



# The 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY Resume

*ADVICE ON DESIGNING A RESUME WITH TODAY'S  
ELECTRONIC STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL EQUIPMENT IN MIND.*

Now don't laugh, but there was a time way back in the dark days before mankind knew any better...say about 1995...when a resume existed merely as a sheet or two of paper containing a text summary of an individual's employment and academic history. And get this: hiring managers actually had to read every resume they received! How did anything ever get done in those days? Well, those times have gone the way of the dodo bird.

## **New Technology and the Resume**

In today's frantic job market, resume reading and retrieval has evolved as a result of new technology. Today, hundreds of large (and increasingly smaller) organizations are using text-searching or artificial

intelligence software to track and review job applicant resumes. These sophisticated software systems use optical scanners to input the data and then search for specific qualifications that match a job description. Companies like Disney, Sony, IBM, Microsoft, and Coca-Cola, for example, routinely depend on these advanced systems to screen job prospects. In addition to the increased use of optical scanning technology to review incoming resumes, more and more job seekers and employers are also coming to rely on e-mail as a viable and effective method for sending and receiving job qualifications.

These technological advances have, in many respects, made it easier for a job seeker to cast a wide and efficient net in pursuit of that perfect job – allowing a resume to do its lofty work in cyberspace 24-7. However, ineffective use of the increasingly important electronic resume conventions can get a qualified applicant's carefully compiled work and academic history summarily jettisoned, at light speed, into the electronic trash heap. But by paying attention to a few basic caveats, the 21<sup>st</sup> century job hunter can easily skirt the potential pitfalls of electronic resumes, and successfully use the new technologies to his or her best possible advantage.

## **Lesson Number One**

First and foremost, a resume, electronic or otherwise, is intended to articulate in the most compelling way possible, the remarkable array of knowledge, skills, and experience possessed by the job seeker. Your resume is meant to differentiate you, the eminently qualified and unabashedly superior applicant, from the many unwashed and bumbling pretenders who are also competing for the same position. In other words, your resume is your story, presented in an accurate but flattering light. It's a rare opportunity to sing your own praises and to let a prospective employer understand why he or she would be lucky to have you on the team. In this sense, all resumes, digital or analog, share the same basic objective.

## Format, Content, and The Electronic Resume

What differentiates the traditional, hard copy resume from an effective electronic version lies less in content and more in style and format. Getting through the electronic thresholds of today's high-tech organizations requires creating a resume that will be read and interpreted by, or at the very least, transmitted by a machine. It's a new game now, and the rules have changed.

Many of the long-accepted guidelines for laying out an effective traditional type of resume no longer apply. Today's electronic resume may not encounter an actual set of human eyes until well into the applicant screening process. According to a *U.S. News & World* report, of the more than 1,000 unsolicited resumes most Fortune 500 companies receive each day, at least 80% are quickly scanned and discarded. It's fair to assume that a significant number of those resumes are tossed for reasons that have little or nothing to do with the actual qualifications of the applicant. If the scanner can't read it, or the software fails to identify key words it's seeking, a resume is likely to get kicked to the cybercurb, and the poor job applicant will probably never know what happened.

### OCR and Key Words

Organizations using optical character recognition (OCR) technology rely upon a computer's ability to "read" each resume, comparing information contained in resumes with a database containing desired skills, aptitudes, work history, educational requirements, and so on. These programs convert a resume into a computer file and then subject it to a detailed analysis, focusing on critical requirements previously identified by the employer. To do this, the software looks for key words and phrases

specific and pertinent to the position being filled. Such key words relate to the following:

- Job titles
- Tasks performed
- Years of work experience
- Certifications or competencies (e.g., JAVA, Microsoft network, Excel)
- School names
- Academic degrees

The ability to use key words effectively means using concrete language when describing job qualifications. While broad or general language

often worked pretty well on the analog resume of yore, today's electronic version demands more concrete and specific words. The computer may not be interested in a resume that describes prior work experience as "...responsible for coordinating a wide range of marketing functions", whereas the

scanning software might instead select an applicant who describes previous work having "...developed a regional marketing program for new product distribution". Today, more than ever before, it's all in how you say it.

IT'S A NEW GAME NOW,  
AND THE RULES HAVE  
CHANGED.



## Be Complete

Traditionally, being concise was considered a virtue in resumes, since HR managers and personnel directors had to read each one that came in. The more to the point, the better. Job seekers were usually advised to try to keep their resumes to about a page, when possible.

Today, scanning technology automates much of the initial work of screening incoming resumes. With an electronic document, the emphasis shifts from brevity to breadth. The applicant should include any key words that are likely to connect the resume to the desired position. That means that the scannable resume may comfortably extend to multiple pages without any concern about being long-winded. The computer doesn't mind.

## Final Thoughts

Does sending out a scannable or an electronic resume eliminate the need for the traditional hard copy? Not at all. Most recruiters strongly urge applicants to always have a clean, crisp paper copy of their resume on hand that they can bring with them to an interview. In that sense, some things never change.

The electronic revolution has forced job seekers to make substantial adjustments in the way they pursue employment. But that's not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, those changes often work to the advantage of individuals who can effectively adapt their job hunting strategies to the demands of the new millennium.

## SOME ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR OPTICALLY SCANNED RESUMES

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**Here are several other things to keep in mind when preparing a resume that's likely to be optically scanned:**

- Use only white or light-colored 8 ½ x 11 paper printed on one side only.
- Don't fold or staple.
- Provide laser or high quality jet-type originals if possible. Typed originals are OK. Avoid dot matrix or photocopies.
- Use standard fonts such as Arial, Courier, Helvetica, Futura, Optima, Univers, or Times in sizes no smaller than 11 or no larger than 14.
- Avoid two-column, newspaper-style formatting.
- Use boldface or all capital letters for section headings (as long as the letters don't touch one another).
- Do not use fancy formats such as shading, boxes, underlining, or graphics.
- If using industry specific acronyms, also spell out the words they represent.
- Create E-mail resumes as text files only (such as ASCII).