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RESEARCH & INSIGHTS

Authors: Douglas Wanjala, Kim Winter

Demystifying Talent Management: What Do Employers Look For In a Resume / CV?

This is the third in a monthly series of articles (and vodcasts) providing insights into talent management, talent attraction, executive search, recruitment, talent development and career transition.

Your resume is a quintessential personal career record of your business life and a primary document of record when applying for your next role. Ensuring your resume is appropriately positioned and presented is essential to securing an interview for your next career role. So, what do employers tell us they look for in a resume?



The majority of the information required for a well-rounded professional resume may seem like common sense, however a resume is personal and everyone has their own methods and style of presentation. Notwithstanding the value of personalisation, it's

important to ensure your resume is targeted to align with each specific role so that critical information the employer seeks is included, and less relevant information, which may not be as important, is left out.

A recent LinkedIn poll we conducted showed that the majority of employers prefer a resume document of no more than two or three pages, hence careful consideration needs to be given to prioritising information that you want to convey in relation to the specific role you are applying for.

One of the key considerations is an accurate summary of employment experience, clearly identifying in chronological order, with the most recent positions you have held along with the employing organization, and the dates by month and year, you were employed. It is vital to include the months to avoid any confusion around length of time in each role throughout a 12-month period.



From a formatting and layout perspective, the first page of the resume should contain as much relevant information as possible relating to most recent job or perhaps two. Resumes should utilize as much of the width of the page as possible without looking cramped, commencing information 1/3 across the page wastes valuable space.

A brief summary of employer organisations and the URL / website is essential and saves time for the person reading the resume. We process several hundred job applicant resumes each week and find that less than 25% of these documents contain optimized, well aligned, sensible information in an easy-to read format.

A recent survey of our corporate customers indicated that their Human Resource Partners / Directors / Managers and Line Managers favoured a brief summary of responsibilities and achievements in hot-point form for each role held. The inclusion of key achievements, KPIs, tasks and commercial outcomes is critical. Conversely, long, verbose, highly detailed, sentence form information tends to take up valuable space, lacks emphasis, can be harder to read and can be overlooked by the reader if they are skim reading for key words.

Employers tell us they are particularly interested in evidence of outstanding achievements, key indicators of high-performance outcomes from a business and personal perspective and insight into specific strengths that are related to the particular role you are applying for.

Photographs on resumes is a key issue. Photos are common and preferred in in some counties but absolutely against protocols in others. The variations tend to be reflective of cultural and social customs and laws regarding privacy and discrimination legislation.

Formal qualifications are important and should always be included, however, these should only be relevant to the role applied for, large volumes of unrelated qualifications and certifications can take up valuable space and diminish the focus on targeted information that should be included in the resume.



Employers indicate they are keen to see career progression so where you have been employed in the same organisation in various roles, highlighting aspects of progression is vital to overcome concerns of career stagnation and or lack of aspiration within a long-term tenure with one organisation.

A well-rounded resume should include a section on personal background, indicators of values, personality, and behavioural traits, these are valuable characteristics and important in highlighting the multi-dimensional nature of your background. Many organisations look for a history of activities such as volunteering, community service, team sport participation, player, coach, and affiliation with organisations that demonstrate balance and/or diversity.

Key words are important, with many employers utilizing resume digital screening technology, so including key words that are mentioned in the position description and that accurately and truthfully reflects alignment, should be encompassed in the resume.

Finally, a recent survey we conducted showed that over 60% of employers compare an emailed or hard copy resume to the applicant's online LinkedIn profile to check on details and ensure alignment between both records.

Online / LinkedIn profiles should be more condensed, our next article in this series will discuss online / LinkedIn profiles and explore the many ways of optimizing your online window to the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Douglas Wanjala
Founder
The Bold CV Kenya

Douglas is the Founder and Chief Resume Writer at The Bold Career View Kenya (The Bold CV), where he leverages his expertise in Career Development to provide career guidance to professionals and executive level leaders globally. He is a Professional Branding Authority as recognized by Randstad RiseSmart Inc and holds a Bachelor's Degree in Economics from JKUAT, Kenya. Douglas is a Freelance Branding Expert at Randstad RiseSmart and engages with JstWork Recruitment & Careers as an Executive Resume and LinkedIn Consultant. To date, Douglas has helped hundreds of individuals across 15 countries land their dream jobs and still counting. He is passionate about equipping job seekers with the mindsets and boldness they require to excel. He enjoys empowering professionals through mentorship, coaching & training.

Contact the author:

e: theboldcvkenya@gmail.com

Phone: +971 4 361 6275

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info@LogisticsExecutive.com | www.LogisticsExecutive.com

