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Common mistakes when writing a CV

When you are seaching for a contract position the first hurdle is getting to the interview stage. To do this you will need to impress a potential agent and client with your CV. **Writing a high impact killer CV** is a skill that needs to be learnt, and with a little bit of research and application you can soon be writing your own. Here we discuss the most common mistakes that people make with their CVs.

First, a bit of motivation

Who gets the contract offer? Is it the person who is always the best qualified? Sadly not. The person who gets the contract offer is not always the best person available for the job. They are the best person available at knowing how to get offered a job - a subtle difference. To get a contract offer you need to get an interview, and to get the interview you need a good CV. The people with the best CVs will get interviewed, not necessarily the best available people.

So, here are, in our opinion, are the most common mistakes made when writing a CV for a job:

Far too long

If a CV is more than 3 pages long then everything on the third page and beyond is unlikely to be read. If the agent filtering the CVs has 200 to get through, you can guarantee they are not going to want to read an essay on your life story. "Well, it all started when I was born…." :-) Yawn, yawn, yawn...... aim, fire, bin.

Keep your CV to a maximum of 3 pages. No one wants to read your life story. Not all of it is relevant, and not everyone has the time.

Too many sentences

Sentences on a CV contain superfluous words. They take longer to read than clear, well spaced bullet points. For example, which of the following below is quicker to read?

This:

On this project we made use of the.NET Framework and utilised all the main namespaces. We used an intercepting filter pattern which we hooked into ASP.NET to implement user level functional security for the 5000 users. Model View Controller was used to connect the pages to the middle tier which was written in C#.

Or this:

ASP.NET, C#, **.NET Framework**.

5,000 users. **Functional security**.

Design Patterns: Intercepting Filter, Model View Controller.

When CVs are scanned the reader cannot be bothered to read sentences. They want to pick out the keywords to see if the person has the experience and expertise required. This is one reason why it is useful to bolden the important parts so they stand out to the person scanning the words. They also take up less room than sentences.

A rule of thumb to use here: Write as you would normally, using sentences. Then delete half the content, and then delete half the content again - whilst still retaining the key messages.

No Expertise section

Without a summary of your skills the reader needs to read the whole CV and pick out the skills themselves. This is too time consuming, will guarantee your CV to be put either in the bin or the bottom of the pile. If an agent has 200 CVs to read for one placement they only need to find 10 good candidates from the initial scan of CVs. The task of the agent is to get person placed in a vacancy in the shortest amount of time - how would you approach that task? Make sure your CV gets chosen by showing clearly from the start that you have the skills required.

A simple analogy is to think of all your skills as being like a large box of chocolates. The potential client is unlikely to care about all those chocolates, and may even not like some of them! So instead of presenting a huge box and saying "Here you go, have a rummage about and see if there is anything you fancy, " you instead create a tailored box of chocolates for each potential client. And then when they open the lid, low and behold, all their favourites. You then have a very tasty CV.

Not targeted to the role

Each time you send your CV out it should be targeted directly to the position you are going for. Some contractors have 10 versions or more of their CV depending in the type of role they are applying for, and each time they still tailor the CV for the exact role.

Find out as much as you can about the role before you send your CV. And if they want '..an experienced fire eating nutter…' you write on your profile 'Experienced fire eating nutter blah blah blah'.

You may have five years lion taming experience and be the best lion tamer in your area, but that isn't very impressive if you are going for a fire eating job.

No profile

If your CV does not have a profile that says precisely what you are then the reader is going to have to guess by reading your CV. And because they do not have time to read the whole thing you will probably go into the 'read if got time pile'.

Make sure have a profile on your CV, and ensure it is tailored to the position. Here's an example for a senior lion tamer position for a global circus:

> Enthusiatic **LION TAMER** with 10 years experience gained with leading global circus acts. Extensive experience teaching and mentoring junior tamers. Now seeking rewarding and challenging position with major circus to demonstrate substantial abilities and make an effective contribution.

Again, notice how the professional title is in bold so it immediately stands out.

Education on front page

If you have 10 years experience, don't put your education on the first page. It is really not as important as the most recent experience you have. Clients want highly skilled contractors with recent and relevant experience - not graduates.

If you have only been working for a couple of years, then you could consider adding education in the expertise and achievement section, but still put it all in the main section at the end. But don't waste valuable real estate on that front page.

Generally you will find that for apprentice type roles there will be a request for degree only or 3 A Levels for example. In that case your profile should read "Degree educated…etc etc."

Too much detail of Education

If you have 10 years experience no one cares that you got a B in history years ago. List them as a one line summary, but keep the degree on a separate line. For example:

2:1 in lion taming from Circus University, Nutsville.

3 A levels, 10 G.C.S.E's.

One exception is if you are a graduate looking for a position and you have little or no experience. If you have studied courses that are relevant to the role and can show some transferable skills then it is worth going into detail. For example, if you were applying for a lion taming role which involved training others and feeding the animals then it would be worth going into more detail:

2:1 in lion taming from Circus University, Nutsville.
Tamed 8 lions over course of 3 years.

Taught and mentored lion taming for last 2 years.

Studied the diets and mating habits of lions.

No achievements section

This is the section that is missed out most on CVs. This section is more aimed at the potential employer rather than the agent. Having a good achievements section can put you above the rest who don't.

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

It demonstrates to the employer that you are commercially focused rather than someone who just 'does stuff' regardless of the outcome.

This area is discussed in more detail in our article **Writing the Killer CV**.

To much use of 'I'

Too much use of the word 'I' can appear self indulgent and does not appear as professional. Remove the use of it entirely. Use action words like designed, improved, completed, or initiated.

And finally...

Writing a CV well involves putting yourself in the shoes of the people who are going to read it. The front page needs to convince the reader in no uncertain terms that you are the best person for the role.

For some real life examples, we also recommend you read our **CVs Deconstructed** section, where we show the before and after results of CVs that we have overhauled for real contractors.

After the CV has done its job you then have the interview stage to get through! Further advice on interview techniques can be found in the article **How to Pass an Interview**.

Good luck with your job hunting.

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