

Does Your Résumé Demand Attention?

Three keys for advertising yourself in a way that will get your foot in the door

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By [Jesse Frederick](#)

There's no hiding from it: The job market is pretty ugly. The sluggish economy is forcing companies nationwide, even worldwide, to lay off staff members spanning a wide range of technical and professional backgrounds. It's a hirer's market, and job seekers are finding it hard to nab a specific job position even when it aligns with their experience and skills.

Nonetheless, there are a few essential steps you can take to get ahead in your job search—and get to the table for that job interview.

First, what is the purpose of a résumé? Here's a hint: Its purpose is *not* to get you a job. Nor is it to catalog your career history, job duties and education—or to document your skills, qualifications and proficiencies.

Its real goal is to *get your foot in the door*. Your résumé is an introductory sales letter that shows the hirer that you warrant a person-to-person discussion about this job position.

1. Target Your Position

Many seeking a job in today's economy are bordering on desperation. When they sit down to write a résumé too many think, *I just want a job—any job—so I'll make the résumé general enough to cover a wide range of positions in my field*. Some get frantic and ditch even limiting their résumé to a specific industry—randomly aiming their résumé like a sawed-off shotgun toward a vague, wide range of fields.

This is not the tactic to take when you write your résumé—no matter how desperate your job search may be. In fact, the more desperate you actually are, the better off you will be if you apply this key.

It is a challenge to get a job interview in today's glum job market. However, if you take a *rifle approach* (instead of that sawed-off shotgun approach)—your hunt will be much more effective—guaranteed.

Pick your goal first. Do some detailed, involved, diligent research. Choose your industry, then *narrow it down even more* and select *your position* within that industry. Then, narrow it down to even the specific company (or companies) you want to work for the most that has openings for the job you have selected.

Never forget, you are in charge of your job search. Take charge and be proactive. Once you've pinpointed the industry, position and companies you would most enjoy (and be skilled and beneficial) working within, target your résumé specifically toward that position. Make the language and verbiage of the résumé identify and relate well with the language that company uses on its website or in its literature. Include industry- and position-related keywords throughout. Also, submit a cover letter with the résumé that addresses the company and hiring decision-maker even more directly.

Scour job advertisements on the Internet, in newspapers or on job boards—and tailor your résumé toward any specific position that interests you directly. With each different position, company and/or advertisement, tweak your résumé and cover letter accordingly.

Remember, the general rule when effectively applying this point of picking your position is *get as specific and detailed as possible in your résumé*.

2. Focus on Achievements

The ammo for your résumé is your achievements: your accomplishments and highlights on the job. Achievements are actions you took or results you created which were positive for your company. These career successes you and/or your employer(s) are confident and proud of can include:

- Customer satisfaction scores
- Company awards and recognitions
- Sales revenue growth
- Process efficiency improvements
- Company savings plans and implementations
- Business expansion strategies
- Vendor/client negotiations
- Client testimonials

Did you save your company thousands of dollars by finding a new supplier? Did you work five years without a work-related accident? Did you exceed your sales targets five quarters in a row? These are facts that will help you sell your skills to the hiring decision-maker.

As you highlight these achievements on your résumé, include metrics if at all possible: exact dollar figures, quantities, percentages, etc. Eyes are often drawn to numbers, dollar signs and percentages. They

add details, proof and “beef” to your highlights, making them more objective and less subjective. Here are some examples of highlights that may be included on various résumés, with metrics included:

- Improved production efficiencies by 25% within a high-pressure factory environment.
- Negotiated a lucrative business deal between company and client worth \$1.5 million.
- Increased sales within department by 110%.
- Cut labor costs by \$25,000.
- Lowered production costs by \$200,000.
- Reduced product turnover by 15,000 units per month.
- Recipient of Salesman of the Quarter company award for closing the most sales accounts in the first quarter of 2010.

The most common rebuttal I hear about including job achievements on a résumé is, *I don't have any*. But in almost all cases, that simply is not true. Having written and edited thousands of résumés covering a wide range of industries, backgrounds, skills and experience, I can say that the vast majority of people who have applied themselves diligently have had a number of accomplishments and career highlights. From recent high school graduates to elementary school teachers, lawyers to medical doctors, office managers to administrative assistants, engineers to construction workers—it *isn't* a matter of not having achievements, it's a matter of recognizing them.

For example, a recent high school graduate may have been involved in a school fundraiser for a few years. If he or she is applying for anything related to sales, customer service or marketing, there should be at least a couple achievements to draw from (example: “Expanded fundraising sales by 22% between 2009 and 2010”).

A medical doctor who has written medical journal publications, an administrative assistant who could have completed 100 percent of his or her office projects within both quality and deadline parameters, a construction worker who has met his deadlines—all of these workers have had numerous achievements. Feel free to think outside the box when determining and including achievements within your résumé.

Also, be sure to set your achievements apart from the rest of the text in your résumé (with spacing, bullet points, or other formatting). Although the metrics will stand out, you want to draw attention to these achievements even more. Secondly, only include your top career highlights (a maximum of two to three per job position, as a rule). They are *highlights* after all.

3. Two Sets of Eyes Are Better Than One

The final key to résumé success cannot be overemphasized. As often as I hear job seekers explain that they have read over their résumés before distributing them, I hear just as many hirers and employers complain about constantly finding résumés that have multiple grammatical, spelling or various other language usage errors. In fact, in a survey I took a few years ago, scores of hirers, HR managers, employers and recruiters unanimously proclaimed that—even with automatic spell-check embedded in our word processors—this was still the most common problem they had with résumés! And every one of them dismally said they *never* have hired anyone with such a résumé.

So do yourself a favor before sending out your résumé to your potential employer: *Review it*. And then ask someone who knows the English language and writing rules even better than you do to review it as well. This point alone—if applied—will in most cases bring an interview or two!

The next time you find your job-search door seemingly slammed and locked shut—and when your résumé just doesn't seem to be doing its job of getting you phone calls or e-mails from employers—apply these keys, and watch the door swing open with interview opportunities galore waiting on the other side.