



Secrets of Resume Screening Software

by Joanne Meehl

If you know how resume screening software works, you can make your resume more visible to it

Screening Software: Why It's Used

Companies use resume scanning and screening software for several reasons. Obvious ones include the overwhelmed-with-work HR department, cutbacks in numbers of staff to go through them, and in this electronic age, the sheer numbers of resumes that come in for each job opening. However, other reasons include the software's impartiality: it is told what to look for, so it finds it, without any favoritism or bias. I tell clients to assume that at most target companies, an electronic "eye" will see their resume before any human eye sees it -- *if* a human eye sees it.

If You Don't Put It There, the Software Can't See It

Sometimes clients wonder why I tell them to put things like "Skilled in MS Word" in their resume. "Doesn't everyone know Word?" they ask. Well, yes, most people do. But if it's important to the job you're applying for and it's NOT in your resume, the screening software says "I don't see the keyword 'Word' here" -- so it screens out your resume.

What You Can Do

Here are two tips that increase the chances your resume makes it past the screening software. *First*, in your response to an ad, especially if it's on the Web, use key phrases from the ad in your resume -- only, of course, if they are a fit for your experience. For example, say you are a Product Manager who spends a good portion of your time developing marketing collateral. The job ad that interests you calls for a Product Manager "who develops marketing collateral". In your resume to that potential employer, use their phrase -- *develops marketing collateral* -- instead of "marketing materials" or other phrase.

Second, mention your key skills early in your resume, and as frequently as possible. The screening software interprets this as "recent" and "substantial" experience.

If you complete any online forms for the job, use the keywords in the forms, as well.

Using Keywords: Vital Today

In addition to screening software, many recruiters and hiring managers simply enter keywords in their own resume databases to find resumes that fit a job they need to fill. Many search for resumes on public sites such as Monster.com or LinkedIn.com, and they Google the Net for private Web sites such as your "about me" page on MySpace or similar sites

Where do you find good keywords? For a particular company or organization, go to their web site. Read what they say about themselves, their products or services, their customers. Also, we recommend the book *Best Keywords for Resumes, Cover Letters, and Interviews: Powerful Communications Tools for Success* (Impact Publications, 2003), by Wendy S. Enelow, an excellent resource for those interested in further strengthening their use of keywords.