

Why Resume Keywording Is A Must For Job Seekers

By Lisa Quast, Forbes | April 27, 2015



Gone are the days of creating one resume and using it for every job application. Customization is the name of the game in today's digital age, which has become more and more important with the increasing use of Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS).

What is an ATS? It's a software application that allows companies to electronically manage their recruiting and hiring process and to store/track the information, notably, scanning applicant resumes for specific keywords related to their job postings. This has helped streamline the hiring process for big companies (back when I started in the business world, all of this was handled manually with paper, pens, fax machines and lots of file cabinets for storage), but it has also commoditized job seekers because they become an entry in a database.

Why do employers use ATS and keyword ranking? Mainly to save recruiters time by helping them weed out unqualified applicants. [Scott Weaver](#), director of talent acquisition and development at the Cumming Corporation, says his company measures the qualifications of applicants against open requisitions and has found that only 15-20% are qualified for the jobs they're applying to. That means there are a lot of unqualified candidates employers must sift through, a task made easier through use of an Applicant Tracking System.

So how do you make an ATS work for you instead of against you? *By customizing and keywording your resume.*

Why is keywording so important? When a hiring manager has an open position to fill, he or she meets with an HR representative to create the job description. This document usually includes a brief paragraph about the position, a list of job responsibilities and a list of job requirements (such as knowledge, skills, experience and education). After the job description is written, the hiring manager and HR representative determine the keywords and keyword phrases that are unique to the job. These keywords are essentially the qualifications, experience and characteristics they are looking for in a new hire.

What does this mean for job seekers? Depending on how a specific ATS works, the location and frequency of keywords within your resume can be extremely important. Typically, the better your resume matches the job description requirements, the higher you'll rank in the ATS. Additionally, it's common practice for companies to begin reviewing applicants from the top of the ranking list – bad news for job seekers who haven't customized and keyworded their resume.

To ensure your resume makes it through an ATS scan for your desired job, follow these tips:

- *Analyze your resume against the job description.* For each job requirement, write down whether you meet, partially meet or don't meet that requirement.
- *Customize and keyword your resume.* For every requirement you meet, somewhere on your resume, you should explain that you have that skill, experience or education. Use the same words in your resume that are used in the job posting when you describe your "proof" of how you meet a requirement, so you'll increase your chances of achieving a higher keyword ranking in the ATS.



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- *Add a "Skills Summary" section near the top of your resume.* This not only helps draw a recruiter or hiring manager's eyes to your best qualities, it will also help your ATS keyword ranking.
- *Test your keywording savvy.* Take advantage of new tools for job seekers, such as [Jobscan](#) and [Wordle](#), which help candidates analyze how well their resume matches a job posting.
- *Network.* Bypass the ATS altogether – most people still find jobs through networking, according to a survey from [Right Management/Manpower Group](#). So don't forget to activate your network (in person and on social media) and get your resume directly into the hands of people who can help you land the job you want.

~ *Lisa Quast*, author of the book, [Secrets of a Hiring Manager Turned Career Coach: A Foolproof Guide to Getting the Job You Want. Every Time](#). Join me on Twitter [@careerwomaninc](#)

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