



How to... write the perfect CV

A great CV is a must for any job. But as recruitment expert and founder of City CV Victoria McLean explains, if your résumé

doesn't match up to today's expectations, you could well be overlooked. She shares her tips for getting to the top of the pile



CV

Who? Victoria McLean
Current role CEO and founder of City CV. The company has won six TORI Awards, the gold standard for the CV-writing industry, including Best Executive CV 2016 and Best Finance CV 2016.
Previous roles Recruitment head for firms including Goldman Sachs and Merrill Lynch.

The CV has changed considerably over the last few years. Historically it was just a list of responsibilities, and still thinking of it that way is where a lot of people – especially those who haven't needed a CV for a long time – are going wrong. The days when copying and pasting job specs from your previous roles was enough are gone.

Managing directors, many of whom have run the same company for years with no need to update their CV, can be particularly susceptible to taking an overly traditional approach. Indeed, 85 per cent of the executive CVs I review are in need of a significant overhaul.

A major factor, of course, is technology. Almost all headhunting firms, recruitment companies and the majority of big organisations now use an applicant tracking system (ATS), which is a giant searchable database. If a recruiter is advertising online for a non-exec director with marketing

experience including specific keywords into their system. The same keywords also go into the job spec when they're advertising, and the system will subsequently only highlight candidates whose CVs have the desired keywords in them. Just as with using Google, we need to consider this as SEO for CVs.

Similarly, if the CV is formatted in a non-conventional way, often the ATS will not be able to read the content. The use of tables and text boxes in your CV can really confuse the ATS, leaving your application stranded in cyberspace. Here are seven more things to consider when refreshing your CV...

1 List achievements not responsibilities
 Focus much more on your successes rather than what you do – that daily activity can make a boring CV. Include the scope and scale for everything you've done and, crucially, provide context

and background for each. People often launch straight into their achievements but they don't provide the background. I want to know what you were hired to do and what your progression was – providing that the narrative is really important.

2 Think of it as a business case
 One way of looking at this is you're a product in a very competitive market and your future hirer is the buyer. You've got to demonstrate why they should buy you – what is it that you've got of value? Demonstrate the return on investment in you. This will make it more likely that they a) want to interview you, b) will hire you and c) will pay you more because they recognise the commercial worth in doing so.

3 Ensure your CV complements your LinkedIn
 Today 97 per cent of headhunters and recruiters use LinkedIn as their primary candidate source

and 70 per cent will reject on the basis of what they see. Think of LinkedIn almost like showing a little bit of ankle without going above the knee! You want to give a flavour of who you are without giving too much away – then they contact you to learn more from your CV.

4 Remember you are a brand
 The CV is just one part of an individual's marketing collateral. So when you're looking for a job you really need to build up that collateral – that includes your CV, your LinkedIn, your cover letter and, potentially, a one-page executive bio. The CV is the most formal part of your collateral. People forget that it is a marketing document and don't sell themselves enough. I looked at one CV for an executive and at the bottom it had "strengths and weaknesses". Your CV is not the place to write about things you're not very good at. It's about selling everything that you've done – what impact did that bring to the

business? Did it reduce costs? Did it improve efficiency? Did it enhance culture?

5 Know the difference between exec and non-exec CVs
 One of the mistakes many people make is trying to cover both with one version. But hirers are actually looking for different competencies from each. For an executive, normally we're looking for the ability to boost the bottom line – that's about the key commercial impacts and the ability to deliver. For the non-executive director it is about guidance, steering and advising boards – the skills required are focused more on challenging, corporate governance and bringing about change.

6 Look outwards, not inwards
 In a lot of the CVs I see, particularly in the profile at the top of the page or in an executive summary, it's all "Me, me, me... I can do this, I can do that". You

should look outwards at your audience – what do they want to see? Give examples, such as "steers leadership teams" or "drives transformational change" – show that you're thinking about the audience.

7 Take the FAB approach
 You need to ensure that every bullet point has what I call an FAB – fact, action, benefit. So for everything you've written down, ask yourself, 'So what?' And if you can't answer that, you need to rewrite the bullet point with a fact and action and a benefit. Ultimately, the CV serves as an agenda for the interview, so pack it full of the very best stories that you want to expand upon. **D**

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ENTERPRISING WOMEN 2017
 Victoria McLean hosts a breakfast seminar on how to create the perfect CV on 25 April at 116 Pall Mall. For more info and to book, visit iod.com/cv

Things to remember

- Research finds 68 per cent of hiring managers reject on the basis of one typo, 97 per cent on two.
- Many CVs are too cramped. Include lots of white space.
- Don't state the obvious – at senior level a lot of things are a given.
- The perfect length is two pages, but you may want to have a third as your appendix: your education; maybe some key deals.
- The reader wants your professional experience really quickly – start it, at most, one-third of the way down page one.
- Your CV should have your name at the top, then job title underneath. That aligns you instantly with the job in the reader's mind. Also put "candidate for", then the title of the role you're applying for.