

### **Tailoring Your Legal Resume**

*By Vanessa Vidal*

Most attorneys and law students applying to jobs typically write one version of the legal resume they send to numerous job openings. While this approach may work in some cases, having a one-size-fits-all legal resume can cause you to miss more opportunities than you realize.

A one-size-fits-all legal resume is like junk mail. They are not personalized and customized toward an employer's needs. When you receive junk mail that does not address you by your name or your needs, what do you do? Probably toss it. Employers are no different. They receive resumes by the hundreds. As a result, they are looking for an excuse, any excuse, to reject the majority of the resumes they receive. An easy way for a legal resume to earn a one-way ticket to the rejection bin is lack of customization.

If you are planning to apply to more than one position, your legal resume should be drafted specifically for each position you are applying to. Granted this will take more time than mass mailing the same resume over and over again, employers can tell the difference between a form resume and a tailored resume. The true value of a legal resume resides in its specificity vis-à-vis the position. If you don't tailor your legal resume to the position you are applying to, you will most likely obtain few positive responses from your resume.

### **Start With a Standard Resume**

Effectively tailoring your legal resume to a job posting is one of the easiest ways to improve your chances of obtaining an interview. It doesn't mean you need to rewrite your entire resume every time you apply for a job. To begin, you need to create a standard legal resume that contains an "Executive Summary" and "Skill Summary" section. These are sections that can be renamed, reformatted, and customized. What is important is that they contain elements that uniquely differentiate you from other qualified applicants, and communicate your distinctive experience, skills, and value to an employer.

When your resume is structured with these two sections, you can easily add, modify, and remove information to make customization easy. These two sections form the foundation of your customization efforts. All you need to do is make minor tweaks to your resume's "Executive Summary" and "Skill Summary" sections. By tweaking them, you can keep 95 percent of your resume the same, but still incorporate tailored information where it matters most.

### **Incorporate Keywords From Job Descriptions**

One of the easiest and most effective ways to tailor your legal resume is to incorporate keywords from the job posting. In today's employer-driven market, recruiters have limited time to process large amounts of resumes. A startling 38 percent of recruiters say they spend one to two minutes reviewing a resume. Many recruiters also use resume-scanning software to assess candidates for their open

positions. What they are looking for, whether if done by a person or a computer, are the keywords relating to the position description. Therefore, it is crucial that your legal resume contain keywords that are specific to the position you are applying to. If your legal resume does not contain the right keywords, your resume may be overlooked.

The easiest and most logical place to begin selecting the right keywords for your legal resume is to start with the job description. Job descriptions will provide you with the keywords that are most important to employers. Take a look at the words used to describe the responsibilities of the position, as well as the requirements of the position. Select those keywords that appear most relevant – and most specific to the job – and incorporate them into your legal resume.

Job description example: *An international corporation is searching for a Senior Commercial Counsel. Candidates should have at least 5 years of contract and transactional experience. Extensive knowledge and experience in asset transactions and contract law is needed. Prior experience with commodities trading, regulation, and antitrust is helpful. This position will be responsible for contract preparation and review for a variety of commercial business agreements, drafting and negotiating complex interstate and intrastate asset transactions, and ensuring compliance with federal and state laws.* The keywords you should select to appear on your legal resume based on this job description are: senior commercial counsel, contracts, transactions, contract preparation and review, commercial business agreements, interstate and intrastate asset transactions, and compliance.

Once you have identified the keywords from the job description, you should go back to your legal resume and determine whether any of the keywords you selected are already highlighted in your resume. Chances are they will not all be included in your resume. Therefore you will need to revise your legal resume, and insert the missing keywords and phrases into the “Executive Summary” or “Skill Summary” section of your resume.

While you can tailor your resume by simply updating your “Executive Summary” or “Skill Summary” sections, you should also consider including keywords in your work experience as well. For instance, you can add keywords and phrases to the bullet points you already have to make them stand out more effectively. Even if a recruiter does not read the entire bullet, the keywords will be easy to identify. You should also consider using different, but similar keywords in these bullets to give your legal resume some variety.

## **Conclusion**

As convenient as it can be to just send a one-size-fits-all legal resume, effective resumes are specifically written for a particular job posting. While keywords are an essential part of tailoring your legal resume, don't overdo it by making your resume look like the job posting. In other words, try not to repeat the same keywords over and over again, and try not to use them in the same order they appeared in the job description. One-size-fits-all legal resume may be easier to create but they don't impress anybody. Putting extra effort into tailoring your legal resume will increase

your chances of securing an interview, which is what a great legal resume is designed to do.

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