

Writing a CV for a crowded job market

Sean Toms of Robinson Toms Recruitment shows how to make your CV stand out

Rule number one is remember your CV is your own personal sales document. First and foremost this applies to whatever role you seek, not just to sales roles but also roles in credit, operations, collections, asset management etc. It also applies however senior a position you are applying for.

Instead of typing the words Curriculum Vitae or CV at the top, stop for a minute and consider typing “Why You Should Hire Me...” and then see how you write it. Rather differently? A list of responsibilities alone will not get you hired; you will be hired because of what you have achieved within your responsibilities, and by demonstrating how you can successfully build upon these and deliver tangible value in your next role.

Your whole CV should be your own personal mission statement, your “This is me and this is how I can add value to your company” document. It is your door opener, getting you to an interview. When in front of the hiring decision maker(s) your CV should send a strong and compelling message. Written well, it will set the initial tone for an interview, manage expectations, and articulate your strengths and your value, allowing you to build on these.

Remember only 30 percent of what is said rather than what is written is remembered in full and with accuracy; a well written CV will continue to sell you and your value long after you have finished your presentation and left the interview room.

When you write your CV, think about these 4 questions:

1) What are my biggest achievements?

Forget the CV format for a minute; just think of the three or four biggest achievements that have really meant something in each role. They must be things where you made a real difference, possibly things that took you out of your comfort zone and “grew” you, demonstrating your adaptability, promotability and your resilience. Perhaps you changed the way that the company did something or achieved something that required a lot of influencing of different stakeholders? Get these down.

Whatever your achievements, they should look similar to the SMART based KPIs – (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timescaled) that the best employers use to set employees’ objectives. Making these achievements obvious will give whoever reads your CV a clear and compelling insight into how effectively you delivered.

2) Where have I added value and where have I made a real difference?

Too many CVs still reflect a list of responsibilities that look like they might have been cut and pasted from a job description – have you ever done this, we hope not. Time spent on your CV is time better spent than on almost anything else in your job search, bar the next stage; pre-interview preparation.

If you doubt this, then why can professional CV writers charge up to £2000 to write a CV at executive level. Their argument is that this £2000 investment will help you secure your next job and if that role one on a £250,000 salary then the cost benefit analysis is unarguable.

You need to bring your CV to life, give it colour and substance, let anyone reading it know what you have done really made a difference to your company. It doesn’t have to be a dramatic, if

you are not a CEO then no one is going to expect you to claim credit for improving ROE or the PE ratio, but you must demonstrate where you added value in your role(s). It may just be something that you simplified or perhaps you enhanced a process that was already there – whatever it was, make it clear, make it succinct and get it down.

3) What is most important to me about my achievements? Are they what was most important to my employer?

It is tempting to list what you feel are your biggest achievements without also considering, as carefully, your employer’s perspective. You may take pride in something to do with managing people, or deputising for a senior colleague, or having taken a lead on a strategic project. Whatever you list first is probably the thing that means or meant most to you, it is your key achievement and this is understandable.

However, think carefully here . . . you need to demonstrate that your achievements are/were closely aligned to the strategic objectives of your current or previous employer. Evidencing success on something that was not continued with and was shut down due to cost overruns or lack of a real shareholder return might look rather like a wild goose chase that you don’t want to be associated with. New initiatives have to be explored and, when market tested, implemented. However pragmatism and real world shareholder returns are all that ultimately matters.

4) Why am I reading this?

The last question is not for you the jobseeker, but for the decision maker or influencer reading *your* CV. They have a got a vacancy to fill, your CV has reached them, whether directly or through a third party. Good! You in now in the game and the selling opportunity for you begins right here. However, they are busy, they have conflicting priorities, they have other claims on their time, recruiting is just part of their job it is probably not their whole job . . . make it easy for them!

Why are they reading your CV? How does your CV match up against what they want and need and what their company wants and needs? If they have to hunt too hard for clues, and piece it together, then the chances are that they will move on to the next one too soon.

We have been told by some clients that they make a decision on whether or not to interview someone within 2 minutes of starting to read a CV . . . with just 2 minutes of someone’s time your CV is your elevator pitch sharply telescoped; make sure that they can see on page 1 why they should see you – let them discard the others who have invested less time than you in preparing their CVs.

Memorably, we were also once told by a very senior manager employed by a global captive lessor client of ours that at interview they decided in the first 60 seconds whether or not to hire that person (first impressions do count), they then spent the next 59 minutes trying to convince themselves that they had made the wrong initial decision, and to change their mind.

We’ll follow this article up with one on how you can make sure that in that crucial first 60 seconds that you don’t spend the next 59 minutes in catch up mode. ■

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