

## RETAIL PLACEMENT ASSOCIATES



### THE JOB HUNT IS ON!

So you're looking for a career change or simply a new job. The outcome of your search will depend on how you prepare for the hunt as much as your skills, education and experience.

A job search is about marketing the asset you know best—you! In today's highly competitive world, there is a plethora of qualified candidates for each position. Set yourself apart from the competition by presenting your skill set in a professional package that gets you noticed.

Review the following tips to help you prepare for the job ahead. And yes, job searching is a job itself. Take it seriously, be prepared, pay attention to the details and you will succeed.

### Just For Laughs



### Prepare Your Resume

#### What Employers Think When They Read Your Resume.

If you're like most job seekers, the hiring process can sometimes make you scratch your head in confusion. For example, how many times have you come across the "perfect" position, quickly submitted your resume and eagerly anticipated the hiring manager's call... only to hear nothing from the company?

Unfortunately, the frustrating reality is that the majority of resumes you submit will elicit little or no response from potential employers. Much of the time, the situation is out of your control: The position may have already been filled by the time you inquired about it or simply wasn't as good a fit as you thought. That doesn't mean, however, that there's nothing you can do to improve your odds of being called for an interview. Following is an inside peek into the questions hiring managers ask themselves when evaluating resumes. By understanding potential employers' thought processes, you can craft stronger application materials.

Can the applicant fill my need?

Admittedly, it's an obvious question. After all, a firm looking to hire a computer programmer isn't going to call

you for an interview if you only have a background in human resources. But even if you possess the necessary experience, if your resume isn't targeted to the specific company and opening, your qualifications could seem equally unrelated.

Tailoring your resume to the position involves positioning your skills and experience in a way that shows the hiring manager that they align perfectly with the opening. So, rather than submit the same generic resume for every job you pursue, look at each opening and create a customized resume. Sure, it takes a little more time, but it's worth it.

If you are applying for a programmer position, for example, the company will want to see previous employment in the information technology industry; knowledge of Java, XML or other computer languages; and evidence that the applications you've helped develop have benefited former employers. In this case, you would downplay your three years as a busboy in college as well as your brief stint as a telemarketer. Throwing everything against the wall and seeing if something sticks isn't the right approach; a hiring manager is more likely to discard your resume than wade through it in hopes of finding relevant information.

Use numbers — perhaps by pointing out that your program enabled the sales team to collect more than 5,000 leads per month — which are likely to stand out in a sea of words and grab a hiring manager's attention. Research the company and re-read the job description several times to make sure you are stressing all of your most relevant qualifications.

Will the applicant remain with my firm for the long term?

The hiring process is lengthy, complicated and expensive. An October 2004 study by the Employment Policy Foundation found that replacing just one worker costs businesses an average of \$13,355. Because of high turnover costs, hiring managers seek employees who are not likely to leave the company soon after accepting an offer. They'll look to your resume for proof of a stable work history.

If you have job-hopped in the past, consider submitting a functional, rather than a chronological, resume. A functional resume is organized around your skills, experiences and accomplishments, not the specific roles you have held at various points in your career. You also can use this format to downplay employment gaps; but be prepared to explain them during an inter-

## Resume (From Page 1)

view.

In addition, hiring managers look for assurance that you are dedicated to your profession. If you belong to a professional association, possess certifications or take professional education courses, list this information on your resume. But make sure everything is relevant and current. You may have a certified financial planner designation, but it means little if you have not renewed your certification in four years.

Is the potential employee professional? Imagine trying to convince someone to buy a product by providing them with a description of it but not allowing them to see or test it. Sounds hard, doesn't it? In essence, that's your challenge when submitting a resume. A hiring

manager will use just a few sheets of paper to determine if you are professional and can communicate well. So, make sure your resume is free of typos and grammatical mistakes and that it is easy to understand. Because hiring managers may receive hundreds of applications, they'll eliminate you from contention for the slightest infraction. And if they have a question about your work history, they don't have the time to call you for clarification.

Have a friend, relative or member of your professional network read through your resume with a sharp eye to spot any errors you might have missed. Afterward, ask the person to summarize its contents. Can he or she accurately recall your past positions

and responsibilities? Can the individual name your career highlights? Is the person able to tell the type of job you seek? If not, you're probably not getting your message across as clearly as you can, which means a hiring manager may not be as impressed with your application as you'd hope.

The hiring process can be opaque, but one thing is clear: A well-written, targeted resume gives you the best chance of being called for an interview and, ultimately, landing the position you desire. Before you submit your next application, think like a hiring manager to ensure your resume doesn't get lost in the crowd.

