

Increase Your Resume's Response Rate Using the Principles of Advertising

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By C. William King

Introduction

There are many schools of thought about which is the best resume format. Some claim that the Functional or Chronological is the best, while others believe that a Contemporary or another format works best. I believe that each of these ideas are mostly irrelevant. These resumes are designed to tell your entire life story. The purpose of the resume is not to tell your entire life story, but should be to get someone in your target audience to take the next step in their hiring process. This is a big enough challenge in today's business environment for any document. To do this you should consider using the principles of advertising and how this discipline influences the intended viewers to take the next step.

Background

Each of us is bombarded on a daily basis with thousands of advertisements. Twenty minutes of each hour of television is devoted entirely to advertising. Most of it is forgettable, and only a few even catch our attention, let alone move us to do something. What separates these few memorable pitches from all the forgettable ones? David Ogilvy, who is considered by many to be the father of modern advertising, knows. This article is based upon his experience running a large Madison Avenue advertising firm. He, in turn, learned his craft while working for Dr. George Gallup, who is considered the father of public opinion polling.

In today's business environment, competition for attention becomes more and more ferocious every day. Human Resource Managers, Recruiters, and Hiring Managers are bombarded with hundreds if not thousands of resumes - almost all of which find themselves forgotten, and put immediately in the physical or digital waste can. If you consider that your resume is an advertisement for you, the job seeker, then the parallels are obvious.

The use of advertising principles is the kind of common sense that should be applied to the act of writing one's own resume. To apply these principles you need to know what they are and understand how to apply them. My aim in writing this article is to introduce the job seeker to these principles, which can be applied to any resume format, and to create a different, and optimal **Advertising** style resume, which more fully incorporates these principles than any of the other styles.

I believe that a better understanding of fundamental advertising principles can help demystify the art of resume writing. Let's consider how you can apply these general principles to constructing your own resume, starting with a description of each general principle.

The Principles

Principle 1: What really moves people inside organizations to consider you as a candidate is the content of your resume, not its format. If you accept this premise, then the Functional or Chronological resume format has been obsolete for decades. Only a few have or recognized it. The most important job of the resume writer is to decide what you are going to show to an employer, and what benefits you.

Principle 2: Know your audience. If your strategy is to send your resume to Recruiters or Human Resource Departments, or internet job sites, to persuade them to forward it to hiring managers, use the Functional or Chronological resume format. This target audience expects to see that resume format.

However, if your strategy is to bypass the HR department and intermediaries, and send your resume directly to hiring managers, then they are your target audience. A resume format that will directly appeal to hiring managers is markedly different from the one that the HR department is comfortable with. I recommend sending your resume directly to potential hiring managers as a strategic job search approach, so we will focus on the hiring manager as the target audience. Getting your resume directly in front of hiring managers, rather than going through the HR department, increases the probability that they will actually see it by a factor of almost 20 times.

Principle 3: Build your resume around a great idea. This central idea for most job seekers should be that your skills, experience, and education are immediately transferrable to meet the hiring manager and organization's needs. If you are a mature job seeker, or a recent college graduate, then your central idea should be slightly different and modified to fit your circumstances.

Principle 4: Give the facts. Avoid fluff and generalities. Each accomplishment should include at least one number. Just as sex is the sizzle that sells in advertisements, numbers are the sizzle that sells in resumes.

Principle 5: You cannot bore organizations into hiring you. A dull, bland, wishy-washy, colorless, uninspiring, or uninteresting resume will not bring results. Your sentences must include active verbs.

Principle 6: Be well mannered. You would not buy a product from a bad-mannered sales clerk, and research shows that consumers don't buy from bad-mannered advertisements either. Your resume should not beat the reader over the head, but it should be charming. In this, I do not mean cute or comic either. Your resume should strike the reader like a firm handshake and sincere smile. You want them to reciprocate with a smile when they read your summary and accomplishments, and to think to themselves, 'Hey, this person sounds pretty good.'

