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The Appropriate Resume Length

We have all heard the admonition, read the articles, and been reminded over and over that RESUMES MUST BE ONLY ONE PAGE, NEVER LONGER! For numerous years I have also been in the one-page resume camp, however now I know, that as Wendy Enelow says, "Length is important, but it is secondary to your marketing campaign." I am a refugee from the one-page camp and offer the following insights.

A lot of pertinent information can be made to fit on only one page, if the material is written in a way that is concise, crisp, and to the point. Eliminate redundant words. Begin sentences with powerful action verbs. And never use the word "I" on your resume. It is understood that is whom you are writing about. Use only sections that apply to you or to your client. For example, eliminate headings and sections that are not needed. If your client does not belong to any professional organizations, delete this section. Consider eliminating the education section if they have only a high school education. Use bullets instead of complete sentences (I know, Word goes crazy with green lines, just click ignore!). Always take the time to edit, edit, edit, and then edit some more. And of course, the big editing rule: Walk away from your product, even for a few minutes, then come back and re-read the resume. You'll be surprised how many errors, or better wording you will discover if you give yourself a little distance from your work. In a perfect world, you would have someone else edit your work. Unfortunately, most of us do not live in a perfect world.

For clients with a long work history it can be summarized and condensed. For example, if several jobs are more than 15 years old, they can be abbreviated with a sentence that begins, "Several varied jobs have given me the opportunity to perfect my skills in..." You can include the years, just like other job listings. You can also name drop here if the client has worked for some prestigious firms or companies, i.e., IBM, AT&T, NASA, Perdue University, etc.

You can also drop older work experiences that do not contribute to your client's goals. For example, administrative work accomplished 20 years ago, when your client's current career goal is a Marketing Manager do not need to be included. If it does not contribute or add

important skills to your client's needed skill base, drop it. If it is too important to be dropped, then condense it.

For many others, one page will simply not work. Executives, teachers, federal applications, and others with a variety of work that has given them a large skill base, may need an additional page. Rarely, will more than two pages be needed, nor is that recommended. Not many Rez Readers will wade through more than two pages (three with a cover letter) of information before becoming bored and uninterested. And as always there are exceptions to every "rule." For example, a client with curriculum vitae will often need numerous pages to adequately cover publications, education, etc.

For many career seekers, it is our job to educate them to the perils of extended (unnecessary) length. I recently had a government worker send me a 12-page resume. She was very proud of her writing. It took numerous conversations until I convinced her that a two-page resume was sufficient, and in fact, ideal for her work history and experiences. This was after I had completely shocked her with a one-page resume (which was really all she needed). New job seekers are not aware of the dangers of unnecessarily long resumes. They do not understand the basic concept of resumes – that it is a marketing tool to get the interview, not a history of their life. So it is our job to educate the career seeker about resumes, their functions and purpose, before we shock them with drastic length reduction (seen by our clients as reducing their self-worth and/or life experiences, etc.).

According to some resume writers, length is not important at all. Their reasoning is that if the resume is well written and grabs the attention of the Rez Reader immediately, they will continue to read no matter the length. I am not convinced of this. The Rez Readers I've talked to work on commission and/or they must go through numerous applications for every position so the last thing they have time and patience for is to read lengthy resumes. Most readers will toss a lengthy resume instead of scheduling an interview. I am not willing to take the risk with my clients. Remember, the whole purpose of the resume is to get an interview. To do that, we need to create curiosity and interest in the Rez Reader, not incite them into throwing the resume away.

It is important to have plenty of white spaces and to create an attractive resume presentation. It should be pleasing to the eye, a document that is inviting and easy to read. For those Rez Readers who only scan the first time through, it should be easily scannable with the human eye. Sometimes this can be accomplished while keeping length to one-page. Other times,

after adjusting margin sizes and line spacing, the resume looks crowded on a one-page format. Do not let this happen – go to a two-page document. As Joyce Lain Kennedy says in *Resumes For Dummies*, “The fallacy that a resume must be kept to one-page is a vampire myth: It just won’t die and stay dead. Drive a stake through its heart. The reality is: Your resume should be as long as needed to get your concise message across with zip and punch.”

In order to know what to include, what to condense, and what to omit, it is really important to stay in contact with your client. You are producing a very personal item for them. Get to know them, so you will understand what is important to them and what is less important. This way you will discover what can be reasonably cut, condensed, reduced or shortened without causing damage to their self-concepts and/or egos. You will also be gaining a client for life. And, along with the client come their family, co-workers, and friends – all potential clients.

Ensure your resumes are well presented, contain concise action verbs, and present your client’s qualifications as strongly as possible. Length is secondary to the message the resume presents.