

CV and cover letter tag team can help you land a job

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Introduction

Being prepared includes researching company to target decision-makers

Finding a job can be a battle. Competition is fierce, especially if you just graduated last month. You need every advantage to get ahead of your peers.

But no matter how skilled and talented you are at what you do, it doesn't add up to anything unless your future employer knows it.

You have to know who to talk to, what to say and how to say it.

When looking for work, many people start with job-hunting Web sites like Monster.ca and CareerClick.

But these sites are overrated.

According to Heath Slawner, a consultant with career and leadership training firm Hart Resource Development, you'd be better off talking to your friends and classmates.

Slawner said that up to 70 per cent of people find their jobs through networking and word-of-mouth. This includes asking professors and relatives to keep their ears open.

But what do you do once you've found a job you want to apply for, or a company you want to work at?

You will need the universal tag-team of job hunting: the cover letter and the curriculum vitae.

The cover letter explains why you want the job and the CV shows your prospective employer why you should get it. Your cover letter should weigh in at one page or less.

The most important thing is knowing your target. Before you even start writing, ask yourself why you are interested in that specific company and that specific job.

To get the answer, you have to do research.

If information about your prospective employer isn't available in the job posting, check out the organization's Web site or ask around.

Find out who's responsible for hiring, and contact that person directly.

Cover letters work best when targeted directly at the decision-maker.

Research is especially valuable if you're looking for an unannounced job.

Slawner said a well-researched cover letter demonstrates your interest in the company - what you can do for them, not just your interest in a job and what they can do for you.

That's key to winning them over.

Slawner advises people the cover letter is basically a short "pitch" for why you want the job and what you have to offer.

It should briefly explain why you are a good fit for the job and help your prospective employer understand your CV in terms of their own needs. Personalize and target this information as much as possible.

Depending on the job, the cover letter also provides a sample of your communication skills.

Be concise and use complete sentences, because you're being judged.

The rules of communication dazzle don't apply to your CV.

It should be as concise as possible - the goal is to be functional.

Slawner suggests an absolute maximum of two pages if you're in the early stages of your career.

According to Slawner, the most effective CVs highlight skills and competencies, as opposed to a typical chronological r?sum?, which summarizes school and job experiences.

The focus should be on achievements. The CV should answer the question what value did you bring to previous organizations?

This lets future employers figure out what value you can bring to them.

A functional r?sum? links your skills and competencies to your accomplishments and goals - in other words, it lets your prospective employer know not only what you can do, but also what you can do for them.

Slawner said this style of CV is especially good for people entering the job market for the first time.

It's a great way to showcase skills when you lack years of job experience.

When listing your skills, use active verbs.

Don't say you have fixed computers, say you fix them. It's not just powerful wording - CVs are sometimes scanned by computers for action words to identify potential job candidates.

Tailor your CV to the specific position you're applying for.

This means trimming the fat and creating a leaner CV with only relevant details.

Keep it simple - don't cram too much info onto the page, and label your sections clearly.

And remember to proofread: grammatical and spelling mistakes damage your credibility.

Finally, if you're thinking of fudging details on your CV: don't do it.

Slawner said companies are increasingly vigilant in verifying references, sometimes bringing in outside firms to check things out.

If you pull a George Constanza and make up your previous employer, they'll check it out and call you on it.

Even if you get away with it and land the job, there are many cases of people getting fired after their employer finds evidence of CV fraud.

This leads to what Slawner calls the most serious consequence of lying on your CV: if you're fired from a job for having done this, how will you explain that to future employers, except by lying again?

Recommended Career Sites:

Career Lab Letter Library - www.careerlab.com/letters/

Pathfinder Resume Guide - www.rockportinstitute.com/resumes.html

About.com Career Guide - <http://careerplanning.about.com/cs/resumewriting/>

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