

Selling Yourself Using Your Cover Letter

Finding a job can be a job in itself. But what you may not realise is that it's a sales job. To convince hiring managers to invest in the product you're pitching — you — it's important to take full advantage of every marketing tool at your disposal.

Recently, however, some job seekers have hurt their cause by overlooking a key self-promotional document: the cover letter. The majority of applications today are submitted through e-mail.

Consequently, many candidates go without a cover letter, offering little more than "Please see attached CV" instead.

That's a huge mistake.

While your resume provides an overview of your professional background, a well-written cover letter allows you to explain more thoroughly the unique skills and qualifications that make you ideal for the role. Following are tips on successfully selling yourself to prospective finance or accounting employers using your cover letter:

Get Personal

Standout salespeople know the names of all their customers. Whenever possible, get personal by addressing your cover letter to a particular individual instead of writing a generic salutation such as "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Employer." If a job posting doesn't mention whom to contact, be proactive and call the company to ask for the hiring manager's name and title, the correct spelling of the name, and the person's gender if it's not obvious. By doing so, your letter will land in the right hands, and you'll score points for demonstrating motivation and resourcefulness.

Customize Your Content

Employers have unique needs and corporate cultures, which is why it's crucial that you tailor your sales pitch to each company you contact. Link your skills, work history and biggest professional accomplishments to the specific requirements of the open position. Base your approach on the information revealed in the job posting, if appropriate. For example, accounting candidates with excellent interpersonal abilities might emphasize these attributes to an employer looking for "someone who consistently interacts with clients," but play up their mastery of financial software for an organization seeking a "tech-savvy professional with advanced SAP skills."

Keep It Concise

Most TV advertisers have just 30 seconds or less to get their messages across to potential customers. Remember this when crafting your cover letter. Hiring managers with piles of applications on their desks do not have time to wade through verbose and unfocused documents. The best cover letters are comprehensive, clear, concise and compelling.

Write an attention-grabbing introduction, succinctly highlight your top attributes, explain why the job interests you, request an interview and then thank the employer for his or her time. Don't waste valuable space with clichéd buzzwords or long-winded anecdotes. Also, while it's acceptable to inject some personality, keep the spotlight on your career instead of meandering off track with irrelevant details about your personal life. Pointing out that you enjoy river rafting and spending time with your family when you're not at work won't help you convince a hiring manager that you're the best candidate for the job.

Tell the Truth

Sales, marketing and advertising professionals can get themselves in trouble by claiming a product or service offers more than it actually does. Likewise, the worst blunder a job seeker can make is to lie on a CV or cover letter. While you want to make a positive first impression and land an interview, don't stretch the truth in order to do so. Remember that even white lies and "minor" misrepresentations can come back to haunt you, even after you've landed the position.

Finally, if you meet all of the requirements and feel that you're the perfect candidate for a job, understand that there's a fine line between coming across as confident and cocky. That means steering clear of off-putting self-praise in your cover letter. Instead of boastfully writing about being the "best," use specific examples of how you positively contribute to your current employer's bottom line, as a means of selling yourself. After all, the most persuasive salespeople can always back up their well-crafted pitches with quantifiable facts.

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