

Writing the killer CV

Introduction

The market is no longer what it used to be, and sadly looks like it is unlikely to return to the good ole days! The dotcom bubble burst, and many companies have realised that simply investing in the latest buzzword compliant technology isn't actually providing much real business value. All that combined with the increasing popularity of overseas outsourcing. The result is lots of spare developers on the market and much more competition.

With the competition high and literally hundreds of developers going after the same jobs, it is important to get yourself to that all important interview. Thus, it is even more critical than ever that you have a good CV. This article gives advice on how to write **high impact targeted CVs**.

The method described in this article uses a high impact approach to directly target each position being applied for.

If you are new to writing CVs for the contract market then you might find it useful to read our [introduction to effective CV writing for contractors](#).

Let's start by considering the CV filtering process, and use that as motivation to write the killer CV.

Filtering CVs

Lets say there are 200 CV's on the employers desk for one position. (Granted, agents normally do most of the filtering work, but lets suppose they get sent 200 for the sake of this discussion). The list needs to get down to 10 that the employer is prepared to read fully and they've got one hour to do it in. Here's what they do:

Step 1 : The 5 second look at each CV.

These ones go in the bin:

- o Anything longer than 4 pages. Can't be bothered to read.
- o No profile or list of skills on the front page. Don't want to search for them.
- o CV is a big essay with sentences. No bullet points. Too much hassle to read.

Okay, how many are left? Lets say the answer is 100. What's next?

Step 2 : Do a quick 10 second scan of each front page.

These go in the bin:

- o Profile and skills on front page **does not** really match requirement.

Okay, they are now down to 40.

Step 3: Time to build a 'potentials' pile.

These stay in:

- o Profile and skills on front page exactly match requirements.

There are now 10 CV's left and the employer will now look beyond the first page. These are the non technical qualities they will be looking for:

- o At least the last 6-12 months experience are closely related to the skills required.
- o The candidate has contracts that have been renewed. Lots of small contracts and no renewals can indicate trouble.
- o The candidate has worked for blue chip companies.
- o The candidate has a good academic background.

Any candidate meeting the criteria will potentially get interviewed. The interview stage then filters out the bladders and weirdo's !

What Is A CV For?

A CV is designed to get you an interview. Nothing else. It is a marketing document that markets you as a person. To write a good CV you need to get your trumpet out and start blowing it!

What is a High Impact Targeted CV?

During the filtering process you literally have 10 seconds to make an impact before you get put into the bin. Simple as that. If your front page does not scream at the reader 'I'm perfect for the job' then the CV has failed to do it's job.

A high impact targeted CV creates a high impact on the front page with the content tailored directly to target the position you are after.

Another article explains in depth the motivation behind [how to structure a high impact CV](#)

What NOT To Put On The Front Page

You only have one sheet of A4 to make that 10 second impact. So, if you start listing all your schooling you did 20 years ago and the fact that you love squash and have a clean driving licence that isn't really going to get you the job. Unless of course you are applying to be chauffeur driving squash playing teacher!

Here's a list of pointless information that wastes space on the front page:

- o A list of schools you attended with examinations, grades, addresses. Who cares! Demonstrate that you have the list of skills they are after.
- o A list of hobbies. Who cares! Tell them what you've achieved by applying the skills you have.
- o **Your work history.** Who cares! Tell them what benefits your clients have gained from your work. Why should they hire you?

Listing pointless information on the front page is part of [the problem of the generalised CV approach](#) which does not work as well as the high impact targeted method.

What SHOULD Be On The Front Page

You need to convey the message to the reader that you are precisely the person for the job. You need to show that you have the skills they are looking for **and** that you have demonstrated use of those skills for other clients **and** provided business value to those clients by utilising those skills.

There are essentially 4 sections to the front page of a high impact CV:

- o Your name, address and contact details. 3 lines.
- o A profile of you. 4 lines.
- o List of skills. 10 Bullet points.
- o List of achievements. 5 Bullet points.

Here's an example:

Joe Bloggs
Tel: 01234 5677889
Email: jobloggs@pleasespamme.com
10 Bloggs House, London, E12 4LP

PROFILE

Highly proficient **SENIOR ANALYST PROGRAMMER** with 10 years experience building Financial Risk applications for major blue chip clients using OO, C++, Oracle, UML, ADO . Full life cycle knowledge, including RUP, SSADM, and PRINCE methodologies. Now seeking next rewarding opportunity to make a successful impact in a customer focused team.