*Contents Courtesy of Robert Half Int. for Careerbuilder.com*

## 25 Words that can Hurt Your Resume

**S**o, you're experienced. Before you advertise this in your resume, be sure you can prove it.

Often, when job seekers try to sell themselves to potential employers, they load their resumes with vague claims that are transparent to hiring managers, according to Scott Bennett, author of "The Elements of Resume Style" (AMACOM). By contrast, the most successful job seekers avoid these vague phrases on their resumes in favor of accomplishments.

Instead of making empty claims to demonstrate your work ethic, use brief, specific examples to demonstrate your skills. In other words, show, don't tell.

Bennett offers these examples:

Instead of... "Experience working in fast-paced environment"

Try... "Registered 120+ third-shift emergency patients per night"

Instead of... "Excellent written communication skills"

Try... "Wrote jargon-free User Guide

for 11,000 users"

Instead of... "Team player with cross-functional awareness"

Try... "Collaborated with clients, A/R and Sales to increase speed of receivables and prevent interruption of service to clients."

Instead of... "Demonstrated success in analyzing client needs"

Try... "Created and implemented comprehensive needs assessment mechanism to help forecast demand for services and staffing."

The worst offenders

It's good to be hard-working and ambitious, right? The hiring manager won't be convinced if you can't provide solid examples to back up your claims. Bennett suggests being extra-careful before putting these nice-sounding but empty words in your resume.

- Aggressive
- Ambitious
- Competent
- Creative

- Detail-oriented
- Determined
- Efficient
- Experienced
- Flexible
- Goal-oriented
- Hard-working
- Independent
- Innovative
- Knowledgeable
- Logical
- Motivated
- Meticulous
- People person
- Professional
- Reliable
- Resourceful
- Self-motivated
- Successful
- Team player
- Well-organized

*Contents Courtesy of Laura Morsch for CareerBuilder.com*

## Other Resume Notes

Most resumes today are created in an electronic format using a word processing program. Microsoft's "Word" is the most popular of these programs. While these programs are a great tool, knowing the pitfalls is essential to presenting a quality resume.

### Font Size and Type

Though word processors will let you set very small font sizes and wide margins, this is not the venue to use that tool. Achieving a single page resume using micro size fonts and wide margins will have the opposite affect of what you intend—it will make your resume difficult to read and easy to reject.

Use simple and common fonts like Arial or Times New Roman. This serves two primary purposes:

- An easy to read resume.
- Your resume will look the same to the

employer as it does to you. If you use a font that is not on the receiver's computer, your resume may appear dramatically different than what you intended as their program substitutes fonts and styles.

You can also convert your resume to a PDF file if you have the program, though some employers will specify the "MS Word" format. Err on the side of caution by using normal margins, common fonts and generally available programs. If you don't have "Word," visit your local Kinko's or other facility. Don't rely upon one program's ability to properly import another's. This is an investment in your future. Take the time to do it right.

### Spacing, Centering, Tabs & Indents

Many positions today involve computer use. Resumes are often sent electronically and your resume can reveal your skill level to potential employers. Know how to use

the tab, centering and other functions properly. Use of the space bar to center a line will be obvious to a computer savvy employer.

### Spelling and Grammar

Nothing presents you better than eloquent language, good spelling and grammar. Employers will eliminate potential candidates based solely on poor language skills and bad spelling. Use the spell-check feature on your processor AND have a competent person edit your resume for form, content, grammar and spelling.

### Save a Copy of Each Resume You Send

When tailoring your resume to highlight specific skills and experience to employers, it is essential to keep a copy of each individual resume sent. When you go for an interview, be certain to take extra copies of that exact resume. Consistency is essential and sends the right message.

# The Interview

Your resume got you noticed. The next step in the process is the interview. In your current position, part of your job may be interviewing applicants for possible employment. Many people mistake this for interview experience and this can be a fatal mistake. Taking the time to prepare for an interview is

an essential part of the process. Though much of this is common sense, it is worth your time to review the basic do's and don'ts of presenting yourself in an interview.

We should all know the basics—timeliness, proper attire, no cell phones, proper grammar, etc. We all

know to avoid saying “you know” and “uh-huh.”

Take the time to review basic interview skills to be prepared. Research the company prior to the interview. Practice before the interview and be confident. Remember you know the product well—you!

