



What Companies Want to See

A resume that sells should contain accurate and compelling information that clearly demonstrates your **skills, abilities, accomplishments** and general **resourcefulness** — and motivates the reader take action.

The text below is typical of what a Software Engineer should include, but the style is applicable to any engineering or technical discipline... companies want to know what technologies you are working with, how you are applying it, what you actually do (personally), and if you have a measurable impact on tasks.

In other words: are you a hands-on contributor - or do you “participate”? Managers look for the individual that **led the team, inspired it, contributed to its success** and pushed design to the next level. They want to hire the team star.

Companies try to hire smart and creative individuals - who can immediately contribute to the success of their mission. They toss out resumes that lack tangible evidence of this — you could be far more qualified than the person they ultimately hire, but you never got in the door to prove it — because your resume didn't sell your skills, abilities and experience. Your competition named technologies, talked about accomplishments, salted it with industry buzzwords, explained how he brought it together for a successful rollout, and beat the schedule by X weeks... all while training four new hires. He got the reader's attention, and provided compelling details that resulted in an interview.

While you may be more qualified technically, and have forgotten more that he knows, the reason you lost out (even to *compete* in the interview process) was a weak, undecipherable and/or poorly written resume.

This is an example of a resume that sells. It opens up with action and technology, and sustains it all the way through. Don't evaluate the technology, look at the style — and how it reads.

(Company deleted), August 2001 - Present
New York, NY

LEAD SOFTWARE ENGINEER

Design, code, test and implement C and C++ embedded real-time multitasking, multithreaded software running on a proprietary RT/OS to support the accelerated design and development of a next generation fault tolerant VoIP switch. Recent tasks have included leading a team of nine software engineers responsible for timing and industry protocol interfaces (IEEE XXX.X and SONET), in addition to personally designing a port link/activity GUI and the router config software interface (for end users) to provide simple field setup, flash updates and remote troubleshooting.

In addition to day to day software engineering tasks, currently architecting our next generation switch with a firmware engineer and DSP engineer. This team has been able to reduce final design from a projected 44 to 27 weeks. Prototype testing has shown that the design is robust, and easily handles heavy user load with minimal overhead.

Accomplishments include, but are not limited to:

- Spearheading the company initiative to move from CMM Level 1 to Level 2+, while meeting deadlines for all scheduled software deliverables.
- Mentored four junior engineers in the use of software tools, which significantly reduced time to market while insuring higher quality and reducing software rework.
- Representing software engineering in weekly hardware design meeting, pulling the two groups together, reducing duplicity, which saved the company a documented \$270,000 over the past year, and insured the project came in on-time and significantly under budget.
- Met with target customers (selected by sales) to determine user expectations, and understand their critical needs
- Translated this information to a detailed design spec, projected to positively impact sales — by removing two costly hardware components, and replacing them with three software features that major customers wanted. Sales indicated that this would open the market for acceptance by smaller corporate users, that would not normally consider in-house switches. Added a web-based remote diagnostics interface with both user and vendor levels to facilitate flexibility...

Is this perfect — no. But it tells the reader (your potential future boss) that you “Design, code, test and implement” something, instead of saying “Responsible for” or “Member of a team that...”

It shows action, initiative, explains the technical environment, **links tasks directly to the individual** (instead of the team), discusses technical accomplishments - indicates the candidate has a high individual net worth to the company. Someone worth interviewing.

Your resume should showcase your abilities, discussing the depth of your skills and **how they are applied**.

If you insist on using “Member of Technical Staff”, tell the reader what you really do - by using a title like Electrical Engineer, Senior Mechanical Engineer, Principal Software Engineer or Lead RF Engineer on the same line. If you have over five years of experience, don't try to condense it on one page – the one page rule applies to clerks and security guards.

Give them a reason to invite you in. Provide cogent reasons to hire you. Motivate them to take action.

You can't explain your resume prior to the interview. Because it is static, careful attention must be taken to convey the “return on investment” that you can bring to the company, and why you are worthy of their attention and time.

Companies want to know what you have done in your most current position, in reasonable detail (minimum a three to four paragraphs). The most current first and second positions should receive the bulk of the attention... what you did 10 years ago is of little relevance now – and warrants a couple of sentences. We have actually seen engineers, with many years of experience, go into detail about their co-op job in college, and provide a snippet of data about what they are currently doing (and no, it wasn't protected by national security concerns, it was just badly executed).

Managers look at it this way: **if your resume is weak, you will probably be worse in a face-to-face interview**... because most people put their best skills forward initially. Managers allocate their time to talk with (*what they perceive as*) the three or four best candidates responding, the rest of the resumes end up in their trash, or back to HR for “and we wish you the best of luck in the future” letter.

They don't have unlimited time, and don't take chances.

We have never heard a hiring manager say “maybe he has exactly what we need, but just forgot to mention it... I'll invite him in and find out. I have unlimited time and money to chase down every candidate that sends in a resume, to discover more about them.” Not going to ever happen.

It's **incumbent upon you to get the hiring manager's attention**. You have only one chance.

The resume needs to **convince the reader that you offer value**. Remember, you're not there when a manager reads it, and can't look over his shoulder to point out what was overlooked... or that you really had much deeper immersion in a technology you listed, but failed to explain it well. Your resume should be a sales brochure selling you as a high quality product, loaded with features and benefits.

A manager at a large software company said his test for resumes is: he posts them outside his office, and his team makes notes in the margin as they're walking by. Very informal process... “let's call this guy, we need his networking exp”, “this one looks good, I can use his skills”, “great schools and current experience”.

He claims it is a very successful method of screening candidates because the team provides preliminary approval before an interview is scheduled. Keep in mind that the mediocre resumes never make it to the board. He says if it gets by him, and passes the bulletin board test, he usually phone screens the candidate to determine if the resume is accurate.

Does he miss any good ones? Sure. But if the resume **doesn't talk to him in the first 10-15 seconds**, they never make it to the wall. He claims less than 1%, or about four a week, make it. That's 396 that don't. His success rate is high, and we can't argue with success.

Why did we write this?

A RF Engineer we placed six years ago at decided that it was time to leverage his skills for something better. He sent us his latest resume, which was awful. Fortunately, we knew he wasn't.

Instead of using it (did we mention it was terrible), we called some of our "A" list clients that were informally looking for RF Engineers, in the region he wanted, and described him from our interview notes. Seven phone calls and four interviews scheduled.

Clients knew we had identified a star, and scrambled to see him. No resume was ever provided.

The first manager that interviewed him (a Stanford PhD who hates everybody) called us and said: "Ed is outstanding, he has everything we need and more. We couldn't stump him, his breadth and depth is amazing. We are going to make him a very aggressive offer. Oh, he brought his resume with him, and I've got to tell you... I would have never interviewed this guy. I think his resume must have belonged to someone else. Anyway, let him know I'm moving forward to get an offer prepared that I think he will accept. I need him."

He scored four out of four for offers — and we placed him again.

He would never have received any action using his own resume. His resume would have precluded getting in the door anywhere. It was dull, sparse on technical details and totally non-compelling. While he had an abundance of skills and experience, and the personality to sell himself in person, **his resume was working against him.**

The client that hired him calls us frequently, and always ends the conversation with "find me another Ed".

The sad part is that he may have already seen a few since then, but the resumes were so bad they never got his attention. Who knows?

[Ashton Search Group](#), the nation's leading technical recruiters.