

Marketing Yourself

Phase 1: how to write a CV

To get your dream job you need a marketing campaign – and you are the product! Your CV is the detail aid. Your application letter highlights your features and benefits. The interview is your chance to pitch. And negotiating the offer is the close. This series of articles will help you develop a CV, draft an application letter, and prepare yourself for interviews. The aim is to help you to stand out in a very competitive marketplace. This first article deals with developing a CV.

A CV has one simple purpose – to get you interviews.

To do that, it has to be readable and interesting.

To be readable, it needs to be:

- concise
- well written
- well presented.

To be interesting, it needs to highlight your:

- qualifications
- skills
- achievements.

Producing a good CV is simple, but not easy. The simple part consists of the rules. The part that is not easy is writing your CV. You need to be a good and willing re-writer.

The rules will appear shortly. But first you need to do some work on your achievements.

An achievement is anything you've done that:

- resulted in more with the same resources
- resulted in the same with fewer resources
- improved operations, or made things easier or better
- resolved a problem or panic situation with little or no increase in time, energy, money, or people
- was a first time activity for you, e.g. launching a new product.

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To identify things you have done that you can claim as achievements, ask yourself these questions:

- did you take the initiative in confronting any problems, opportunities or challenges?
- did you develop something?
- did you create or design a new programme, procedure, plan, service or product?
- did you identify a need for a plan, programme, product, service or procedure?
- did you prepare any original reports, papers or documents?

A good list of well-written achievement statements will:

- make you feel good about yourself and your worth, giving you confidence
- provide you with a selection of interesting things to use in your CV
- give you some powerful things to say in interviews
- enable you to show prospective employers that you have USED your skills.

Here are the simple rules alluded to earlier:

- write your own CV – at least the initial draft
- keep it to a maximum of 4 pages
- make white space your friend
- use bullet points
- use the first page for essential, basic information about you (e.g. personal and contact details including mobile phone and email, qualifications, training, skills, and selected achievements)
- use later pages to give details of your work experience – in reverse date order, with your current job described in greatest detail
- write a brief description of each organisation shown in your work experience (purpose, size, output, etc.)
- list your responsibilities in each organisation – using bullet points
- list your achievements in each organisation – using bullet points
- use your completed work to create a summary page (you can then use this to stand alone or to serve as your front page).

The front or summary page is the most important. It should summarise everything that you have to offer. That way, if the recruiter goes no further, you have got your basic information across. Keep the whole document concise and relevant. Your CV is not supposed to be your life story. It is more a summary of your relevant experience and achievements. It is rarely necessary to cover more than the last 8-10 years of your experience in detail.

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Now, you need to think about presentation. Give it the same attention that you would if you were preparing a detail aid. Use plain white or cream paper. Make sure your CV is readable by avoiding fancy graphics and using simple fonts. These include Arial, Garamond, Swiss721, Times New Roman, Univers, and Verdana. For most of these, a 12pt size is best (apart from anything else, it stops you filling up the pages with too many words). With Arial, you can get away with 11pt because it is the most uncluttered font of all.

And that's it, except for one final question.

Do you have to re-write your CV for every application you make? No, this is not necessary. It is better to invest your time in a targeted, well-crafted covering letter. The next article in this series will deal with covering letters.

Phase 2: how to apply for and get an interview

Phase 1 of your marketing campaign was to produce a great CV. A great CV is a concise catalogue of your experience, qualifications, talents – and achievements. But on its own it won't persuade anyone to see you, because that's all it is – a catalogue. So it's not enough to send just a CV to a recruiter. You need to send an explanation of why you are applying and what you are offering.

In marketing terms, your CV sets out only your features. You also need to set out your benefits. That is the job of the covering letter, or application letter.

Recruiters who receive covering letters usually read them carefully. So a good letter can be your first opportunity to make a positive impact. Some recruiters decide to invite candidates for interview on the strength of the covering letter alone. They then merely flick through the CV to confirm details and put it aside to read later.

However, before you even attempt to write a covering letter, find out as much as you can about the company and the job. You will be then able to prepare reasons why you are specifically suited to the job. It's called market research, and you are the product. Most professional recruiters are pleased to spend time helping you with information that you need.

The message in your covering letter will have to:

- command attention quickly
- get and maintain interest
- provide necessary details
- persuade the reader to act on your application

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The best way to achieve these objectives is to write a concise letter in which each paragraph does a specific job.

- make your letter brief and to-the-point: not more than one page. And, whenever possible, address it to a named person. 'Dear Sir' letters have no place in a marketing campaign in which you are the product. Write a draft letter first so that you know what you want to say.
- address the specific issues raised in the advertisement and highlight where your previous experience meets the requirements. It is usually a good idea to play back some of the phrases used in the advertisement. The person who wrote it took a lot of trouble doing so and will be pleased to see such a replay.
- ideally, your letter should have only four concise paragraphs.

