

THE KEYWORD CONTROVERSY

Sue Montgomery, Certified Professional Writer & Career Coach

Using keywords in your résumé is almost a guarantee that it will get noticed by hiring managers. There are different sets of keywords for every profession. For instance the manager of a not-for-profit organization should incorporate advocacy, board relations, corporate development, foundation management, media relations and many other job-appropriate words into his or her résumé. A healthcare professional might choose words like acute care facility, continuity of care, emergency medical systems, grant administration, long-term care and multi-hospital network to grab the readers' attention.

So what are keywords? They are tools you can choose to build winning résumés. They are words or terms associated with a specific industry, profession or job function that clearly and succinctly communicate a specific message. Many writers of recruiting advertisements incorporate keywords to attract the right candidates. If you are responding to one of these ads, repeat those words in the résumé and introduction letter you send as your application for the job. For instance, if the advertisement says "must be passionate about customer service," your documents should say "I am passionate about customer service."

While keywords have been around for a long time, they have been getting some bad press lately. An article in the March 6, 2007 edition of *The Wall Street Journal* dealt with a new spin on keywords. They are being imbedded into résumés by using white type on a white background and using type so small it looks like a solid horizontal line. In online résumés, keywords are being inserted in Web coding that's hidden from view. All of these tricks give jobseekers a good chance of getting their résumés noticed for different positions simply because they contain numerous keywords. Pretty smart huh? No so fast! Many of the newer search tools can differentiate between a keyword inserted in a résumé at random and one used to describe a person's work history.

For example, Trovix, Inc.'s search technology enables recruiters to order résumés so that those with the most relevant experience are at the top of the list. No matter how many keywords are imbedded into your résumé, if they aren't associated with the job, they won't matter. In fact, Trovix's technology penalizes jobseekers who use keywords out of context by bumping their résumés to the bottom of the pile.

Search technology from VCG, Inc. highlights keywords and shows how many times each was used in the résumé. This gives recruiters a good idea of whether or not white font or some other embedding technique was used.

Résumés with an overabundance of keywords can be a real turnoff for hiring managers. This is usually true when an applicant has inserted a keyword summary (long list of keywords) at the bottom of his or her résumé. But this, too, is somewhat of a controversy. Many jobseekers still like putting keyword summaries in their résumés because they believe you should do "whatever it takes to get noticed." Some hiring managers and recruiters agree.

Résumé Plus develops résumés that feature an abundance of keywords throughout the career documents created for its clients. Keywords are put into a skills summary, woven into the professional experience, placed in the objective, included in the introduction letter, shown in the education section and wherever else they can be placed without overstepping the boundaries of professionalism. Other ways Résumé Plus inserts keywords without using tricks is to choose synonyms. A programmer can be referred to as a software engineer, information technology professional or applications developer. Managing can be described as directing, overseeing, guiding or supervising. All are keywords and all are applicable to similar types of positions.

Yes, using keywords is an important, indeed necessary, part of creating a powerful résumé, but you must use them with discretion.

Portions of this article were excerpted from the March 6, 2007 edition of The Wall Street Journal.