## Six Moves to Boost Your Interview Performance

There's no instant replay when you go through an interview. One important secret is that your verbal messages are enhanced by body language, facial expressions, voice intonations and props. Your words, physical presence and voice can aid you in landing the job. Here are some tips:

### Deal With Nervousness

Important events, where we are judged and need to perform well, can make anyone nervous. A little nervousness can actually aid you in being sharp and improve your performance. But heart-thumping, face-twitching, voice-quivering nervousness will reflect poorly on you and the strong, self-confident “I can solve your problems” impression you are trying to make. To rid your body of nervous tension, just before you go into the interview find a private spot outside or in the restroom, shake both arms and hands and take a few deep breaths. This physical exercise releases tension that has built up and helps calm you. Then, close your

eyes and visualize a scene about winning, seeing yourself as the winner This visualization helps get you into a positive, “I can do it” framework.

### Come Prepared

The night before the interview, organize what you need to bring. Always have extra resumes— yes, they do lose them and misplace them. Bring your list of references. Be sure all addresses and phone numbers are current and accurate. Include any work samples and the list of questions you intend to ask. Have absolute clear directions and if you don't know where you are going, find out the night before. Being late is a major no-no.

### Pass The First Impression

Before you even say hello, the employer's mind is evaluating attire, hygiene, style, and formulating an opinion as to whether or not you should represent their organization. Even in today's more casual, dressed-down workplace, appearance still counts a great deal with employers. Tom, a vice president for a bank, noted, “I really liked a candidate, but his attire was sloppy and too casual. The CEO said, ‘don't hire him, it'll get worse once he gets the job,’ so the position went to someone else.” Therefore, dress up. Select a conserva-

tive and well-fitting business suit. Greet the interviewer warmly, and offer a firm handshake. Nothing creates a poorer impression than a weak, couple-of-fingers handshake.

### Non-Verbal Clues

A sincere smile sends a warm, confident message. Eye contact is one of the important things employers notice about you. It is crucial and conveys that your message is believable.

### Offer Support Documentation

Employers love to see proof that you can really do their job, so do bring samples of past work you've done. This can be copies of a spreadsheet that improved the tracking system, materials you've created, or brochures that list you as a panelist or speaker. Show and tell works very effectively, so bring “proof.”

### Listen

It is frustrating to the interviewer to ask questions that never get answered, so listen closely. Many employers reveal their “hidden agendas,” those few things that really influence their decision. Paying close attention allows you to really address the true needs and land the job.

Contents courtesy of Robin Ryan, Career Coach for MSN.com

## Foolish Mistakes Job Seekers Make

What do nail biting, answering your cell phone, and lying have in common? They are all ways to blow an interview.

According to a recent CareerBuilder.com survey, hiring managers identified the top mistakes job candidates make. Read on about the worst qualities you can display in an interview and real-life examples.

### 1. Poor Communication Skills

A candidate who has bad grammar, talks too much, or does not listen is a red flag. Being too open during the interview is a killer, too. You should be candid, but don't spill your guts with all your personal problems. And think before you speak - one candidate at a drug treatment facility asked if they drug-tested and if there was advance notice.

### 2. Poor Performance or Preparation

Yes, there are job seekers who don't prepare or even know what job they're interviewing for. Physical ticks like lack

of eye contact or extreme gestures and movement turned off employers. Other candidates simply flaked out - answering a cell phone, eating a sandwich, or jumping up out of the chair and falling down.

### 3. Negative Attitude Displayed

Hiring managers are turned off by unenthusiastic, bored or arrogant behavior. Using profanity, acting cocky, or putting down a previous boss will quickly turn off an interviewer. One 37 year-old candidate said the only reason he's seeking a job was because his mother wanted him to.

### 4. Inappropriate Appearance

Improper dress and grooming can jeopardize an interview, too. Ladies, this is

not a pick-up opportunity, don't dress like you're going clubbing. Guys, jeans and a t-shirt are not accept-

able. Countless hiring managers cited instances of candidates who obviously did not bathe. Think that's bad? Said one employer, “One candidate did not wear shoes to the interview. How you can forget your shoes?” Oh, and please be sober.

### 5. Lying on Resume or During Interview

Do you have to be told that dishonesty is a no-no? “One candidate mentioned his arrest after checking the box on the application that he had never been arrested,” said one hiring manager. And just in case you weren't sure, stealing from a prospective employer is also frowned upon in an interview.

Contents courtesy of Kate Lorenz For Careerbuilders.com

JEFF MacNELLY'S SHOE CHRIS CASSATT & GARY BROOKINS



## Potential Employer Hot Buttons

Many candidates focus on themselves and their personal desires when interviewing for a new position; things like salary, benefits, commute time, location etc. Yet, the company and interviewer has a totally different mindset when interviewing candidates. If you don't recognize the difference, you will fail in interviewing virtually all the time.

