

TIPS FOR CREATING A RESUME THAT DOWNPLAYS JOB HOPPING



If you've held several jobs over a short period, and don't explain the changes on your resume, you might look like a "job hopper" to recruiters and hiring managers.

Although job hopping is more acceptable than it was a decade ago, it can still raise concerns with recruiters. Tom Lovett, president and senior partner of Lovett and Lovett Executive Search in Dayton, Ohio, says job hopping may be a sign of poor interpersonal skills and lack of performance.

"Companies are not interested in wasting their time or money professionally developing a candidate that has not had a successful career track," says Mr. Lovett.

Define yourself in a summary statement.

Having a tailored summary statement at the top of your resume is an opportunity to guide the recruiter through the document and influence how they interpret your job changes.

First outline the collective number of years of experience in your field in a sentence such as, "Eight-plus years marketing experience with expertise in database, planning and writing."

"The eight years feels cohesive even though it might have been with five different companies," says Karen Schaffer, a career consultant in Halifax, Nova Scotia and author of "The Complete Book of Resumes: Simple Steps for Writing a Powerful Resume."

According to a study done by Human Resource Services Inc., a human-resources management-consulting firm in Milwaukee, candidates who averaged less than three years per job during their first 10 years were 65% more likely to leave their next job within three years. Use the summary statement to allay the concern that you may also leave prematurely by including a phrase like "seeking a long-term role in," says Mark Bartz, partner of ExeCareers Inc., a career-advancement company in Tampa, Fla.

1. Include a summary of previous employment.

Avoid a bullet list of jobs on your resume by fleshing out your three or four most recent positions and creating a summary of previous employment section for prior jobs.

Provide a collective start and end date for the previous employment section, instead of start and end dates for each job, says Mr. Bartz. "The eye only sees one date and it reduces the sense of job hopping," he says. List the company and title for each position followed by one or two sentences about your role.

2. Create coherence between hops.

If you choose to forego a summary of previous employment, it's important for your job changes to tell a story.

You may have to leave out positions that don't relate to the direction you're going in or are "too distracting," says Marci Alboher, author of "One Person/Multiple Careers: A New Model for Work/Life Success." If you've had jobs across different industries, focus on the connections between them, she says.

Try to show progression and that you've taken on increasing levels of responsibility with each jump. Mr. Lovett says forward-moving jumps are considered more favorable than lateral or backward jumps.

3. Indicate involuntary hops.

Not all job hops are viewed negatively. If your position changed as a result of a merger or acquisition or you are a contract worker, explain it on your resume.

"Downsizing, mergers and acquisitions are so common these days and it may look like people have job hopped and in many cases it's not their choice," says Taunee Besson, president of Career Dimensions, a career-planning firm in Dallas. "They were just in the wrong place at the wrong time."

If your employer underwent a merger or acquisition, next to the company's current name, in brackets write "formerly ABC Company" with the company's previous name, says Ms. Schaffer.

If you were a contract worker indicate that in your job titles, Ms. Besson says.

4. Use dates to your advantage.

Removing months when you date each position can give the illusion that you worked in positions longer than you have. For instance, if you list that you worked with a company from December 2005 to February 2006, a recruiter will know you had a three-month stint. Listing 2005-2006 next to a position will imply a longer duration, says Mr. Bartz. Using years also allows you to leave out short stints that may raise eyebrows.

Divert attention to your skills rather than your tenure by listing dates on the right side of your resume instead of the left, says Ms. Besson.

5. Use a hybrid resume.

If a traditional chronological resume doesn't receive positive feedback or looks cluttered, try a hybrid resume where your work history is secondary to your skills. The hybrid resume takes the skill set feature from the functional resume and uses a chronological history toward the end of the resume, says Ms. Besson.

Under your heading and summary statement, choose four or five responsibilities that you have excelled in and list accomplishments from your past positions relating to those responsibilities. Ms. Shaffer recommends listing the company where you achieved each accomplishment in brackets at the end of each bullet point.

Under the list of responsibilities, create a section listing each employer, title and start and end dates in reverse chronological order, says Ms. Besson.

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