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Why a generalised CV doesn't work

Introduction

A good CV will get you to an interview and ultimately a job. A bad CV will leave you in the bin with all the other bad CVs. This article discusses problems associated with using a single generalised CV approach and advises a more effective approach.

Who Gets the Job? Best Candidate or Best CV?

A CV is the most important document you will write during job search. Consider this statement from an established guru:

*"There may be others who applied there who could have done the job better than you. But it is true today, and will ever be true: the person who gets hired is not necessarily the one who can do the job best; but, the one who **knows the most about how to get hired**."*

What is a CV For?

Let's look at a few basics regarding how to get hired. Assuming you have done all the usual research regarding job opportunities, location, industry, the channels you will use (agencies, direct employers, networking etc) you are poised to approach the market. You will almost certainly need a CV to do this.

Let's now consider what the CV is (and what it isn't).

The purpose of a CV is to generate an interview and nothing else. Your CV is a brochure and should be designed to market your skills and expertise in a fast and appropriate manner.

Your CV is not an opportunity to detail your life story across many pages - almost like conducting an interview on paper. This approach is referred to as the generalised CV. This would be like sending out a large sweet jar containing a whole variety of moderately interesting goodies which the recipient is invited to search through with the hope that they are bound to find something they like.

Some common features of a generalised CV

Written with no specific target in mind (hello anybody out there - I really am a nice person and I hope you like me after you have read my life story)

Front page lacks impact and CV is often far too many pages in length

Starts with name and address and moves forward chronologically from date of birth via every last detail of education (including addresses of schools and even the year in which the GCSE in metalwork was obtained)

Uses the one single (same) CV to apply for all opportunities

Doesn't contain buzzwords/jargon associated with the job target

Unfortunately, this style of CV rarely generates interviews (unless you have already got the job anyway and the employer is just going through the motions of a recruitment process).

Many surveys have confirmed that you have 10-20 seconds to make an impact on the reader with your CV (not too dissimilar to the 'first impressions' element of an interview).

So, you need to tell them very rapidly indeed exactly what they want to hear and you can do this by using a different approach. We call this a high impact targeted CV.

Key features of the high impact targeted CV

Two A4 pages in length (unless vitally relevant job experience/expertise is essential so can stretch to three A4 pages)

Front page contains profile, expertise list and achievements

Profile contains a banner headline of the targeted job title and includes the key requirements as specified in the job advertisement ('Experienced and successful **TEAM LEADER** with 3 years recent experience of back office banking applications with global blue chip clients')

Expertise section is about 10 bulleted items listing knowledge and personal skills ('Reliably meets demanding project deadlines and targets working under pressure')

Achievements section is about 3 bulleted points describing in powerful language what you did, what skills you used and what benefits there were ('Using

expert C++ development skills automated manual reconciliation of system data with market data resulting in task completion in 1 minute compared to 3 hours - with 100% accuracy')

The above CV approach tells them what they want to hear in less than 20 seconds (no telling porkies by the way!) and the remaining content follows a similar vein – targeted and punchy. You can read more in our article called **'Writing the Killer CV'**

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