Just what are these "HOT BUTTONS" that a prospective employer will push during the job interview? Let's explore them!

- **Ability to do the job.** Apply for jobs only if you're actually qualified for the position, not if you think you're qualified or just like the way the job sounds. Establish your ability through your resume by emphasizing previous accomplishments and results performance.
- **Initiative.** You must show the ability to "hit the ground running". Let them know you are ready, willing and able to jump right in and do everything you can to help the company perform and grow.
- **Job Growth.** Show you can adapt easily and that you're willing to take on additional responsibility.
- **Self-Confidence.** Speak with authority when answering questions. Use phrases like "I will, I can or In my opinion" to get the point across that you are a confident person.
- **Leadership.** Show, through previous experiences, that you have the "courage to lead" your coworkers regardless of your level or position in the company.
- **Attitude.** Walk into the interview showing a high level of energy, tons of enthusiasm, and an overall zest for life.
- **Social skills/interests.** Say please, thank you, and give credit to those who have helped you along the way. Generally show you possess good manners.
- **Integrity.** In today's society, more and more people show a lack of integrity in all phases of their lives. Make a point to give examples of how and why you have this important trait. The ability to get this point across will go a long way to securing a new position

Follow these points at all times when interviewing, and coupled with a well written resume and proper professional dress and image, you will be prepared to put your best foot forward when applying for a new job.

*Contents by Mark Suss, President, Retail Placement Associates*

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## I Just Had a Great Interview. Now What Do I Do?

Thank-you letters are so boring, but you feel compelled to write one because the career books, career counselors and HR managers tell you that is what you are supposed to do. If you don't do it, then you failed to show professional courtesy. If you do send one, the recipient will appreciate it, but it is rarely the defining factor that gets you the job. Furthermore, they all sound alike. Yawn.

The Professional Resume Writing and Research Association ([www.prwra.com](http://www.prwra.com)) is a great organization for resume writers and career coaches. There was a recent debate on thank-you letters and appropriate follow-up strategies, so I thought I would put together an article on the topic for the benefit of all job seekers.

Instead of the traditional, boring thank-you letter, let's hit a grand-slam home run with follow-up strategies that tip the scale in your favor.

1. Within 48 hours, follow-up with a value-added response. Don't write a letter or e-mail that just restates your qualifications; instead provide something unique that dramatically sets you apart from others. Focus on a topic discussed in your interview, and then provide your prospective boss with additional information on that topic. Here are a few examples:

A candidate had a great interview for a

senior sales leadership position. During the interview, his potential boss discussed how the salespeople were not successfully selling to C-level executives. The candidate followed up by sending his potential boss a book on C-level selling strategies. His thank-you note looked like this (abbreviated): "Dear Joe, I enjoyed our discussions yesterday on the sales position and on the challenges of selling to C-level executives. Here is a book I recommend to help overcome the selling problem. You might want to pass it among your sales execs. As the vice president of sales, I will provide the leadership to achieve C-level selling success . . . ." He got the job.

After an interview that focused on the discussion of building strategic alliances, a client sent his prospective boss an e-mail link to a contemporary article on strategic alliances. Another client sent a follow-up e-mail on new products that were going to be launched by a competitor. An administrative assistant sent a list of office organization techniques. TIP: Go to any search engine or news site (like [MSNBC.com](http://MSNBC.com)) and register for "News Alerts." It's free and can be a great source for follow-up articles, breaking industry news and relevant information on your targeted companies.

Guaranteed, your innovative and unique follow-up response can be the

edge that gets you the job, but here are two more steps to make your follow-up successful.

2. Call, write or personally visit your potential boss once a week with a value-added benefit. Do this until you land the job or they tell you the position has been filled. Some career strategists think this is overkill, but success teaches that persistence pays off. At the very least, you will usually learn where you stand.

3. If you are turned down, write a very cordial thank-you note to HR and, more importantly, to the person who interviewed you, thanking them for their time and consideration. Indicate you would appreciate being looked at for other jobs. If you are really interested in the position or company, follow-up in a month with an inquiry about other opportunities that may have recently opened up. Do NOT rely on the company to get back to you. Even though you were turned down, you may have been "number two" and they will be eager to have you interview for another position.

Whatever happens, don't get discouraged. Your continued follow-up does nothing but breed good will. Professionalism and persistence produce positive results.

*Content Courtesy of Don Straits, CEO and Dragon Slayer, CorporateWarriors.com*