Crafting an Executive Resume That Will Get Noticed

When's the last time you revamped your resume? As an executive, this is an often-ignored exercise—but it shouldn't be. Charlene Bergman explains the importance of having a polished resume and offers tips that will make yours stand out.

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Executive recruitment has witnessed significant changes in recent decades, with heightened competition for positions, more sophisticated search processes, and faster executive turnover. For recruiters, the increased activity can limit the time available to review each candidate. All of this puts the onus on you, the executive, to state your qualifications succinctly, match your skills to the job, and at the same time distinguish yourself from competitors—not a simple task.

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Despite these changes and challenges, a candidate's resume remains the vehicle by which most job applicants are assessed. In fact, a great resume is often a prerequisite to the first interview. But the requirements of the resume have also changed. For those whose careers have advanced through internal promotion or personal networks, or you simply haven't looked for a new role for some time, resume writing skills may have taken a back seat. That said, here are some simple guidelines to get you on track, and to stand out from the many other resumes that hit recruiters' desks.

The professional profile section is key

The professional profile at the top of the first page is the most important part of the resume. The Muse reports that recruiters will spend an average of about 6 seconds on a resume, which means most won't even read past this section if it doesn't pique their interest. Think of it as your *value proposition*, in other words, what makes you stand out from your peers?

The focus of this professional profile has also shifted. Previously it was simply an elevator pitch highlighting your career ambitions. Today, it should showcase your core competencies (including soft skills), experience, and qualifications at a high level, establishing the uniqueness and excellence the individual will bring to an organization. This will attract the recruiter to read on.

Keep the resume clean and crisp. Choose point form over paragraphs

Don't be afraid to list your qualifications or accomplishments in point form to make them punchier. Make sure you use a consistent structure in your phrasing. For example, start each bullet point with a verb, such as "Drove sales by...", "Led a team of...", "Expanded manufacturing in..."

There are no strict guidelines around the length of your resume. There's nothing verbose about a three-page resume for a more seasoned executive, particularly if it's filled with relevant skills experiences and achievements. Resumes become too wordy with the use of paragraphs or story formats that are cumbersome to read and overwhelming for recruiters or hiring managers. Trim excess words and fluff and focus on the specifics—both qualitative and quantitative.

Customize and use keywords

The position you seek is likely to have specific descriptors, which might even appear in a job posting. Use this to your advantage, mirroring the same terms to portray your qualifications. Not only will recruiters focus on these terms, but larger employers may even use applicant tracking systems that scan resumes looking specifically for these keywords.

Don't confuse keywords with buzzwords, which can be a real turnoff to reviewers. No one will be impressed that you're a proactive, results-oriented team player who thinks outside the box.

Lastly, never rely on your cover letter to customize your qualifications for the position sought. Often, the recruiter will go directly to the resume and won't read the cover letter at all.

Focus on skills and achievements, rather than on past duties and responsibilities

Employers are more interested in what you can do in the new position than in the detail of former duties. Concentrate more on talents and accomplishments than on past responsibilities. In describing your achievements, use verbs that imply action, including *implemented*, *improved,* and *attained*. Wherever possible, use quantifiable measures such as, "increased export sales by 65% in the 2018 fiscal year, reduced DSO by x days, increased employee engagement by x percentage YOY." Executives can have careers that span several decades. Typically, experience that goes back more than 15 years will not be relevant—especially if there has been a variety of roles during that period. Therefore, highlight your most recent experience.

Consider an executive bio for networking

Your job search should include lots of face-to-face networking opportunities such as coffees, lunches, and receptions that are outside the formal recruiting process. These provide a great opportunity to offer your contacts or new people you meet a brief synopsis of your competencies and achievements. Make sure your one-page bio includes the personal profile section of your resume, bullet points or a paragraph of your achievements, and a listing of the companies or roles you have held.

And finally, mind the details

Unfortunately, a candidate's resume can be summarily rejected, no matter how well it is written or how carefully you matched it to the role. Proofread repeatedly for typos, diction, and grammar. Preferably, have someone—possibly a professional writer or editor—review your resume for form and content. The resume is an opportunity to showcase your expertise and experiences, and mistakes won't speak well to your day-to-day attention to detail.

In most cases, your resume will be the first touch-point with a prospective employer. Taking the time and care to ensure it's captivating, succinct, and relevant will go a long way—increasing the odds of your resume standing out and landing at the top of the pile.

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