

Six Steps for Writing a Recession-Proof Resume

By Robert Half International

It's no secret that today's job market is extremely challenging. With more and more job candidates applying to fewer and fewer open positions, it may seem nearly impossible for you to get a potential employer's attention. How can you move your document to the top of stack?

Consider the following suggestions for writing a recession-proof resume:

Don't just update your old resume. If you haven't been on the job hunt for many years, it can be tempting to simply pull out the last resume you used, add your most recent accomplishments and send it out. But the document could be many years old, which means the content is likely outdated. At the very least, give your resume a thorough review and weed out any information that is not applicable to your current career goals. You may, for example, remove positions you held in college or delete the mention of an old computer application. You might even find the best course of action is to prepare your resume from scratch.

Consider your form. A chronological resume, in which you list your work experience in reverse chronological order, has long been the standard format that job seekers use. But in a downturn it may not be the best style for showcasing your skills and experience.

If you have frequent or large gaps in your employment history, you may want to use a combination resume instead. A combination resume places the most emphasis on your skills and accomplishments, downplaying your previous positions and dates of employment. Rather than having a section called "Work Experience" serve as the bulk of your resume, for instance, you might have sections titled "Administrative Experience," "Computer Skills" and "Management and Training Skills." A combination resume still details your work history, but this information is abbreviated and placed near the end of the document.

A combination resume also could be a good choice if you are hoping to switch careers. If you don't have experience that relates directly to your new path, this format allows you to highlight transferable skills that are applicable to the position you seek.

Focus on the bottom line. Companies today are looking for ways to reduce expenses and increase efficiencies. When detailing the positions you've held in the past, be sure to mention how you've helped boost a former employer's bottom line. So, if you worked as an administrative assistant, rather than saying "filed documents" or "answered phones," try something like this: "Identified new office-supplies vendor, resulting in cost savings of 25 percent." Be as specific as possible when describing your achievements, and don't be afraid to brag a little.

Customize your content. One of the most important steps when crafting your resume is to target your content to each company and position. Rather than creating a standard document for use with every opportunity, customize your resume so it speaks directly to a potential employer's unique needs. That may mean highlighting different accomplishments or going into greater detail about certain contributions, for instance. Doing so might take a little extra time and effort, but submitting a targeted resume demonstrates your knowledge of and interest in each position and will help you stand apart from other job candidates.

Use your cover letter. Like many job seekers today, you may have extended gaps in your work history due to current economic conditions. The cover letter allows you to address any concerns an employer may have about these gaps. In it, explain how you've kept your skills up-to-date since your last full-time position, whether through temporary assignments, volunteer work or professional development courses.

Check for mistakes. In a survey by our company, 84 percent of executives polled said it takes just one or two typographical errors on a resume to remove a candidate from contention for an open position. Employers see typos, misspellings and grammatical mistakes as a sign you lack professionalism and attention to detail. And in today's environment, hiring managers are less willing to take a chance on applicants who seem unqualified. Use the spell-check function and ask friends and family to proofread your resume before you send it out.

One last piece of advice: Use your network to your advantage. Even if your resume is solid, having a professional contact who can refer you for an open position or personally hand your document to a hiring manager could be key to landing the role you seek.

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