



Make Your Resume Visible to Screening Software

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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 (Applicant Tracking Systems, or ATSs) for several reasons, the main one being 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, a digital "eye" will see their resume before any human eye sees it -- *if a human eye sees it.*

What You Can Do To Be More Visible

Here are some tips that increase the chances your resume makes it past the screening software:

- In your response to an ad on the Web, **use keywords and phrases from the ad** in your resume -- only, of course, if they are true for you. For example, say you are a Product Manager who spends some 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 "creates marketing materials" or other phrase.
- Know that preferred **formats** can vary. If an employer says "Please send us a PDF version of your resume", then do so. But know that most employers' technology is designed to read Word (.doc, not .docx) and .txt only. If their site doesn't tell you the preferred format, the safest one to use is .txt. So I urge candidates to never use PDFs or other formats unless it's specified that it's OK by the employer.
- 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. Most now search for matching candidates on public sites such as **LinkedIn.com**, and they use their keywords to **search the Web** in general, for resumes.
- Where do you **find good keywords?** Google "keywords for [title]", just to see what you find. Also, for the particular company or organization, go to their web site: Read what they say about themselves, their products or services, their customers. Be familiar with new developments in your field, current issues, and trends, and use these terms as well if they apply to you. Go onto LinkedIn, and find others who do what you want to do; read their profiles for keywords and phrases that apply to you.
- Mention your key successes and skills early in your resume, **and as frequently as possible throughout**. Do not worry about too much repetition, especially in your LinkedIn profile. The screening software interprets this frequency of use as "recent" and "substantial" experience.
- If you complete any **online forms** for the job instead of sending a resume, use the keywords in the forms just as you'd use them in your resume.

What to Avoid

- Don't leave out **key successes and achievements** in some attempt to be modest; we are in a *permanently competitive job market* and this will not serve you well. As the old saying goes, "Facts tell but stories sell". Keep it simple, but focused on your successes.
- Don't clutter your resume with things like logos from your former companies and other flavor-of-the-month tactics. Screening software doesn't even see these, plus images make your resume a digitally large -- and thus slow to load -- document.
- **Don't use deceptive methods** such as the old "white on white" trick. This old method of hiding blocks of keywords as (invisible-to-the-eye) white text no longer works because those supposedly hidden words are clearly seen by *today's* screening software -- and YOU will be perceived as deceptive and lazy so your resume will be thrown out. And don't insert a "paragraph" of key words, one after the other, which is also viewed as lazy. Instead, do it properly: Include your keywords *in context* in the related parts of your resume.

Using these tips will increase your chances of being found, and of getting that interview call!