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The Resume as Marketing Piece

Your foot in the door should be your best foot forward

by Sheryl Sookman

Putting together a resume is an arduous task for most people. Typically, a resume ends up either saying too much or too little about a person's experience and background. With increased competition for jobs, it is important that your resume stands out from all the other candidates. Your resume must convince the meeting manager or the manager in human resources that you are a candidate they *must* interview.

Instead of thinking of your resume as just a record of your work history, think of it as your marketing brochure. As with any marketing material, it needs to "sell" the product, which in this case is you. The prospective employer is the customer who reads your "marketing piece" to determine if they want to acquire this "product."

Your Unique Selling Proposition

When companies consider how to market a product or service, they focus on their Unique Selling Proposition (USP). It is the one thing that differentiates their product from others in the marketplace. It may be that the item or service costs less, works more efficiently, or lasts longer. Your resume should focus on your USP to identify what makes you unique. What is it about you, as a candidate, that makes you better than any other applicant? What can you offer that will be beneficial to the company or organization?

Your accomplishments make up your USP. It is important to state them in a tangible and quantifiable manner. Avoid using generic statements such as, "Managed a wide range of meetings and events." Be more specific about the number of attendees, size of budget, and length of programs. One way to state this is, "Managed meetings with 150-1,500 attendees with programs ranging in length from one day up to five days."

When referring to budget management, make certain not to focus just on the high-end figure. Although having managed a total meeting management budget of \$15 million might be impressive, it does not provide any details about the scope of the meetings and events you managed. Include specifics about the per-program budgets within a range, i.e., "Per-program budgets ranged in size from \$15,000-\$1.5 million (President's Circle incentive)."

Be sure to also identify whether you were responsible for reducing costs associated with these budgets. Again, remember to state this in a tangible way, such as "reduced program expenses by 15 percent on an annual basis" or "decreased program expenses by \$10,000 per year."

What is Your Brand?

In marketing a product or service, it is important to establish a brand—an image that allows people to easily identify your company from the competition. Companies and organizations spend thousands of dollars to insure that their brand is maintained.

Your brand is different from your Unique Selling Proposition because it identifies your specialty areas—your niche market. What skills and experience have you gained to form your areas of

specialty? Are you an expert in strategic planning, budget design, or an expert in contract negotiation? If, for example, you are seeking a position that utilizes your strategic skills, then make sure that your resume emphasizes this area rather than your logistics or operations experience.

One young meeting planner was puzzled about why she continually ended up in positions where she was responsible for designing the invitations for her company's parties and special events. The reason: Every job on her resume included a bullet that stated her experience in this area. In this case, she had created a brand for herself that she did not really want!

As part of your brand, be sure to identify the types of meetings you have expertise managing. Specify areas such as expositions or trade show booths, product launches, seminar series, incentive travel programs, annual meetings, or general sessions.

Designing Your Resume

The design and layout of a marketing piece also impacts how people receive the information. Your eyes tend to gravitate from top to bottom when reading a document, so be sure to place critical information about yourself at the top of each job within your resume. Prioritize your accomplishments so the most important ones appear first.

Generally speaking, hiring managers spend about 10 to 15 seconds initially reading a resume. Given this short time frame, it is important that you do everything to help insure that the reader gets all the way through your resume. By placing your information in bullets instead of in a paragraph format, you help the reader to more quickly view all of your accomplishments.

Use clear and concise wording when describing your experience. With more than 500 people potentially applying for each position, you want to make certain that you clearly state your skills and background. If a company is looking for someone who has experience planning multi-city seminars and product launches, will they know you have it if your resume simply states, "Experience coordinating a wide range of meetings and events?"

Information to Include or Exclude

One misconception is that your resume must include every aspect of every job you held since graduating from high school or college. As your primary marketing piece, you have the ability to keep the reader's focus by highlighting those areas of your past jobs that you enjoyed, have expertise in, and want to expand upon. Make sure not to clutter your resume with information that will distract the reader or shift their focus from your brand.

Another problem people often face is how many years to include on their resumes. The general rule of thumb is to only show the past 10 to 12 years of experience. If there is a job beyond that time frame that you believe is relevant, there are a number of ways to include this information. One option is to add a section called "Previous Experience," under which you simply list the name of the company, your title, city, state, and dates of employment. Another option is to create an "Addendum" for your resume where you highlight specific meetings and events. Describe each meeting or event in a brief paragraph and include information about your specific responsibilities.

Storing and Updating Your Resume

Because your resume is an ongoing reflection of your career, it is a good idea to update it on a regular basis. By doing this, you avoid having to reconstruct details about your major accomplishments.

Another important reason to continually update your resume is to insure that it is stored in the most current version of software. Software upgrades can typically read a few older versions, but there are some instances when formatting is not maintained or portions of the file are no longer recognized. A recent article in the San Francisco Chronicle addressed the fact that NASA is having difficulty accessing all of the information previously stored about the Viking Missions to Mars. The computer hardware and software has changed significantly since these missions occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s and, as a result, newer systems are unable to read some of the critical data that was acquired. As a result, NASA had to go back to written files to reconstruct some of the information, while other data may be lost forever because the scientists involved are no longer living.

Your resume is *the* document that gets you in the door for that all-important interview. Make sure it represents you in the way you want to be seen as a meeting professional.

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