Principle 7: Make your resume contemporary to the hiring manager and the industry. You need to understand the psychology of the industry and if possible, the hiring manager. Start with the questions, “What generation do they belong to?”, and “Where is this industry in its growth curve?”

Principle 8: Committees cannot write good resumes, but they can criticize them. Avoid shopping your resume from reviewer to reviewer to reviewer, where each one adds a few sentences, modifies a format, or changes some adjectives. This rarely produces a quality result. While reviewers are well intentioned, and may know more than you do, they come with their own biases and prejudices that invariably end up in your document. So you end up with a mish-mash of a resume that does not appeal to any of your target audiences.

Principle 9: If you are lucky enough to write a good resume, continue to use it until it stops working for you. Do not fall into the trap of writing inferior variations to ‘customize’ your resume, to each organization you send it to. You are not continuously presenting to the same group standing still, but to a moving parade.

Principle 10: Never write a resume that you wouldn’t want your family and closest friends to read. Do not tell lies or exaggerations. You would not lie to your closest friends, so don’t lie to the hiring manager. Eventually, you will be found out, with only bad consequences.

Principle 11: The resume is related to your brand, but they are not identical. The resume is only one ‘image’ that contributes toward and reinforces who you are, “the brand.” Business cards, phone interviews, elevator speeches, LinkedIn pages, social media, and in-person interviews also contribute toward your personal brand.

Principle 12: Don’t waste the reader’s time. We are all busy. If you are respectful of the precious few seconds the reader gives you, the reader will greatly appreciate it. Don’t make them wade through sentences full of drivel to get to a nugget of information. For example, do not waste the reader’s time telling them the pedigree of the company you worked for. The resume is not a vehicle to promote your previous company. Avoid unnecessary words, dates, locations, etc.

Principle 13: Appeal to both the right and left-brain hemispheres of your target audience. Hiring managers tell their boss all the logical reasons (left-brain) why they decided to hire you. But hiring decisions are emotional decisions made on the right side. Your resume should appeal both logically and emotionally. I find it best to end the summary paragraph with a sentence that includes a positive emotional feeling.

Principle 14: Follow the time-tested rules of good advertising copywriting, most of which are listed below, also distilled from Ogilvy’s experience. Also, beware of typos and bad grammar, as these are usually grounds for immediate rejection.

What Makes Good Advertising/Resume Copy

- A. Brand identification is important. Put your name and contact information at the top of the page. Your name only, should be in larger point (14) and in **bold**. Your ‘brand identification’ should be visible at a glance.
- B. People will read the headline more often than any other part of the resume. So tell them what kinds of jobs you are looking for. If that is the position that they are trying to fill, then the probability that they will read the next 50 words is nearly 100%.
- C. The first 50 words are read five times more often than the remainder of the resume. After 50 words, attention starts to drop off. So state your case in the first 50-75 words. Use this summary section to flag down the reader and garner his or her attention.
- D. Use at least one emotional word in the first 50-75.
- E. Appeal to the hiring managers’ self-interest. Highlight accomplishments that indicate you have met, wrestled with, and conquered problems he or she is probably facing.
- F. Help the hiring manager understand your overt or implied selling promise, and what benefits you can bring to his or her organization.
- G. In any copy always go straight to the point. Keep each accomplishment to a maximum of 14-18 words. Describe ‘what’, not ‘how.’
- H. Avoid superlatives, generalizations and platitudes. Be specific and factual. Be enthusiastic, friendly and memorable. Don’t be a bore. Tell the truth, but make it fascinating.
- I. The resume should be a complete sales pitch for you. It is not realistic to assume that someone would have to read an accompanying cover letter to get a complete picture. The only exception to this rule is a T-letter, to accompany your resume, and should be used only when the job seeker already knows the job requirements.
- J. Make sure your resume is believable.
- K. Help your reader find your highlights with arrows, bullets, asterisks, or other marks.
- L. Never use colored or tinted paper or font. There is no evidence that any aesthetic additions increase your appeal or number of ‘reads.’

