

How to Ensure Your Resume is Written to Come Up in Key Word Searches

A well written and concise resume is essential to engage the reader. Because of the quantity of the resumes employers receive, technology is increasingly playing a greater role in the recruitment process, with larger recruitment agencies and HR departments using Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS) to undertake the initial screening and culling of job applications.

This ATS process may incorporate boolean search strings and often uses key word matching technologies. Most resume scanning software includes a keyword identifying and sorting system which has the capability of ranking or rating resumes based on the number of “keywords” contained in the resume. This means that your resume must contain the right key words and the right percentage of these words to come up as a match against the specific job you have applied for.

Resumes that don’t pass the search and match score required are unlikely to be viewed by human eyes. Whether or not this is the most effective way to hire is questionable however the reality is that this is the process that is frequently used. Knowing this, it is important to modify your resume for each job you are applying for, taking note of the criteria and skills listed in the Job Ad and insuring your resume reflects these words where they are relevant to your experience.

These days, the first review of your resume is most likely going to be through scanning software than a human being. Those resumes that make it past the screening technology will go through to the next round, where they are viewed by the Recruiter or Hiring Manager. They will generally spend less than 30 seconds going through each one. As with the search and match technology, they are looking to match your most recent jobs, education and skills against their job brief. However, it is always better to assume that a human is going to read your resume even if it doesn’t happen initially, it will happen when your resume passes through the keyword scan. When humans read your resume it is equally important to put the most important keywords early in your resume to engage the reader.

In her article, [‘Secrets of the resume gatekeeper’](#) Beth Kowitt, says there are no magical words that must appear on every resume. The things that people think are magical words are resume fluff. Terms like hard working, loyal and great communicator aren’t going to get you anywhere. She adds, “The person who’s writing the document needs to appeal to both the scanner and the person who’s scanning.”

Due to the technology involved in scanning the resumes, it is also important to keep the format of your resume simple and somewhat plain. A resume that is not formatted correctly won’t appear in a search for keywords, which in turn decreases the chances of being called up in an interview. Also, an overly formatted resume like with text in fancy fonts, special effects, graphics and logos, headers and footers is not advised.



It is important to note that the ATS screening technology is used by the larger employers and recruitment agencies. Some small companies are using scanning technology and searching the Web for resumes through 'resume mining' sites and technology.

Normally the more boutique or specialized recruitment agencies have a more 'human approach' and are open to hiring on potential rather than on 'search and match' criteria. Likewise, not all employers are using this technology. A good way to assess whether ATS is being used is, when you apply for the position, look at the bottom of the job search page and you should see if it is powered by an ATS such as Taleo and PageUp. Also, you will have to fill in a lengthy online application process and potentially even filtering questions.

The use of key words and the relevance of your resume content to the job (i.e. the job ad) are critical in determining whether you make the interview stage. This is why it is important to have multiple versions of your resume and to adapt / customise one as appropriate for each job application.

To access more information and resources on Resume Writing, visit the [Six Figures Resume Writing Resources](#) area.

Author Details

Kelly's 12 years experience working across HR, Recruitment & Career Coaching has provided her with a solid understanding of what the job market looks like, what employers look for and the common experiences and challenges they face.

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