

Five Fatal Job Search Errors

By Liz Ryan of Yahoo! Hotjobs

The other day I received a resume attached to an email message. The email message itself was lovely, but the attached document was labeled "BrittneyRoxYall.doc." Evidently young Brittney (let's hope Brittney is young) forgot what she'd titled her resume and sent it off as an attachment, without changing the document's name.

It is fantastic to see that Brittney has healthy self-esteem. That's a big plus for Brittney in her job search. However, I couldn't consider Brittney a candidate for the job I was filling, once she'd made that unfortunate clerical error. Little items like a mislabeled resume can hurt a job seeker, so take note of these five fatal job-search errors:

1. Mislabeled Your Resume

Brittney learned the hard way that a resume on your hard drive must be labeled BrittneyJonesResume.doc or some other simple and obvious name when it's sent to employers via email. Even better is to label each resume with your name and the name of the employer it's going to, a la BrittneyJonesResume-AbbottLabs.doc. That way, if you tweak your resume for different job openings (and I hope you do) you'll always know which version of your resume you've sent to each employer.

2. The Shotgun Approach

A resume that starts out "Objective: to make a contribution to my next employer in any Marketing, PR, Product Management or Operations role" is bound for the trash bin, whether the job in question is a Marketing, PR, Product Management or Operations job. These days, you don't go to the print shop and order resumes in boxes of 100 anymore. You can and must customize your resume as often as needed, and very possibly for every job you pursue. So why would a prospective employer want to know about your qualifications for jobs you're not applying for? Take out the extra roles and focus your resume on just the job you're applying for today.

3. Ignoring the Job-Ad Instructions

I wrote a job ad that said, "Please send me an email message that answers these three questions." Then, I listed three questions that job applicants should answer in a paragraph or two. Oh dear! Of 95 applicants, only a handful answered the questions. That's an easy way for employers to screen out candidates, so it's worth your time to read and re-read the job ad carefully, and respond to it in the way the ad specifies. No sense being dropped out of the pipeline before you've had a chance to shine!

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4. Failing to Customize

When a job opening gives you a chance to write a cover letter, write a good one! Take 15 or 20 minutes to research the employer online (visiting the company's own website and news sites, for starters) in order to say something company-specific in your cover letter.

"I am interested in the job because it sounds interesting" doesn't cut it in this job market. Try, "Given your recent acquisition of Sun Microsystems, I'm guessing that the IT Integration Specialists you're seeking now should be folks who've been through data-integration projects in the past, as I have. At IBM, I ..." and so forth.

5. Drowning in Boilerplate

A good resume or cover letter is strong and human-sounding, not dry and full of corporate-speak fluff. Take out the "strong team orientation," "results-oriented professional," and "bottom line focus" before you send another resume into the market. Replace that awful stuff with mini-stories that point out your best qualities, like "At ABC Graphics, our team won the President's Award for on-time delivery."

Don't let a basic job-search error slow down your job search!

Liz Ryan is a 25-year HR veteran, former Fortune 500 VP and an internationally recognized expert on careers and the new millennium workplace. Connect with her at www.asklizryan.com. The opinions expressed in this column are solely the author's.