

## USING ELECTRONIC RESUMES IN THE JOB SEARCH

By Dr. Lillian H. Chaney and Dr. Catherine G. Green

The widespread use of technology has changed recruiting practices of many businesses. One change is the increased acceptance of electronic resumes. Electronic resumes, sometimes referred to as scannable resumes, are formatted so that they may be scanned by computer or transmitted via electronic mail. Because today's job seekers are very knowledgeable about computers and use them regularly as a communication and research tool, this trend toward increased employer acceptance of electronic resumes provides applicants with an efficient process for expanding and expediting the job search.

Estimates of the extent to which companies are accepting electronic resumes vary. Microsoft reported in 1999 that half of the resumes they received were sent electronically. In a more recent study of 46 companies of various sizes, ranging from fewer than 25 employees to over 1,000, 85% of employers surveyed reported that they now accept electronic resumes. With projections that online recruiting is expected to grow exponentially in the next few years, students will need to update their job search skills to keep up with the changing job market of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A good place to start the updating process is the preparation of an electronic resume. Preparing an electronic resume, however, does not mean that the traditional, fully formatted resume is passe. Traditional resumes continue to play a significant role in the employment process. Job seekers will, therefore, want to have an attractively formatted hard copy of their resume for the interview and for employers who request a conventional resume.

### **Advantages of Electronic Resumes**

Many employers are realizing the advantages of investing in resume-scanning systems. One advantage is the speed with which employers are able to identify potential employees who have qualifications needed for the open positions. Another advantage is the cost savings of being able to screen job applicants electronically rather than manually. By using the keyword search, the employer can quickly eliminate candidates who lack the job qualifications. Rather than placing costly advertisements in publications, employers are able to let the resume-scanning system do most of the work. Recruiters and hiring officials are aware of the time and effort saved by using technology in this important area of employment recruitment and selection.

Job seekers also recognize the advantages of using electronic resumes. One decided advantage is the widespread exposure to numerous prospective employers through Websites of companies and professional associations, through bulletin board services, and through resume banks. Many of these openings are never advertised in the traditional, more costly media. This low-cost exposure is impossible with a single resume. The fact that the resume remains in the database for some time is advantageous as it gives the applicant more options for job openings all over the country; this advantage is especially helpful for persons wishing to relocate. Job seekers also appreciate the convenience of having on-line services and the Internet available to them 24 hours a day. Another advantage is the objective nature of the initial screening. The computer does not care if the job seeker is male or female, young or old, or attractive or unattractive. In addition, computer skills are essential for many jobs; and sending one's resume electronically demonstrates a knowledge of technology that is viewed positively

by many employers. Some job seekers also prefer sending their resumes electronically because of the costs associated with printing and mailing resumes.

### **Guidelines for Preparing Electronic Resumes**

The impact of the new technologies on the job search process is readily apparent. In addition to increased communication between employers and prospective employees via electronic mail, job seekers are accessing corporate Web sites and Internet job boards, such as E-span, Monster Board, and Job Trak. To use the technology effectively, job hunters must have a knowledge of the correct guidelines for preparing electronic resumes.

Some general guidelines include the following:

- Most sections on the electronic resume are the same as those for the traditional resume. However, some sections, such as Special Interests and References, are not typically found on electronic resumes.
- Detailed information on employment beyond the last ten years should be omitted since more concise job information is preferred.
- The length of the resume should be kept to one or two pages, with the candidate's name at the top of each page. (In a recent study of leading CPA firms, respondents showed a preference for two-page resumes although they stated a preference for one-page resumes).

- The resume, which may be created using any word processing software, should be saved as an ASCII text file to accommodate the software used for scanning and retrieval.
- When a hard copy is mailed for scanning, the resume should be printed in black ink on standard 8 1/2- by 11-inch white, off-white, or light gray paper, printed on only one side, and mailed flat in an envelope with no stapling or paper clips.
- A section labeled Keyword Summary should be placed after the applicant's name and address. This list of keywords should be nouns and noun phrases rather than verbs that are recommended for traditional resumes. For example, the job title of Project Coordinator, rather than Coordinated Project, would be used. The Keyword Summary section, which is limited to 50 words, should include such information as degrees and university granting the degrees, major, certifications, special skills, and employment history, including job titles and duties performed. Concrete descriptions, such as C C++, and Java, should be used for computer language skills.
- Sending the first draft of the electronic resume to a friend (or to oneself) is recommended to confirm that the information scans accurately.

Some typographical embellishments often used in formatting traditional resumes can cause difficulties in scanning. To minimize scanning difficulties, these guidelines should be followed:

- Standard typefaces, such as Courier and Helvetica, should be used; font size of 10 to 14 points is recommended.

- The width of the page should be set to read a maximum of 60 characters across.
- The applicant's name and address should be centered at the top of the resume; the font size for the name should not exceed 20 points.
- All capital letters and/or boldface is recommended for section headings; italics and underlining should be avoided. While the newer optical character recognition software can read italics, italicized information is not as readable as other typeface styles.
- Abbreviations should be used judiciously; common abbreviations for degrees and certifications (BS, MBA, CPA) and state names are read by most resume-scanning systems. Acronyms commonly used in certain professions, such as A/R and A/P on an accountant's resume, are usually accepted.
- The space bar, rather than tabs, is used where spaces or indentions are desired.
- Asterisks (\*) or plus signs (+) are preferable to bullets for highlighting key points. While round, solid bullets will usually scan, hollow or unusually shaped bullets will not.
- Vertical lines, boxes and shading should be avoided; few horizontal lines should be used.

Following these guidelines will give job seekers an edge in competing for positions in today's technological age. The time spent preparing a correctly formatted electronic resume can yield big returns in terms of low-cost access to expanded job opportunities. Job seekers need to avail themselves of every opportunity to find their niche in corporate America.

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