

First Impressions

What is your resume really saying about you?

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The economic indicators show signs that job growth across the country is continuing to increase and employers are continuing to hire, and especially in four areas: professional and business services, and education and health services. For example, employment was up 6.1 percent in computer and peripherals manufacturing for the San Jose metropolitan area, which includes Santa Clara and San Mateo counties, while local employment at Internet service providers grew 8.2 percent in the same period.

While the number of jobs is increasing, employers realize it is still a buyers' market and are taking their time to find the candidate who is the best fit for the position. Since e-mail has become the primary way that job seekers initially submit their resumes, it is important that the resume clearly and succinctly presents their skills and abilities. It needs to speak loudly as to what your capabilities are as a meeting planner. This is especially true if someone who is not familiar with the particulars about meeting and event planning first reviews the resumes. For example, someone in human resources may be scanning resumes for specific skills and background on a checklist that the manager of meetings has identified as "must haves" for members of their meeting planning staff.

How you describe your experience and background impacts whether your resume is selected or not. One of the most important things is to provide detailed information about your accomplishments and job responsibilities, and communicate this in the most concise manner. Providing quantifiable accomplishments is also important.

Provide Clear and Concise Details

The most effective way to capture a reader's attention in a resume is to list each item in a bulleted format. One of the most challenging tasks for people is to learn how to provide enough detail about specific accomplishments or job responsibilities without creating lengthy paragraphs. It means not being too flowery in the way you describe your experience.

An alternative to saying, "As the senior planner, in charge of investigating sites and presenting options for consideration for all meetings and events," is to say, "Responsible for analyzing and selecting sites for all meetings, events, trade shows, and incentive programs."

What frequently happens is that people go in the other direction and end up not providing enough information. A single resume might have two bullets that say the following: "Arranged for audiovisual equipment," and one below it that says, "In charge of arranging all food and beverage." Since they are both dealing with meeting logistics, another way to present this information is to combine them into one bullet that reads, "Arranged all meeting logistics including food and beverage and audiovisual equipment."

Provide Details

It is important not to be too vague when describing your accomplishments. Simply saying, "Planned committee meetings" does not tell a prospective employer enough about those meetings. Be certain to consider the following five pieces of information when describing your experience: type of programs, frequency of the programs you managed, size of the programs, size of budgets, and locations of program.

Following are examples:

1.) Type of programs you managed or coordinated: Most hiring managers want someone on their team who already has experience planning similar types of meetings and events. Simply stating "planned corporate meetings and events" is not specific enough. Indicate if you have experience planning sales meetings, seminars, trainings, user conferences, annual meetings, board of directors meetings, multi-city programs, product launches, incentives, or trade shows. Expand that bullet to say, "Planned corporate meetings and events such as sales meetings, user conferences, product launches, and trade shows."

2.) Frequency of the programs you managed: Not only do employers like to know that you have experienced managing similar types of programs, they like to know that you have managed a similar number of meetings and events. If the company exhibits at 50 trade shows nationally with booth sizes averaging 20-feet-by-20-feet, they would be less likely to consider someone whose experience has been dealing with five trade shows a year that are no larger than tabletops. Instead of saying, "Managed trade show schedule," consider saying, "Coordinated presence at 25 shows annually with booths ranging in size from 10-feet-by-10-feet up to 40-feet-by-40-feet." If you were addressing multi-city events, such as a seminar series, you might say, "Managed a seminar series held in 20 cities each quarter, with an average of 150 attendees per city."

3.) Size of programs: As with the frequency of programs, employers want to know if you have experience working with programs of a size similar to theirs. You can indicate this in one of two ways: one is to provide a range, such as, "Managed programs ranging in size from 150 up to 2,000 attendees"; The other is to indicate a maximum size that you have experience handling, such as, "Managed programs with up to 2,000 attendees."

4.) Size of budgets: Just saying managed budgets does not provide hiring managers with enough information. Tell them about your level of responsibility with budgets as well. "Responsible for developing, managing and reconciling program budgets ranging in size from \$50,000 up to \$2 million" gives the hiring manager a lot more information.

5.) Location of programs: Simply saying, "handled all domestic and international meetings and events" does not provide enough details. Indicate the number of cities you have worked in domestically, such as, "Arranged meetings and conferences in more than 50 cities nationwide on an annual basis."

Companies and associations that have an international presence are especially interested in individuals who have managed programs in similar destinations. Include information about specific cities, countries or continents where you have managed meetings, such as, "Managed programs throughout Europe, South America and Africa." If you prefer identifying specific countries, you might say, "Managed programs in more than 25 countries, including Italy, France, Germany, Singapore, Australia, Brazil, and Mexico."

Quantify Your Accomplishments

Employers like to see specific references about your accomplishments. Quantify how you decreased costs, increased revenue or improved attendance. Instead of saying, "Cultivated new major donors and corporate sponsors," consider saying, "Generated more than \$500,000 in revenue by cultivating five major donors and 30 corporate sponsors in the past two years."

When describing an increase in attendance, you could say, "Increased attendance at annual meeting from 1,500 to 2,000 attendees (a 25 percent improvement) in one year by changing the conference schedule to include more spousal/ guest events." Another example would be, "Reduced the operating budget by 15 percent, saving the company more than \$75,000 on an annual basis."

If you are involved with meetings on a more strategic level, describe what your involvement is with the decision-making process and who the stakeholders are that you interface with. Identify what your responsibilities are for executing the overall strategy for each meeting or event, what systems you have in place for identifying their success, i.e., return on investment (ROI) or return on objectives (ROO).

Other Items to Remember

We work in a very detail-oriented business. Always be sure to proofread your resume for typos and grammatical errors, and be sure to have someone else review it as well. Do not rely exclusively on the spell check program within word processing software. Resumes and cover letters that have misspelled words, poor grammar or an incorrect sequence of dates of employment tend to get eliminated from consideration.

Check to see if your resume contains a contact phone number that you check frequently. If you only check your messages at home once a day, consider putting your cell phone on your resume instead. Make certain to update the cell phone number on your resume as well, especially if you recently changed your cell phone carrier. Your e-mail address is another important piece of contact information. If your e-mail address changed because your Internet provider merged with another company, be sure to update this as well.

Your resume says a lot about you as a meeting professional, so make sure it speaks volumes about your experience and capabilities. It will get you in the door for an initial interview.

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