

Information Overload

Issue 71, November 2008

Welcome:

The end of 2008 is almost here. Did you manage to get everything done and completed you said you wanted to do and complete this year? Personally and /or professionally speaking? Or are you hoping for a better year next year?

One of the problems facing us today is of course the uncertainty in the job market. Will the jobs still be there in 2009? Will our own jobs still be there? Will we have to find something else and quickly? Or do we hang on to the job we have?

Like all things, there are no right or wrong answers to those questions. We have seen a slight contraction in the job front, usually by organisations who need to shore up their services in the short term, and they do that by getting rid of people and services they think they can do without. Major projects may get put on hold and new hires are limited. But think about it just for a minute. An organisation will still need people to do the work, if it wants to stay in business. And they will need people who are versatile and open to change. What we have seen is a move away from full time, permanent placements to short(er)-term contracts. Get in, get the job done, and get out again. Putting an organisation into a holding pattern until it can determine what steps they need to take next, and which direction they need to be moving in. And it is the organisations who think long term and strategically that will benefit from this “recession”.

On a personal level, we should also think about where we want to be and what we want to do. Is today a good day to change jobs and / or career? And just as importantly – are we able to move quickly should that perfect job come up? What I would like to know is this – if that perfect job came up tomorrow would you miss out because you hadn't thought about keeping your CV up to date? Well, let's face it, you didn't need to – did you!

In today's tightening job market your application has become more important than ever. Get it wrong on paper and you won't get a chance to correct it during the interview.

We hope you enjoy reading. Have a great week.

In this issue we will look at:

- Covering letters
 - Examples
 - Format
- Sending applications electronically
 - Email addresses and websites

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- Facebook, Myspace and Other social networking sites:
- A Thought to ponder.

Covering Letters

Covering letters are essentially sales letters, so they must be written with the “purchaser” in mind. In this case, the purchaser of your services is the prospective employer. And like any sales letter, it should always focus on what you can do for them, not what they can offer you.

A covering letter should always be constructed in the format of a traditional business letter, so name and contact details are important. Always date your correspondence. Always start with Dear XXXX and finish with one of the traditional types of ending Yours Faithfully, Yours Sincerely, and your first name and surname in full (helpful in case your signature is illegible).

The problem that most people make is the bit that goes in the middle.

A covering letter should have between 3 and 4 paragraphs. The first paragraph should explain why you are writing to the person. Use the second paragraph to emphasise why the organisation should meet you. If you find yourself writing more than 3 or 4 sentences then you should consider breaking this paragraph in half. The third/last paragraph should be used to ask for a meeting. We have provided a couple of examples for you.

Examples of Covering Letters

Do not do this....

123 Any Street
ANYPLACE, NSW, 2345
Vampire69@email.com

16th March 2004

Dear Sir or Madam

Please find enclosed my application for the position of chief laboratory analyst.

Yours Sincerely



Josephine Bloggs

“Lab analysts do it in test tubes”

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Example of a good covering letter:

789 Any Street
ANY PLACE, STATE, 1234
Tel: 02 1234 5678
Mob: 0401234567
Email: jbloggs@email.com

DD Month YYYY

Mr Jim Smith
Chief Analyst
Chemical Company
Technology Park
YOUR CITY, STATE, 7890

Dear Mr Smith

I would like to apply for the position of Senior Laboratory Analyst (Position Number 123) as advertised in the XYZ paper on DD Month, YYYY.

I am currently working as a Laboratory Analyst with ABC Chemical Company. I have 3 years experience at a supervisory level, with emphasis placed on excellent time management, communication and team work. As a shift supervisor, I am responsible for ensuring completion of work in accordance with all quality and safety guidelines. As Senior Laboratory Analyst with Chemical Company I feel that these skills and abilities possessed by myself would greatly enhance the team you already have in place.

I look forward to meeting with you to discuss my application in greater depth. I can be contacted on my mobile or email during the day, or on my home telephone after 6.00pm.

