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YOUR CV AS A SALES BROCHURE

By Cindy Norcott

Your CV is a personal marketing document that you use to sell yourself to a prospective employer. It should highlight why you are the best person for the job. Every time that you look for a job, you are competing with at least 250 other candidates.

On average, a recruiter spends 6 seconds looking at a cv to decide whether it is suitable or not to bring you in for an interview.

The basic requirements of every CV

Aim to create an easy-to-read CV that has all the necessary, relevant information and it looks good and is free from spelling and grammatical errors.

The CV should be between 1 and 3 pages long. If you are a more senior candidate with 20 to 30 years' experience, focus on the most recent 10 years of your career history.

Save your CV on both a PDF format (to ensure layout is intact) and a Word format (so an agency can make necessary edits into their own format). The work experience section of your CV gets the most attention.

Tailor your CV to the position you are applying for. Eg You might emphasise your sales ability and achievements if you are applying for a sales role.



A little added effort to make your CV stand-out

Research the company and work out exactly what skills you should point out to them. Include volunteer work, especially if you are a junior candidate with not a lot of experience.

Keep your CV updated and current. Make sure your job title is still the same, referee details are updated and contact details are the same. Include your telephone number, an alternative contact number as well as your email address.

When you add in details of referees (people who will be able to give a reference on you), do not include your present employer, unless they know you are looking for a new job and you have their blessing.

Never lie on your CV or embellish and exaggerate the level of your skills. If this is found out, you might end up being dismissed from the position (if the lie is severe enough).

A personal touch in your application goes a long way

When you send out your application, this will usually be via email. Make sure that you address it to the person by name and tell them which advert or position you are applying for. If you are just sending your CV to the HR manager without a vacancy, you are unlikely to get far, but tell them why you are sending your CV and what types of roles you are interested in.

Don't make the mistake of sending a long covering letter stating how desperate you are. Keep it short and to the point. Don't make the mistake of sending your CV to 20 different companies via email and cc'ing in all the companies. If you do this, you probably won't get a response because it looks like you are spamming everyone and are not professional.

If you email your CV and don't address it to anyone specifically or you don't say why you are sending it or for which role, you are likely to be ignored.

Don't send a scanned CV.



Pay attention to the details

Include a recent head and shoulders photo that looks professional. (Not a bathroom mirror selfie).

Include a short, catchy summary or profile of yourself at the beginning of your CV, which is a brief description about you. A profile states who you are, what you can offer the company and what your career goals are.

Include achievements – this sets you apart from other candidates.

If a qualification is incomplete, declare it. State “Incomplete” in brackets or take out the word “Qualification” and replace it with “Present studies”.

Include reasons for leaving jobs. Be careful of using statements such as “Difficult boss”, “Unbearable work conditions” or “Personal” as reasons for leaving.

Explain gaps in your CV. Recruiters and hiring managers are generally suspicious and will immediately notice a gap in employment.

Make sure your CV is typed in a font that is easy to read, standard and neither too big or too small. A suggestion is Arial Size 11.

Don't type your CV in capital letters.

You can use sub-headings in your CV such as – personal details, education, computer packages, achievements, work history.



Personal details. Remember to include your ethnicity (some roles are specifically for AA candidates). Include your current physical address, contact number, ID number or date of birth, email address and possibly a link to your LinkedIn profile.

Education details. Include your highest school standard passed, the school, the dates, include symbol or aggregate (especially if it was in the past 10 years or less). Mention if you received a Matric exemption or University pass. Include any leadership positions you had. If you have several tertiary qualifications, state your highest qualification first. You can also list any courses attended and certificates received.

Computer programs. List them and next to each package, you can explain your level of proficiency, such as basic, intermediate or advanced.

Work experience. Mention your positions in reverse chronological order. Start with your most recent position and work backwards. In your start and end dates, include the month and the year. Include your job description or at least the main elements of the job. If you upload your CV to a job site so that recruiters can find you, use keywords. For instance, if you are in Marketing, you could use words such as SEO, direct marketing and digital marketing. Give clear reasons for leaving.