- M. Use spacing between major sections. This dramatically increases readership of that section.

- N. Use the same type font throughout. Do not use all caps, small or large. This is harder to read than lower case. Fully justify both margins. Use 12 point font. The old mainstay of Times New Roman font has been popular for more than 75 years. However, with the advent of high resolution screens and printers in the last 5 years, the use of other serif fonts are now popular in books, webpages, newspapers and magazines. The key to a good font is legibility, a combination of speed, comprehension, comfort, and a kind of emotional acceptance of the font.

General Case Example for Most Job Seekers

Principles are all fine, well and good, but how about applying these principles? In the following section, I supply an example that works well for most job seekers. This example has been market tested and honed over a period of many years. The target audience for this style is the hiring manager. I call this the **Advertising** style resume.

First Paragraph/Section Example

Summary Statement

TITLE OR POSITION DESIRED I TITLE OR POSTION DESIRED II

Experienced _____ professional with a track record of **XXXX, XXXXX, and XXXXX**. Experience in **AAAA, BBBB, and CCCCC** industries. Knowledgeable in **(list more general areas) RRRR, SSSSS, TTTT, UUUU, and VVVV**. Expert in **(list most important specific skills) DDDD, EEEE, FFFF, GGGG, and HHHH**. **Adjective-One-Describing-YOU** and **Adjective-Two-Describing-YOU** with a passion for **QQQQQ**.

Second Section Example

In this section, you will list your accomplishments, ranked from most important to least important. This section is not chronological. Each accomplishment will contain at least one number. Make sure you have a good story for each bullet, so you can tell it in an interview.

Accomplishments

- Managed the execution of the Sarbanes Oxley compliance program for a \$700 million services company.
- Supervised a diverse staff of up to 19 trained telephone counselors at an NGO helpline which served 3,000 callers per month.

- Established the virtual 250-member global consulting administrative infrastructure for a Big 4 professional services firm employing over 170,000.
- Maintained membership database of 1,500+ members representing more than \$200K in revenue.
- Installed and maintained over 50 Linux servers.
- Created custom software business applications to support company growth from \$30M to over \$300M in annual sales.
- Managed all preventive maintenance with less than 1 down day of production per year.
- Designed and built refractive index analysis instrumentation saving \$4 million per year.
- Created and distributed more than 7 million direct mail pieces per year.

Third Section Example

List your professional experience, using only one line per company. Your title is the most important, followed by the name of the company and the years spent there. Notice that there are no ‘months’ nor do we tell the reader where the company is located nor what they do for revenues.

Professional Experience

Last Title Held	Last Company worked, Inc.	2008-20015
Next to Last Title	Clueless Logistics Systems, Inc.	2004- 2008
Next Title	Chuckhole Express, Inc.	1998-2004

Fourth Section Example

List your degrees. Only one line per degree, listed degree first, organization and date degree granted. Last degree should be first.

Education

BS	Labor Economics	The University of Hard Knocks	1983
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Special Case – Summary/First Paragraph for the New Graduate

Summary

TITLE OR POSITION DESIRED I **TITLE OR POSTION DESIRED II**

Degree Area (like Mechanical Engineering or Business Administration) student at TTTT college with a track record of XXXX, XXXXX, and XXXXX. GPA of X.XX. Experience in AAAA,

BBBB, and CCCC industries. Knowledgeable in RRRR, SSSS, TTTT, UUUU, and VVVV. Adjective-One-Describing-YOU and Adjective-Two-Describing-YOU with a passion for QQQQ.

Final Advice

All of the above should go on one page. Someone will only look at your resume for 15 seconds, so one page is more than enough copy. Leave out miscellaneous and charitable activities, except if they directly apply to the job you are applying for.

Feel free to contact the author at “king[at]essential-research.com” with questions or comments.