Yours Sincerely



Josephine Bloggs

Format

- Use standard 80gsm white paper – the stuff you can buy for \$5 a ream from the supermarkets. Coloured paper can make your application stand out for all the wrong reasons.
- Use black type face – it is likely your application will be photocopied, or if sent electronically – printed out.
- Use the same font size and type for your covering letter that you have used for the rest of your application. Try not to use fonts that are difficult to read – *For Example, Or this one, and don't ever try to copy your handwriting style.* If an employer wants a handwritten letter then make sure it is. This newsletter is written in Gill Sans. However I would recommend using Verdana, Ariel or the standard Times New Roman (11, 11 and 12 font sizes respectively). I know that I have said this before, but it needs repeating. You are trying to make it easy for a prospective employer to “like you” – if you make your application hard to read, then chances are they may see you as being “difficult” “high maintenance” “seeks attention” and so on.
- Check for spelling and grammar. Do not rely on your computer to do it for you. After all, you might have the write word but if it's used in the wrong context, then chances are you're heading straight for the “thanks but no thanks pile.” Especially if the rest of your application is poorly presented.

Sending Applications Electronically

If you are able to send your application through electronically, there are some things to remember:

1. Use your own email address and not that of your current employer. If you don't have a personal email address at home, but are allowed to access the internet via your work computer, you may want to set up a “free” email account. There are many available, but the common ones are Hotmail and Yahoo. I prefer Yahoo, simply because the spam filters seem to be much better than the Hotmail one. When choosing your name, please choose a “professional name” for your “professional emails”. First Name (dot) Surname @ whatever.com may seem quite boring, but can you imagine receiving an email from elvisthechicken, libchick or thegothqueen? And yes they are all legitimate email addresses from “library” folk. Would you open it? I'm not sure I would.
2. The subject line should say what the email is for. Sounds obvious – but believe it or not, people fail to do this. If you are applying for a position – then say so. Application for the position of position number
3. Treat the content of the email as a business document. Everything you send as part of your application needs to portray you in the best possible light – you are your own marketing tool after all. Would you be impressed with an email that said –

Subject: Job application

*Hi, just thought I'd send my application for the records job.
Cheers, L*

I know I wouldn't.

4. Remember to attach the documents before hitting the send button
5. Have a professional signature panel set up

6. Do not leave the application until the last day before you send it in. What happens if the recipient is not at work that day, or the Internet and Email is down? And yes it does still happen. You will have missed the closing date and any chance of being considered for the position.
7. Either phone and ask if the person received the email (do this the day after) or add a read receipt to the message so you can tell when it is opened. Now the problem with read receipts is simple – they can't read it – if they haven't received it. Or they may leave it in their inbox until after the closing date before opening all the applications. Don't assume it got through, some bounce backs don't always happen straight the way.

Email Addresses and Websites:

Email addresses – please make sure that you use a “professional” email address, libchick1, elvisthechicken2003 etc etc will not portray you in the best possible light (and yes these are “real addresses”. Similarly, any personal website that does not give credence to your application should be left off your application. This “personal” information can be taken and used as “evidence” of why an organisation should not hire you. We still have to be very careful with discriminatory behaviour in the hiring process (yes even today). So a word of advice - leave off any information relating to age, date of birth, marital status, number of children, religious and sexual preferences. None of this is necessary – but can and has been used against people to reject applicants as being “unsuitable”.

Facebook, Myspace and Other social networking sites:

Whilst we are on the subject of websites that show your skills and abilities in the best possible light, you may like to look at the type of information you have posted on the many social networking sites that proliferate the Internet these days. Why? Well job offers have been rescinded based on photographs and other less than flattering information found by the personnel department of the organisation you would like to work for. In addition – people have been terminated for the same reason.

If you do have the odd dodgy photograph and caption tucked away “online” now is the time to remove them. And get your friends to do the same. Now it could be argued that it shouldn't matter what you do in your “spare” time. But if you frequently go on drinking binges and have the photographs to prove it, then chances are going to be good – come Monday morning you may not be fit to go to work, or if you do, you may not work to your best ability or capacity.

One final thought for today is this – it takes time to put an application together, especially if your CV is not up to date. Your CV should be a working document. When you complete a major assignment / project / get an award / learn a new skill – then add it to your CV. Because I can guarantee when you are in a hurry, you won't remember the details. One final thought about CV's – if you add a section entitled Significant achievements (after duties and responsibilities) you will find it a whole lot easier to write the answers to your selection criteria.

With many thoughts

Lorraine

A Thought to Ponder

“If a man is after money, he's money mad;
if he keeps it, he's a capitalist;
if he spends it, he's a playboy;
if he doesn't get it, he's a ne'er-do-well;
if he doesn't try to get it, he lacks ambition.
If he gets it without working for it; he's a parasite;
and if he accumulates it after a life time of hard work,
people call him a fool who never got anything out of life.”

Vic Oliver

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