First paragraph – is an introduction that will explain why you are writing. Avoid stock phrases, like “I am writing to apply for...” It is much better if you can open with something like: “Thank you for your time on the telephone the other day, and for giving me more information about the job of Marketing Manager at...”

You should also mention the documentation you have enclosed to support your application, such as a CV.

Second paragraph – will explain your motivation in seeking the job. You should try to get across what appeals to you about the job, why you want it. For example, “This job appeals to me because it seems to offer the opportunity to build on the expertise I have developed in...” and “It seems to be the next logical step in my career in marketing.”

Third paragraph – is where you explain why the employer would want to employ you. You should try to get across what you think you have to offer and how you can be of benefit to the organisation. This is the most important paragraph. You can use bullet points in this paragraph if you want. They help make your marketing message strong and powerful. And they make it easy to read. For example: “I can offer Synpharm –

- 5 years experience in selling and marketing pharmaceuticals
- 2 years product management experience in oncology products
- experience of 2 successful product launches
- etc., etc.”

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Avoid exaggerating or understating your achievements. You don't need to go into all the details here. They are in your CV. Aren't they?

Fourth paragraph – is the conclusion and should ask, either directly or indirectly, for the interview. After all, that is your objective; without an interview, you can't hope to get the job.

and that's all!

Now all you have to do is present it well and check it thoroughly. Check that you have included all your contact details, including mobile phone numbers and email addresses. Then make sure you enclose a copy of your CV before sending the letter!

Good luck.

Phase 3: preparing for an interview

Volumes have been written about job interviews, so an article of this length can deal only with the bare essentials.

The purpose of an interview is to assess your capacity to perform in a particular job, and to find out if you will fit into the organisation.

There are 3 secrets to a successful interview – preparation, preparation and preparation! Preparation involves reviewing your CV and covering letter, doing research on the company and the job, and anticipating questions that the recruiter might ask you.

Before attending an interview, find out all you can about the company and the job. You will then be able to prepare reasons why you are specifically suited to the job.

The interview is the most important event in your job search campaign. It is not the final step; you will still need to negotiate an offer. But you win or lose a job in the interview. It would be sad to lose it for lack of preparation after all the marketing effort that you put into your CV and covering letter. So think of the interview as the sales pitch within your overall marketing campaign, and prepare for it accordingly.

Main Preparation for the Interview

As part of your preparation for an interview, there are three main things you should do:

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- Know your work history and your achievements very well. In times of stress, the first thing that fails is your memory.
- Know why you are the right person for the job. If you are very clear in your mind about that, it will help convince the interviewer.
- Know as much about the company as possible. This will help you anticipate what questions you might be asked.

Further Preparation for the Interview

- Know the exact place and time of the interview, the interviewer's full name and correct pronunciation of it, and his/her title
- Research the company via the Internet, the Business Who's Who, and other sources
- Know enough about the job to make sense at the interview
- Think about the company's products or services
- Network with your contacts for further information
- Consider issues the company could be facing and how they relate to the job
- Visualise what it would be like to work in the company
- Revise the facts and figures of your present and previous employments
- Consider your personal image. (How should you appear to the interviewer?)
- Visualise and rehearse the interview
- Be ready to "run the interview" if necessary
- Devise a list of questions to ask the interviewer (what do you need to ask?).

At the interview

Go to the interview prepared to listen, not just to talk. It is important to focus on what the other person is saying, not on what you are going to say next. You have to listen actively. That involves eye contact, facial expressions and careful attention to pick up underlying messages.

Get on the same wavelength

"Pacing" and "Mirroring" are ways of helping the interview go well. Be prepared to let the interviewer set the pace and respond in kind. If the interviewer is bright and crisp and friendly, you should try to be the same. If the interviewer's manner is serious, formal and unremittingly businesslike, try to behave as much like that as your own personality will allow.

Answering Questions

When providing information, make sure that it can be easily understood, is clear and concise. Where possible, use examples to clarify what you mean.

Interviewers will often ask you questions about challenges you might face in the job, or have faced in previous jobs. You need to prepare in advance for

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these by reflecting on situations in your past work experience. You can then use examples to show how you handled situations and what the outcomes were. A useful structure for your answers is this one:

- Situation** – a brief description of the context in which things took place
- Tactics** – the possible responses or options you considered
- Action** – the action that you decided on and took
- Results** – what you achieved

With practice, you will find that this structure enables you to demonstrate your achievements very effectively.

Finally, go to the interview prepared to accept the job if it is offered to you and you really want it. Only ask for time to think about it if you really need it. Here's wishing you get the job you want.

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