



# The Path of a Résumé or C.V.

*Are you prepared for the big game hunt?*

By **David G. Jensen**  
Contributing Editor

**M**ANY TECHNICAL PROFESSIONALS express frustration that they send as many as a hundred C.V.s during the course of a single job search. I would like to follow that paper trail and describe what happens on the *receiving* end of a résumé or C.V. It should be clear after reading this that you need to be as creative as possible along the way, because if there was ever a process that was stacked against you, it is this one.

## Day One

Dr. Fred Fleming submits an Internet job application according to an ad he saw in C&E News. "A perfect fit," he tells his wife as he applies online. Later that evening, he decides to take it one step further. After a bit of sleuthing, Fred comes up with the name of a manager in that department, and also the recruiter in Human Resources whose job it is to fill this post. He drops each of them a snail-mail copy of his CV as well, "just in case."

## Day Five

Sam Jones, the administrative assistant in Human Resources for XYZ Technologies, a Northern NJ biotechnology firm, gathers the day's incoming mail, both through their Internet site as well as the U.S. mail. There are more than 50 résumés that day, including Fred's C.V. It is Sam's job to sort through these materials and forward them on to the proper HR associate, who will later screen the résumés for a fit against current openings at XYZ. As he heads back to his desk, he stops at one of the department fax machines and sweeps another dozen faxed résumés into his pile, some of which are barely legible.

## Day Seven

Two days later, the HR associate who works with scientific hires, Susan Clark, has Fred's résumé and a great number of others in a large stack. Because the company gets nearly 1,000 résumés a month, a good part of this recruiter's day is spent on this screening process. Here's how Susan describes her daily ritual and resulting role in the hiring process:

"I have my assistant open the stacks of morning mail and pile the résumés into one large group, which I look at over a cup of coffee," she says. "I deal with the paper stuff first, because the electronic ones sort automatically into special folders that I can scan at my convenience. But regardless of whether they are digital or hard copy, the process involves separating them into three piles. A quick glance at a résumé can usually tell me whether to put it into the 'no way' pile, the 'maybe' pile, or the 'talk to' pile."

"The 'no ways' are résumés where there is no possibility of a fit, or where attitude problems, communication difficulties, or spelling errors and typos knock them out of consideration. The 'maybes' get a brief second look because there was something that caught my eye -- some of them falling into the round file and a few getting further interest for an open position or for scanning into our applicant data file. Of course, the résumés that fit the picture on a current opening go into the 'talk to' pile. After a second look at these, however, we can generally cut that back dramatically. The C.V.s with some potential of interest go through the interoffice mail to the department heads or managers of the groups where the opening exists, and there a second screening, this one primarily for the technical fit, takes place."

## Day Twelve

Dr. Susan Thomas, the head of biological research at XYZ Technologies, reviewed several fat interoffice mail envelopes. The C.V.s from the recent C&E News ad were enclosed, and there would certainly be a lot of work ahead to get through that large stack. As she pulled them out for individual review, she judged that she would have no more than one or two minutes each before determining their worthiness for consideration. Forty-five minutes later, she had reviewed 34 C.V.s, all of which seemed to fit the general background they were looking for. But, with the critical appraisal for which they paid her the big bucks, she had selected only eight of these C.V.s for the first pass. She decided to share the phone interview process with one of her reports and get this next phase handled within a few days.

## Day Fifteen

The Group Leader Protein Chemistry, Bill Wright, planned some time out for telephone interviews. Luckily, his wife knew how important filling these critical jobs would be, and she was willing to put up with him disappearing into the study for an hour or two each night. Bill had two interviews planned for the evening and one of them was Fred Fleming, who had mailed a résumé to him in response to their ad. The other interview that evening was with a woman who had introduced herself to him in an E-mail just the other day. Galina Yastrevski was referred by one of his old college mentors who had some very nice things to say about her abilities. Bill didn't care where the applicants he interviewed for his department came from; all

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**David G. Jensen** is the founder and chief executive officer of CTI Executive Search, a unit of CareerTrax Inc. (Sedona, AZ). CTI is a leading recruiting firm in the biosciences. You can reach Dave at (928) 282-5366 or via [davej@commspeed.net](mailto:davej@commspeed.net).

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that mattered to him was that he find the right person for the job as expeditiously as possible.

**The Rifle vs. The Shotgun:  
The Rifle Shot Goes Farther**

I like happy endings, don't you? So, we'll assume that in our story, Fred Fleming goes on to fame and fortune as an employee of XYZ Technologies. He was lucky, though. He took the traditional route to getting that interview and made it through the process. Not every person with the "perfect fit" fares that well with an advertised job. Perhaps it was because Fred got a little creative, and opted to avoid getting lost in the shuffle. He doubled up on his chances, by sending both online application and snail-mailed copies.

But the person who was really creative, and who moved right to the front of the pack, was Galina. She hadn't gone through the paper-shuffling cycle at all, and yet she landed in the tail end of the process with the prospective supervisor. Think of your job search as a hunt for big game . . . Some people consider this "hunt" to be the process of sending out as many C.V.s as possible, hoping that some of them stick. I would label this a "shotgun" approach, akin to wandering around the jungle, firing a shotgun at random (sure, you'll eventually bring home dinner). But Galina had evidently taken a "rifle shot" approach. She had been doing a significant amount of networking along with selective mailing of her credentials. Although she had missed

the ad that Fred was following, her network contacts took her to the same place without the risk of becoming one piece of paper in a huge stack. And one thing the story above doesn't describe is that she found two other opportunities at XYZ that weren't advertised. Bill Wright knew that she wasn't a fit for his opening, but he had routed her material around the lab and come up with some alternate suggestions for her.

In any situation where your correspondence becomes a part of a paper shuffle or an overflowing E-mail in-box, you do indeed risk falling out at any step along the way. Of course, there is great competition in finding jobs; this is true in almost every profession. (The number of résumé responses that a non-science ad in *The Wall Street Journal* brings in, for example, is enormous.) As in any competition, the best approach is to have as many tools at your disposal as you possibly can. You need to take it further than simply responding to an ad. And, as Fred did, when you find something that fits you well, don't rely on their website to get you visibility. Find the manager's name and mail something directly to that person.

I am not recommending that job seekers stop mailing résumés to ads for which they are an obvious fit. It is essential, however, to recognize that the competition out there is being as creative as possible. After all, a successful job-search strategy incorporates more creativity than stamping envelopes or clicking the "send" button. ■