

Are Headhunters calling you...or ignoring you?

By Deborah Walker

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In my former life as a recruiter (also affectionately referred to as "headhunter") I received hundreds of resumes a week from all parts of the country. The statement that a person's resume gets a 15 second read is not far from the truth. In fact, 15 seconds is a generous assumption. In reality, a resume must capture the recruiter's attention in the first five seconds to avoid the round file. Candidates can greatly improve their chance of catching the recruiter's attention by following three simple rules: use the correct format, include plenty of quantifiable accomplishments and sprinkle liberally with appropriate keywords.

The first rule, use of correct format, is crucial. There is one, and only one, proper resume format for recruiters--chronological. Recruiters' do not have time or patience to figure out the complexities of a functional resume. To recruiters, time is money. A second danger of using a functional resume is that recruiters automatically assume the candidate is attempting to hide something. This is a universal assumption. No job seeker on earth is able to hide unpleasant facts within a functional resume. Recruiters are trained from the start to pick up on any possible "red flags" that identify the job seeker as an undesirable candidate.

The second rule, use of quantifiable accomplishments, is essential in helping the recruiter see you as money in his pocket. Remember this point--you will only capture a headhunter's attention when he sees you in terms of commission potential. Since recruiters earn their fee by providing better candidates than their competition, your resume should shout "ACCOMPLISHMENTS." Quantifiable accomplishments are most convincing when connected to bottom-line results: revenue earned, money saved, market share increased, costs cut or time saved. This type of information gives the recruiter selling points to market you to their clients and put you in front of employers quicker.

The third rule, liberal use of keywords, is important not only in the short term, but also leads to future opportunity. At any given time a recruiter may have 10 to 100 specific positions to fill. Recruiters categorize their positions by qualifications identified by keywords. When reading resumes the recruiter scans for those keywords. The recruiter may be so tuned into finding specific words that he is oblivious to anything else in the resume except keywords.

The best way to make sure your resume is filled with keywords is to scour job postings of target positions and identify keywords of qualifications. Find the most commonly used keywords in 12 or more target postings and use those words as the language of your resume. For future use, recruiters save resumes in candidate-tracking databases to sort later by keywords. If your resume does not have the correct keywords, it may never be seen by human eyes. Correct choice of words means that your resume will get recruiter attention every time he queries by keywords contained in

your resume.

Once your resume is showcased in the proper format, packed with quantifiable accomplishments and strong keywords, be sure to follow proper etiquette in contacting recruiters and headhunters. The most effective initial contact is through email. Recruiters spend 80% of their time proactively calling prospective candidates and employers. They do not appreciate spending phone time with unsolicited callers. Once a recruiter has your resume he will call you if he is interested in you. It does no good to call him up asking if they he has received your resume. You risk ticking him off permanently.

When emailing your resume to recruiters it's best to send it as both a Word attachment as well as in ASCII (plain text) format in the body of the email. This allows the recruiter to access your information in the quickest manner in order to contact you sooner.

Recruiters and headhunters can be a tremendous resource to your job search efforts. They are privy to a great number of opportunities in the hidden job market. They are experts at presenting candidates' best selling points. They also act as go-between for candidate and employer, allowing the candidate to learn important employer feedback. Designing your resume with recruiters in mind is an important first step toward building relationships with influential recruiters who have the power to introduce you to your next boss.

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