impact executive solutions pty ltd

recruitment · contracting · consulting

REPLYING TO AN ADVERTISEMENT

Read the advertisement carefully

Job advertisements vary greatly in their detail, the information provided about the company and the job, and the skills, experience and characteristics required. They are generally written for the right candidate to read the advertisement and say "That describes me."

While generic skills are important and are transferable, some advertisers tend to over emphasise generic factors which can be taken as given requirements for a role (for example, 'excellent communication skills' or 'polished presentation' or 'dynamic'). While these generic descriptions indicate the ideal candidate, focus on the description of the company, the job, the industry knowledge and the specific skills and experience required. In most instances, it is industry knowledge, technical knowledge and related experience the advertiser is seeking.

If you are uncertain about your suitability for the position, or you want to know more about the position before submitting an application, phone the advertiser and clarify within reason (ask only a few key questions which will help you make a decision to apply or not) whether the opportunity is appropriate for you and whether you would be considered for the role if you submitted your resume.

If the advertisement is written by a recruiter:

- Don't ask to be told the name of the client company. Many companies use recruitment consultants to ensure initial confidentiality in the market place. However you should expect the courtesy of being told the client's name at the first interview;
- Make sure you have read the full advertisement and ask only questions about points not covered in the advertisement. Nothing irritates advertisers more than being asked questions which are answered in the advertisement;
- Make sure you finish the call with a clear decision from the recruiter as to whether you should submit your resume or not. At times you will be told that your background and experience is not the right fit for the position, but you will be invited to submit your resume for registration on the database for future opportunities;
- With the additional information you now have on the position requirements, write a more incisive application letter than would have been possible before you made the call.

If the advertisement has the employing company's logo on it:

- Briefly research the company or division of the company and the industry before making the call;
- Assess how relevant your background is for the company, its industry and the role;
- Make sure you have read the full advertisement and ask only questions about points not covered in the advertisement;
- Make sure you finish the call with a clear decision from the company contact as to whether you should submit your resume or not;
- With the additional information you now have on the position requirements, write a more incisive application letter than would have been possible before you made the call.

PREPARING AN APPLICATION LETTER

The Purpose of an application letter

We strongly recommend that you always submit an application letter with your resume.

The application letter is the means by which you as a candidate for a position can:

- Demonstrate that you have read and understood the contents of a prospective employer's advertisement;
- Clearly link your experience set out in your resume to the specific requirements of the position;
- Demonstrate that you have an understanding of the company's industry, customers, suppliers, products and those of its competitors;
- Highlight the achievements in your career most relevant to the role;
- Demonstrate your written communication skills and your eye for detail and give preliminary insight to your ability to construct an influential and persuasive case;
- Provide some insight into your personal style in the way that you construct and express your thoughts.

It is also for these reasons that some employers and recruitment consultants insist on an application letter to accompany a resume submitted for an advertised position.

As a candidate, your use of an application letter enables you to use the same resume to apply for different roles by using the application letter to address the specific requirements of each position.

Constructing an application letter

From our decades of recruiting experience, we can say with confidence that the majority of resumes submitted in response to an advertisement are not accompanied by an application letter. As a result, a well constructed and to the point letter accompanying a resume can be an extremely powerful influence in securing an interview for a candidate.

Of those application letters which are submitted with resumes, a high percentage are obviously a form letter sent out with multiple applications from a candidate to a range of widely varying positions. A generic application letter which has no relationship to the required skills and experience for the role advertised detracts from an application and can be a key reason for a candidate failing to be called for an interview.

Letter layout

The technical requirements of a professionally constructed application letter are:

- Date the letter;
- Address the letter correctly, ensuring that both the title and the name of the intended recipient are spelled correctly;
- Make clear reference to the position reference number, the job title, the advertisement date and medium in which the position came to your attention (for example The Sydney Morning Herald, My Career Section dated February 17-18 2015);

- Write the contents of the letter in compact paragraphs of no more than 3 sentences, focusing each paragraph on the key aspects of the role as set out in the advertisement;
- Construct your sentences so that they do not "parrot" sentences and phrases used in the advertisement;
- Try to limit the letter to one page. It is acceptable to run to a second page, but highly advisable to limit the application letter to a maximum of two pages.

There is debate about whether an application letter should be handwritten or can be typed. Some companies still like to see handwriting but the majority of recipients of application letters and resumes file them electronically and therefore prefer an electronic copy.

Letter contents

The application letter enables you to draw out specific components of your experience highly relevant to the position, some of which may not stand out in your resume. If those components are critical in determining whether you will be selected for interview, then it is recommended that you modify your resume for that particular job and application.

In the body of the application letter concentrate on demonstrating through your experience and achievements your understanding of:

- The advertiser's industry;
- The key performance criteria of the job function (for example, profit centre management; sales growth, leading edge customer service performance measures in the industry, staff retention rates, lead conversion rates)
- The technical requirements of the position;
- Your experience versus the depth of experience required and the dimensions of the position described in the advertisement (for example, multi site, state or national responsibility, ten years' sales management experience, management of a team of 10 people for five years, travel to China 8 times per annum for the last six years);

Make a positive and assumptive close summarising why you should be called for interview and indicating that you look forward to receiving a call.

Application letters - What to Avoid

The following "sins" will work against you and must be avoided at all costs:

- Spelling the intended recipient's name or title incorrectly;
- Even worse, sending an application letter out with the wrong name on it (usually by picking up the last application letter used and sending it off with no change, or by making bulk applications at the same time to jobs advertised on the internet);
- Inserting an incorrect job reference number or position title (It may sound basic common sense, but this does occur more than occasionally);
- Spelling errors in the body copy of the letter. Use spell check – that's what it's there for. A lack of attention to this type of detail says volumes about a candidate's potential performance in a role;
- Poor grammar;
- Repeating whole slabs of the advertisement verbatim, preceded by the words "I have" (polished communication skills) or, in relation to personal attributes, "I am" (results focused, persistent);

- Sending a generic application letter which makes no specific reference to the requirements of the job advertised and essentially performs no other function than to say 'Please find my resume attached'.

Application letters - What to make sure you do

- Check your spelling of the intended recipient's name;
- Make sure you have addressed the intended recipient correctly (correct job title);
- Provide the correct job reference number and job title as shown in the advertisement;
- Write in your words, avoiding repetition of phrases and sentences in the advertisement how your skills, knowledge and experience relate to the specific requirements of the role;
- Keep your paragraphs compact;
- Don't run to more than 2 pages;
- Run spell check;
- Print off a copy of your application letter (and your resume) and read them after you have run spell check, to ensure you have picked up words which do exist but are out of context in your letter (for example the use of "red" instead of "read", the use of "form" instead of "from");
- Have someone whose spelling and grammatical skills you trust read your final version prior to sending it.

It may seem pedantic and probably is not mandatory, but as Australian schools teach "English" rather than "American" spelling, you may want to change "Americanisation" of spelling generated by Microsoft spell check back to the Australian standard. (For example "realisation" instead of "realization," "centre" instead of "center").

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