EXPERTISE

- o **C++** (8 years)
- o Oracle (version xyx, 9 years)
- o OO, **Rational Rose**, UML, OCL
- o Design Patterns, Design By Contract
- o SSADM, RAD, DSADM, XP, **SCRUM**
- o Meets tight and demanding deadlines under pressure
- o (and so on â€" you need about 10 bullet points here)

ACHIEVEMENTS

- o Successfully **re-engineered** existing risk analysis application cutting down the run time from 30 minutes to 10 seconds. This enabled fund managers to real time risk analysis figures resulting in the company being more competitive in the market place, **increasing revenues by 50%**.
- o **Trained and mentored** junior developers in OO techniques resulting in significant productivity rate increases and **less time to market**. Increase in speed of development enabled IT to become more responsive to clients demands for change and enhancements.
- o Automated manual reconciliation of system data with market data resulting in task being completed with 100% accuracy in 1 minutes, as opposed to 3 hours.

The Expertise Section

This section needs about 10 bullet points that prove that you are the person for the job. Highlight in bold the words that match the advertisement. Make sure you also show a broad range of skills rather than wasting too many lines on one area. You can put multiple skills from the same area on one line. Remember to add personal qualities. e.g Meets tight and demanding deadlines under pressure.

The Achievements Section

Achievements are hard to write which is why we have written an entire article which explains [how to write an achievement](#). We will cover the basics here.

One of the [common mistakes when writing a CV](#) is to write the achievements as a set of skills you learnt quickly and focus on how you benefited rather than the benefits you generated for the client. You really have to dig deep and think about what business benefits you **added by applying your skills for your clients**.

There is a set formula for writing achievements. The bullet point needs three things:

1. What set of skills (from the section above) you used.
2. Who it helped.
3. A quantifiable measure of how it helped.

Here's a list of bullet points that are NOT achievements:

1. Trained a developer.
2. Wrote some code.
3. Learnt OO / UML / Design Patterns.

These are not achievements. They are list of 'stuff that you did'. It does not tell anyone who benefited from paying you money and what the improvements were.

Achievements are about measurable benefits you provided to you clients that justified your pay check. They are things you did that saved time, saved money, made more money, won more, and so on.

Here's another achievement that is starting to get there, but not quite:

- o Developed a spreadsheet that helped save 10 staff some time and make money.

Here's a better effort:

- o Developed and implemented a bespoke spreadsheet application for the traders, which reduced the time to calculate financial forecasts from 3 hours to 15 seconds. This not only save time, but enabled the traders to become more responsive to market change, and resulted in a measurable increase in profit of 12% over 2 months.

The Next Couple Of Pages

This is where you list you work experience. No essays. Short and sweet, using bullet points. It is here that you are explaining the things you did and what skills you used. You should also add some benefits as well if you can. Here's an example:

www.mlhsc.co.uk - Merrill Lynch HSBC
Development Team Leader - Retail Banking
Feb 2000 - July 2001 (18 months, 3 renewals)

- o **Managed team of 5** developers for the design and development of retail banking functionality. Responsible, end to end, for implementation of requirements: From marketing requirements, through design and development, into UAT, and release.
- o An **8 tiered architecture**, built using **Object Orientation**. A web front end with a number of distinct tiers written in .NET linking to a back end mainframe.
- o And so on...

A few things to note: Explicitly list the number of months you were there and the number of renewals. This tells the reader that you are reliable and that people value your work. Stick to bullet points. No one wants to read

essays. Also highlight the key bits in bold text so they stand out when scanned quickly.

The Last Page

This is where you list your education, training, and hobbies. Keep this compact. If you have a degree and 5 years experience then you don't need to list every subject and grade of every GCSE.

Targeting The CV

You now have an idea of perhaps how to improve your CV so it shouts at the reader and stops them putting you in the bin with all the other essay writers!

Now you need to make sure that the CV is targeted for the role you are going after. This is the easy bit. If the job advert says they are looking for a trapeze artist then you dress the CV up to make it look as though you are the best trapeze artist in the whole of the country. If they are after a lion tamer then the same rules apply.

The key here to make sure that your CV is tailored for the position that you are applying for. It will not be uncommon for you to have different multiple copies of your CV to be used for different roles. You need to play on the strengths and experience you have gained from previous positions and showed that you have *key transferable skills* that can be applied in the new position. So, if you are going for a trapeze artist position for which you have 3 years experience, but have done 5 years lion taming, it would be best to tame the lion taming (no pun intended) experience down and focus on the trapeze experience.

We have dedicate an entire article to explaining exactly [how to target a CV](#).

Some examples

Here's some examples of CVs (before and after) that shows how the high impact killer CV technique works:

[CV Writing - Example 1](#)

[CV Writing - Example 2](#)

[CV Writing - Example 3](#)

Closing Comments

The method described here for formatting CV's is a proven method as part of an overall job search strategy for getting to an interview.

We hope this has been useful for you and that it will help you in your job search.

Good luck

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- [CV Writing for Contractors](#)
- [How to Structure a CV](#)
- [Why a Generalised CV Doesn't Work](#)
- [How To Target Your CV](#)
- [Writing Achievements on CVs](#)
- [Common CV Mistakes](#)
- [Targetting the CV Profile](#)
- [CVs Deconstructed: Example 1](#)
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