

Your Resume – Is Your Resume Overweight?

By A.J. Bond

Lengthy resumes are a common problem encountered by recruiters. Previously as a hiring manager, and more recently as a consultant, I have seen my fair share of resumes that are simply too long. The first thing a recruiter does at the prospect of a sizeable resume is to give an audible groan (or worse) – the second is to give the applicant a black mark.

So how long should a resume be? While there are no hard and fast rules, if your resume is more than 3 pages long, there is a good chance it may be too long. While individuals with little work experience should be able to get their resume details on to a single page, more experienced applicants should keep their resume to two, maybe three pages long. Though there will be a need for some candidates to produce longer resumes, this should be the exception rather than the rule.

The implications of an overly long resume can be serious. As a recruiter, it indicates the candidate cannot separate the important from the unimportant. As a result, any subsequent declarations in the resume about having effective writing and communication skills may be discounted or taken with a grain of salt. This can be terminal if a potential role lists strong communication skills as essential criteria.

The second serious issue with lengthy resumes is that your story or intended message can get lost amongst 'everything else'. As a result, a recruiter can miss important information, or worse, they may be less likely to wade through a lengthy resume to identify critical information. This can often be the case if they have a large pile of resumes to review.

A critical component of good communication has always been the ability to be concise. This is particularly so when writing a resume and dealing with time strapped recruiters who may have dozens or even hundreds of applications to evaluate.

Resume writing is more difficult than many people give credit. In a handful of pages, the writer is required to distil a lifetime of work experience, achievement and aspiration, whilst simultaneously trying to convince someone to hire them. This is not always a simple task. While keeping a resume concise is important for all job seekers, it is even more so for very experienced applicants who have a substantial body of work experience and achievement to sift through.

The Key word to keep in mind is 'distil' – in this context meaning to concentrate. A Resume should never be a shopping list of every task, role and achievement performed by the applicant, but rather a concise statement of relevant information as it relates to the role in question.

Below are a few tips to help keep your resume to a manageable size;

- **Include what is relevant** – It is important that the capabilities, experience and achievements included in your resume align with those described in the position description.
- **Exclude what is irrelevant** – Details of old or unrelated roles, skills and capabilities that have no bearing on the role in question can be excluded.
- **Highlight what is critical** – Identify essential criteria from the position description, and ensure these are properly covered in your resume, preferably on the first page.
- **Avoid Repetition** – Careful review of the resume should pick up instances of repetition or duplication. It is surprising how often people duplicate information in a resume.
- **Brevity** – Keep the size of your resume down by using concise language and bullet points where appropriate. And to state the obvious - avoid stating the obvious.

To summarise, the best approach to writing a resume can be divined from the quote '*impart the maximum amount of information whilst using a minimum of words*'. Recruiters should not have to actively search through a resume to find important information. Important information should be easily identified, and preferably on the first page.

So if your resume is a little on the lengthy side, do yourself a favour by applying some of the tips outlined above to get your resume back into shape.