

Word Play

Knowing what managers look for in resumes is the key to success

by Sheryl Sookman

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In a survey my company recently sent out to corporate meeting managers nationwide, respondents concurred that only 30 percent to 35 percent of the resumes they receive for any given job posting are potentially qualified candidates—that means approximately seven out of every 10 resumes are rejected.

What causes so many of them to be rejected? The answer is actually quite simple: The majority of candidates who submit their resume do not have the required background and experience for the position, or are not clearly communicating their capabilities.

In most mid- to large-size companies or associations, resumes are initially directed to the human resources department. The hiring manager provides human resources with a list of the qualifications that are most important, and they use this information to pre-screen resumes.

For example, the hiring manager may require meeting planners with extensive experience managing international meetings; what they want to see is a reference to specific countries or cities where the meeting planner has managed programs. The human resources department will automatically eliminate any resumes that do not contain any mention of international meetings experience, and may put in a secondary review group any resumes that only say something like, "Experience managing domestic and international meetings," because they are not specific enough.

"There are so many different types of meetings and events someone can do, so it's important to know right off what they are capable of doing," says Lisa Lani, CMP, vice president, Corporate

Events at San Francisco-based Union Bank of California.

The mantra meeting planners should repeat when crafting their resume is "be as detailed as possible, in a clear and concise manner." Most hiring managers spend less than five minutes reviewing a resume, so it is extremely important that you consider carefully what you say, how you say it, and how you present it visually.

Summary of Qualifications

Including an objective at the beginning of the resume tends to be "more of an exercise in resume writing," according to Julie Johnson, CMP, CMM, director, Events & Incentives, Lennox Industries Inc., in Richardson, Texas. Unless an objective is focused, most meeting managers we surveyed recommended eliminating this from the resume for entry-level or mid-range meeting planners. As one meeting manager said, "Oftentimes, the objective is too vague, and is just trying to say what the manager wants to read."

What meeting managers do like to see—again, if they are focused—is a summary of qualifications.

"A summary is helpful if it is "very targeted, with concise examples that apply to information in the body of the resume," says Michele Snock, CMM, manager, Global Meeting Services at San Jose, Calif.-based Cisco Systems.

This is even more applicable when it comes to higher-level positions.

"A summary of qualifications is more important as a way to convey your areas of expertise [for executive positions]," says Betsy Bondurant, CMP, CMM, associate director of Meeting Planning and Trade Shows at Thousand Oaks, Calif.-based Amgen Inc.

Resume Format

When asked which type of resume format they preferred, 55 percent of the meeting managers responded that they prefer the chronological format. No one liked a purely functional-oriented resume, but interestingly, 45 percent responded that they prefer a resume that combines chronological and functional elements. The main reason they dislike the functional format is that it is difficult to know when this occurred: Was it in your most current position or did you do it 10 years ago?

For Bondurant, a chronological resume helps her see if there are any gaps in the flow of the person's career.

One of the five most important things meeting managers told us they look for in a resume—in terms of its structure—is employment history. They all prefer seeing a clear representation of job history dates. Avoid listing just the years you held a position, i.e., 2004-2005, because it raises a question in the mind of hiring managers whether you are trying to hide the fact that you were in this position less than a year. It is best to show the month and year you started and ended each job in numeric fashion, i.e., 1/04-2/05.

Important Information to Include

We asked meeting managers about the information they most want to know about a candidate's experience level. Seventy-seven percent responded that they are interested in a candidate's tactical abilities and the specific types of meetings and events they managed. Job-seekers should thus avoid reciting the same tactical experience in each job.

"Build on your level of experience with each job," says Cisco's Snock. "Show what added responsibilities you had."

Listing the specific types of meetings and events you have managed helps the hiring manager to see if your experience matches with the programs their department handles. For example, let them know if you were responsible for board meetings, user conferences and/or incentives, or if you were just in charge of monthly staff meetings. If you assisted a senior planner, then say that; avoid misrepresenting your level of involvement.

"Note whether you were the person in charge or involved as part of a team-management process," Bondurant says.

Meeting managers are also interested in knowing about the size of programs; i.e., the number of attendees and the average number of programs a candidate handles each year. An easy way to present this information is in a range: "Responsible for managing 10-15 programs per year with 50-5,000 attendees."

Sixty-six percent of survey respondents noted that they want to know about a meeting planner's strategic involvement with programs. The manager of a large corporation on the West Coast recommends candidates include "brief examples of initiatives they were involved with and specific accomplishments." For Bondurant, it is important to know what they understand and are involved in.

"I want to see ways that they have been able to produce cost savings," says Union Bank of California's Lani.

For companies or associations who hold meetings worldwide, it is extremely important to have candidates who have this type of experience.

"I am not as interested in knowing about specific countries [where they have managed programs] as I am about regions of the world," says Lennox Industries' Johnson.

For Lani, it is important that candidates know the

California meetings market because their meetings and events primarily happen throughout the state.

Resume Structure: The 'Must-Haves'

As we noted earlier, meeting managers typically spend no more than five minutes reviewing a resume. Paragraphs tend to slow down the reader, so use bullet points instead.

"I look in particular at the last four to five years," Johnson says. "Reduce the number of bullets to two maximum for earlier jobs, and eliminate those that do not relate to meeting planning."

Of course, it's crucial to state the specific talents you bring to the table.

The key is to provide as much detail as possible in the most concise manner. When noting the type of meetings you manage, you could write, "Responsible for managing approximately 75 meetings each year, including sales meetings, user conferences, town halls, and incentives." In addition, make certain to include whether you manage other meeting-related activities, such as trade shows or special events.

Managers also want to know who attends the programs you manage; are they are senior-level executives, sales staff or for external customers? Other information meeting managers noted they want to see in resumes includes experience with multi-stakeholder planning teams, the use of technology tools and computer programs, experience managing supplier relationships, and a clear description of your contract negotiation skills.

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