



# Job Market Competition

*The numbers are scary, but it's easy to stand out*

By **David G. Jensen**  
Contributing Editor

ANYONE WHO IS CONSIDERING a job change in this strange economy knows something about competition. There certainly is a lot of it when one is applying to the same employers that everyone else is writing to! Let's face it: there are a lot of "feet on the street" when you combine today's job-changers with those who've been laid off in downsizings or mergers. While this is unnerving, it isn't always as scary as it sounds. Increased competition for jobs simply means that you may need to sharpen your skills and find a way to rise above the pack.

As I was reviewing my previous columns to determine how to assist readers in this standing-out-in-the-crowd process, I came upon the idea of writing about how the résumé is reviewed when it gets to its destination. Whether it is a scientific CV or a brief two-page résumé, your paperwork is going to sit somewhere in a large stack until it gets the most perfunctory of glances. (Résumés are like Rodney Dangerfield . . . they just don't get a lot of respect). I called a recruiter friend of mine for some help, and we developed a log of two of her recent days spent reviewing incoming résumés. I found out that this woman, a contract recruiter with one major client, gets a lot of mail.

Whether it is a professional recruitment office, a small biotech firm, or a large pharmaceutical company, recruiters are deluged with mail. Your recipient glances at it, compares it with open specs for a position, and then makes an instant decision. By reading through the log that follows, you'll see how this process works and hopefully learn something about the mistakes of others.

## **Recruiter's Log – Résumé and CV Input from Ad** Saturday, 6 September 2003

Over the last 10 days, we have received more than 200 responses to a print advertisement that I ran for our ABC Pharma project. The stack of résumés is intimidating. I know that if I don't start looking at them soon, I will fall even further behind . . .

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Those 200-plus responses break down as follows:

- Only 85 arrived by E-mail in the preferred Word format; these can go directly into our database after review.
- 22 arrived as ASCII text embedded in an E-mail; we'll have to save these into the database as unadorned Word files.
- 43 arrived in the regular mail; these we'll have to manually scan using OCR software before we can put them into the database.
- 40 appear to have no relationship to this position or any other; some of these are tossed and some of them make it to the filing cabinet.
- 20 arrived via fax and will be pulled out for later processing. They cannot be scanned; they need to sit until someone can manually type their information into the database or write the sender requesting electronic files.
- 21 appeared to fit the specs and will be lined up for a telephone screening call.
- 4 cover letters indicate they are referrals from another one of my contacts and not from the ad. These are given priority.

For my phone interviewing process, I'll start with the E-mailed CVs, because they are the easiest to deal with and I will have direct access to them on my laptop. The paper résumés come next, and the faxes last.

## **Recruiter's Log – Notes on Specific CVs** Monday, 8 September 2003

**Résumé #1:** This person tried to stand out by printing materials on mauve paper. When will people learn that print on colored paper can't be properly scanned and only serves to irritate? Note to follow-up file: Send an e-mail asking for an electronic version (as the ad requested).

**Résumé #2:** A perfect fit for the advertised position. Unfortunately, there are several typos on the cover letter. The CV looks OK though . . . it must have been written or reviewed by a third party because the cover letter obviously didn't have the same screening. (If English is not this person's native language, why not have the cover letter read over by a friend?) There is possible bad judgment or questionable communication ability on this one. This CV gets dropped into the "possibles" pile with a note of caution.

**Résumé #3:** I've never seen anything like this before. This candidate, obviously looking to beef up credentials, listed the most inane things I've ever seen as "Accomplishments," including a line highlighting his status as the "Local Car Pool Leader." Toss this one.

**Résumé #4:** This one is an old-fashioned academic style CV, listing the spouse and names of children. It is so very hard to tell if this person fits our position. By the nature of the publications, it would appear so, but I would have much preferred to see that more directly in some specific notations about work experience and accomplishments. There is no cover letter attached; that would have been the perfect vehicle if the sender needed to stick with the academic CV.

**Résumé #5:** This one looks like a potential fit for the job at ABC Pharma. I'll need to check into this person's real interests in California, however. She has

always lived in the New York area. Unfortunately, her stock cover letter refers to availability for "any location in the Northeast." Why did she respond at all when the ad clearly states California?

**Résumé #6:** There is an impressive cover letter on this one. It is addressed directly to me, which makes a big impact because the applicant has cared enough to find the "person behind the ad." It isn't a good fit for this position; nevertheless, sent a personal E-mail note.

**Résumé #7:** This one is a PDF file in the European format with a photograph of the applicant at the top. Certainly I don't mind checking out the photo to see the correspondent, although I wince when I think about the legal ramifications of how this CV "feature" could be misused. I'll need to find a way to extract the photograph if we refer this candidate on to our client at ABC Pharma. The PDF format looks great, but sadly will not fit into our recruiting-standard database

that requires Word files.

**Résumé #8:** Bingo! This one has the right skills, the right laboratories and publications, and just the right level of experience. And the cover letter is well written. It includes several points from the ad and refers to relevant experience on the CV. Nice tie-in, straight from our ad to his credentials. Immediate follow-up required on this one.

**Résumé #9:** The client ad called for a Ph.D. microbiologist. This person has a BS in medical technology and emphasizes in the cover letter that microbiology was a part of the coursework. What a waste of time, both for me and for the sender. Toss.

**Résumé #10:** A "Hobbies and Personal Interests" section lies at the bottom of this one-pager résumé. I have to ask myself why this person skimmed on important facts and experience details to restrict himself to one page—only to take up additional résumé real estate with such nonsense as "Wine Tasting" and "Camping and Hiking"? What does this stuff have to do with the ad?

### Make the Right Impression

Do you know the best way to stand out from the crowd? It isn't by using 'cosmetics'; colored paper, photographs, animated gimmicks, or other "cute" ideas might be OK for a marketing person, but it is not going to reflect well on you as a technical professional. The best way to stand out is to actually deliver what the company is looking for (which they receive so rarely, as you can see in the above log). Send a résumé or CV with a well-written cover letter that addresses each point in the advertisement and shows in clear language how well you fit their need.

Readers of this column always express concern about the large numbers of CVs that typically show up after an ad is run. There is nothing you can do about that problem—competition is tight. But always remember that the numbers sound scarier than they actually are. In actuality, only two in 10 applicants are selected for telephone interviews, because the bulk of the letters and E-mails that companies receive just don't pass muster. It's not all that hard to make the right impression! ■