Designing your resume to grab employer's attention

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Date : July 31, 2014

Job hunting can be one of the most exhilarating and yet one of the most agonizing experiences in your life. While you look forward to the new chapter in your professional life, finding a way to stand out from other candidates, who are at least equally qualified for the position you want, is a difficult task.

Your resume is the first contact your potential employer has with you. A well formatted and a well-written resume can make a difference between getting the interview and getting the job, and being passed over. Most employers receive a stack of resumes of qualified candidates and scan them quickly before they decide whether or not hey want to read further. You only have a few seconds to make a lasting impression. Don’t panic. Instead, focus on the design of your resume as it is the first thing your employer, whether on paper or in electronic form.

The most commonly made mistake in resume design include using templates that are already available in Microsoft Word. While these templates provide a quick, easy to follow tools to create your resume, they are outdated, and they will make your resume appear generic and uninviting. Additionally, these templates, while well formatted in Microsoft Word, will not translate well when emailed or uploaded to job search engine web sites.

Second most commonly made mistake in resume design is inclusion of graphics on the page. Your picture and/or any other graphics are not appropriate for a resume. Including anything outside of plain text will make you stand out in a way that makes the employer think you are not taking yourself seriously as a professional, and this is certainly not the first impression you want to make. You can find samples of resumes on the Internet; search for resumes by your industry to find the templates that make most sense for the job you are seeking. Than work on a blank page to replicate the look and feel of the resume you like.
The following are basic formatting rules for your resume:
- Limit the length of the resume to two pages.
- The page should have one-inch margins, top and bottom, right and left.
- Use left justification only – as a rule, do not center the content of your resume.
- The font and font size should be consistent.
- The bullet points should be basic – use circles or squares, but never any symbols that may not translate well when you email your resume to your potential employer.
- Headlines can be in all caps; the remaining text should not have special formatting.
- Do not underline any of the information in your resume. In the world of Internet driven job applications, underlining in a document implies a web link.
- The font size for headlines should not exceed 14 points; the remainder of the text in the resume should not exceed 12 points.
- Use the Tab key instead of the Space bar to create spaces between the text in your resume.

As a last formatting check point, ask your friends or your family for help in reviewing your resume. Send the resume file via email to a few of your friends – ask them to review the resume and make sure nothing seems out of place. Print out the resume on paper and review to make sure that margins are accurately set, and that the content doesn't appear crowded on the page. Keep in mind – when it comes to your resume, sleek simple appearance, and great writing, will get you the job you are seeking.