References. The best people to include are your direct reports in your previous jobs. Include the name, title and landlines as well as cell numbers. Make sure you have asked them if they are happy to give you a reference. Do not put colleagues down as referees.

Achievements. You can include special awards, projects led and what was achieved, any streamlining activity that saved the company money or improved efficiency. You can also include promotions earned.

Remember to attach your documents.

Other things you can also include are professional certifications, publications, professional affiliations, conferences attended and additional training.

If you are a young graduate or a junior job-seeker, you might want to include volunteer experience, hobbies an interests, projects done, freelance work done and details of your personal blog.



THE INTERVIEW: PUTTING YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD

The interview is a conversation. You need to walk into any interview, believing that you are the best person for the job. You need to be as natural as possible and practice positive body language.

Before the interview, you need to know yourself, be self-aware, understand how you can meet the employer's needs and why you suit the position. If necessary, do a mock interview and practice answering interview questions in front of a mirror or with a buddy.

Always be prepared

Before the interview, research the company to understand what they do, what their culture is like and what industry they are in. If possible research the person interviewing you. Try to google them to get as much information as possible. Make sure you know what position you are interviewing for and if possible, get the job description beforehand to familiarize yourself with what the job incumbent will be doing on a daily basis. If you are going for an interview with a company via an employment agency, make sure the agency briefs you properly.

Make sure you arrive 10 to 15 minutes early for the interview. Allow extra travel time. Take along a few spare copies of your CV, a copy of your certificates and supporting documents and take a pen and a notepad as well as some questions you have written down in advance.

Dress to impress. The rule of thumb is to dress one level above the position you are applying for. Remember that most interviewers will be older than you and possibly more conservative so dress professionally. If the company you are applying for is young and trendy, such as an advertising agency, then dress accordingly.



Be your own best salesperson and nail that interview

Make a good impression with everyone you meet. Smile. Say their names. Have a firm handshake. Don't fidget, play with your hair, cover your mouth, touch your nose or avert your gaze.

Don't take anyone with you to an interview. Turn your phone off.

Zoom / Skype Interviews. Make sure you are familiar with the software. Ensure you have a stable internet connection. Look at the camera and not at the screen. Test your equipment beforehand. Ensure your background is professional.

Video Interviews. Many companies are asking candidates to do an initial video interview, where they ask the candidate to send them a quick video of the candidate answering 3 to 5 questions in 5 minutes or less. Make sure you portray energy and confidence and that you look professional.

Telephone interviews. Many companies are opting to do an initial telephone screening interview, where they will ask the candidate several questions. Make sure you are in a place where you won't be disturbed.

Don't pretend you know everything. It is sometimes ok to tell the interviewer that you don't know. Don't lie and don't bluff. Be comfortable with silence. Take a breather and pause and think of answers to questions.

The interview is your opportunity to blow your trumpet and to put your best foot forward. You need to sell yourself.



Popular Interview Questions

Here are some examples of popular interview questions:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why do you want this job?
3. Why should we hire you?
4. What can you do for us that other candidates can't?
5. What is your greatest strength?
6. What is your greatest weakness?
7. Why do you want to leave your job?
8. What is your salary expectation?
9. What is your greatest achievement?
10. How do you handle stress and pressure?
11. Why do you want to work here?
12. What are your goals?
13. List three positive things your last boss would say about you?
14. What are your hobbies outside work?
15. Where do you see yourself in 5 years' time?

Take note...

Red flags that hiring managers worry about are:

1. Gaps in your CV
2. Unrealistic salary expectations
3. Poor reasons for leaving
4. No career progression
5. Evidence of personal or financial problems
6. Poor presentation of the candidate and / or the CV
7. Job hopping
8. Criminal record
9. Bad-mouthing of previous employers

Ensure that you also have one or two questions to ask. It shows that you are also discerning and want to make sure that the job is right for you. Here are some suggested questions:

1. Are there any opportunities for growth and advancement?
2. Can you describe the culture of the company?

Follow up with 24 to 48 hours after the interview with a thank you email.

CONTACT US

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