

Impress the Computer

By

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When you brush up your CV and upload it for a potential employer, you might assume it will be read by a human being. But increasingly recruiters and large organisations are using specialist software to help them sort through the sea of resumes they receive. Such programs look for words and phrases commonly used by the type of candidate the employer wants.

So it pays to know what terms they search for and make sure you include them. Industry experts say even slight changes to your CV can ensure your skills and qualifications are recognised. One strategy alone, that of including "competency statements", can increase the chances of securing an interview by 30 per cent.

First, though, it's worth mentioning what won't get you noticed by recruitment software. Tables, boxes and even bullet points, all of which may aid a human being, can confuse an automated CV interpreter and are best avoided. The same applies to decorations. "The best practice is no graphics and no pictures," says Karen Cariss, the chief executive of the recruitment software company PageUp People.

She encourages job seekers to ensure their CV has a simple structure with clear labels for the various sections, such as education, employment history and personal details. Also, while software scans documents for terms the employer values, there's no point in cramming in every conceivable keyword. An epic-length CV won't impress the

human being who reviews it after it's selected by the computer. Cariss recommends limiting it to two or three pages.

Christopher Shen, who has worked for 15 years as a consulting organisational psychologist, says when reading a job ad try to work out what skills an employer is likely to want. An employer looking for a chief financial officer, for example, would probably value candidates who are diligent, conscientious, have an eye for detail or possess high numerical reasoning ability.

Once you identify the desired skills or competencies, weave evidence of those into your CV. Dr Joanne Earl, a lecturer of organisational psychology at the University of NSW, says helping an employer understand what you are competent at is among the best things you can do. The strategy can be useful even when an employer has been vague in their job ad, says Earl, the co-author of *Resumes That Get Shortlisted*.

A competency statement can address an applicant's knowledge, skills, abilities or attitudes. Typically it consists of a few sentences in which a person highlights a situation, explains what action they took and the results the action produced.

Research for the book found even generalised comments can help a job seeker. "What we found was that when people include competencies in their resumes, they increase their chances by about 30 per cent of getting on a shortlist," Earl says.

"The benefit of including them in an uploaded document is that it's most likely that they'll be the same keywords the organisation is searching [for]."

The research uncovered the eight most common qualities employers ask for in job ads. They are: communication skills, team skills, attention to detail, energetic, initiative, ability to handle pressure, enthusiasm and leadership.

If a job candidate can spot the skills an employer wants, competency statements

should directly address those. But when a job ad is vague, Earl suggests candidates identify which of the eight common qualities are most likely to appeal to an employer and write statements about them.

She urges people to build a repertoire of competency statements they can use for different jobs but even people with little employment history can draft more generic versions.

Earl stresses, however, that this isn't simply a matter of dropping a few competency statements into a CV. "If they just cut and paste from a newspaper article, it's probably going to smack of insincerity when it doesn't match the body of their text.

"Where possible, they should be tailoring those competency statements to suit the job and not have a one-size-fits-all CV," she says. "Making the link between what the employer wants and what their own personal strengths are is the winning formula when it comes to winning a job."

Other strategies to make sure you stand out in a computerised pile include supplying complete date ranges for each part of your employment history, full job titles and the full name of the companies you've worked for, says Tony Blamey, general manager of Fairfax's mycareer.com.au website.

He also urges job seekers to be aware of the buzzwords in their industry and include these in their CV. Another tip is to include current or even intended studies in the education part of a CV.

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