value towards defining your overall brand. Here are some examples of accomplishment statements.

Make Money – Accelerated profit margins by 30% with projected sales of \$400M by launching seven innovative insurance and POS products in just three years.

Save Money – Cut expenses incurred by temporary staffing agencies by \$5M; consolidated vendor list by 60%.

Save Time – Eliminated over 30 administrative hours weekly by authoring and designing 50-page web-application interface that standardized and automated responses to general support desk inquiries regarding the group's flagship product.

Improve a Process – Streamlined 10,000-user email list to improve distribution and accuracy of mailings significantly.

Reverse an Existing Problem – **Reduced product imperfections by 500%** by implementing more stringent controls to improve fabric and product quality; achieved ISO 9002 status.

Be First to Market – **Pioneered CarpetSafe® exclusive insurance product for ABC Carpets** offering replacement carpet if original is damaged through general wear and tear or staining.

Build Relationships/Brand Identity – **Garnered \$13,000 in grant and donation money** and free publicity for *Furnish Coop* by forging partnership with Corcoran Realtors.

Grow the Business – **Boosted revenues for online watch distributor from under performing \$12M to over \$30M**, with average markup of 18% vs. previous 3%, well above comparative distributor margins.

Attract New Business – **Grew female customer base from 15% to 60%** by repositioning merchandising strategy and offering high margin apparel, home, health and beauty products.

Maintain Existing Business – **Reversed strained relationship with \$22B supranational client**; renewed three-year contract despite internal and external expectations that account was unsalvageable and secured an additional \$4B in business.

12. Begin accomplishment statements with powerful action verbs.

Maximize the use of strong verbs to show increases, decreases and general business improvements. Minimize or eliminate the use of weaker verbs such as "responsible for" and coordinated. To convey growth, try verbs like propelled, accelerated, rocketed, increased, drove, augmented, added, maximized and optimized. To prove a positive decrease, include verbs such as reduced, minimized, trimmed, slashed and cut. Strive for diversity in your word choices to elevate the quality of the document and keep the reader's attention.

13. Quantify accomplishments.

Use dollars, percentages and numbers to quantify your accomplishments and validate achievements. Consider the information being presented and decide which number is the most powerful one you can convey. For example, if you worked for a not-for-profit and raised \$5,000 more in donations from one year to the next, this dollar figure alone might not be very impressive. But if the \$5,000 represents a 75% increase over what was raised the previous year, the 75% is a more compelling figure than the \$5,000. If you worked for a privately-held firm and it is inappropriate to reveal revenues, prove impact by discussing percent changes.

Cut \$2.8M off recruiting costs in just one year by launching New York City metro area centralized recruiting center tasked with recruiting and training over 3,800; center exceeded 2007 forecast by three quarters of a million dollars.

14. Focus on past 10-15 years of employment.

Generally, hiring authorities are more interested in recent accomplishments than those achieved over a decade ago. Weight information on your documents toward the past 10-15 years and minimize the amount of space dedicated to earlier work experience. The exception to this suggestion is when your most recent accomplishments are not your most impressive ones or where your goal is to focus on accomplishments achieved earlier in your career. In this case, stick with the abbreviated chronology and demonstrate your value add by presenting competency categories in the order that is most relevant to your career target.

15. List appropriate hobbies.

Only include hobbies when they are relevant to your job search or in synch with your target audience. For example, an IT technician might mention his knack for fixing up old cars and an event planner might mention her involvement in community theater. Hobbies can also be used effectively to counter potential age bias. For example, the over-50 candidate might mention that she is a marathon runner or an avid equestrian to imply overall stamina, health and fitness and dissuade any bias that as an older worker the candidate lacks the necessary energy to do the job.

16. Include appropriate volunteer experience.

Again, include what is relevant and discuss the competencies gained from the volunteer experience that elevate your candidacy. For example, a career changer seeking an entree into the health care field might mention volunteer work done in a hospital or a technology professional might mention volunteer work he does teaching computer skills to disadvantaged youths.

17. List relevant professional affiliations.

Include relevant and recent professional affiliations and make special mention of any leadership roles held within these organizations. Showcase examples of how you moved these organizations forward to help promote membership, resources and the profession overall.

About the Author: Barbara Safani



Barbara Safani, owner of Career Solvers, (www.careersolvers.com) has 15 years of experience in career management, recruiting, and executive coaching. Barbara partners with both Fortune 100 companies and individuals to deliver targeted programs focusing on resume development, job search strategies, networking, interviewing, salary negotiation skills, and online identity management. She is a six-time winner in the TORI (Toast of the Resume Industry) awards competition sponsored by Career Directors International and author of *Happy About My Resume: 50 Tips for Building a Better Document to Secure a Brighter Future* (<http://happyabout.info/myresume.php>) and #JOBSEARCHtweet

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