

## Is it Time to Rethink Your Resume's M.O.?

By Lisa M. Newman, Marigold Consulting

Some of my favorite television programs are crime shows and detective mysteries. I enjoy watching how the investigation unfolds, the evidence is collected, and the clues are analyzed leading up to the point when the suspect is ultimately identified and apprehended. Often, the perpetrator has a particular M.O., or *modus operandi*, which differentiates him or her from other potential suspects. For instance, the perpetrator may target victims with certain characteristics, employ a particular ruse to gain the victim's trust, or use a specific object as a weapon during commission of the crime.

So, what does a criminal's M.O. have to do with your resume? Glad you asked. The criminal who never deviates from his or her modus operandi is more likely to get caught. Likewise, if you have been sending out your resume to potential employers without realizing appreciable results in the form of interviews, it may be time to rethink your resume's M.O. Let's face it...we live in a much different financial world now than we did ten, five, and even two years ago. The business-as-usual method of operation you've been using to apply for positions may have been successful in the past. Now, however, you must radically shift your approach to reflect the realities of the current job marketplace. More than ever before, you must know how to effectively compete with even greater numbers of candidates who are just as, if not more, qualified than you.

One way to change your resume's M.O. (modus operandi) is to recognize your resume's other M.O. (missed opportunities). Simply put...what opportunities are you missing out on in your resume to favorably set yourself apart from your competition and showcase your personal unique selling proposition? As we examine the five areas of missed opportunity described in the paragraphs that follow, ask yourself which suggestions you can incorporate in your resume today.

### **Missed Opportunity #1:**

#### **You don't have a powerful personal brand statement.**

When you consider that a potential employer will only spend an average of 15 to 30 seconds reviewing your resume, you realize you have just fractions of a minute to make a positive first impression. How can you immediately capture an employer's attention and maintain it long enough for him or her to place your resume in the "yes" pile? For maximum impact, include a personal brand statement as a tagline appearing directly beneath your name. Keep your brand statement simple and easy to recall. I suggest limiting your brand statement to three sentences or less. This is one instance on your resume when the use of the pronoun "I" is acceptable.

To construct your brand statement, begin by making a list of your professional attributes. What special abilities and traits do you bring to the table that others may not? Because self-assessment can be challenging, look for cues in your previous performance evaluations and job appraisals. Select one or two key strengths and weave them into a strong personal brand statement. Try to tie your traits into tangible benefits you can provide a prospective employer. Somewhere in your statement, be sure to mention the specific audience you intend to serve.

Avoid ubiquitous cliches and phrases such as "team player" and "excellent oral and written communication skills." These phrases are essentially meaningless because *everyone* lists them on

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their resumes. Besides, all employers expect candidates to possess these skills. By including them on your resume, you state the obvious and waste valuable space that could be devoted to more constructive information.

When you finalize your brand statement, refer to it everywhere --- on your resume, in your cover letter, on your social networking pages, and on the reverse of your business cards.

Here is an example of the brand statement I wrote for my consulting company:

“I deliver snooze-proof training to individuals in all settings who want to bloom out of proportion personally and professionally. I partner with attendees of my sessions to foster a comfortable and productive learning environment in which extraordinary ideas are birthed, practical solutions to everyday challenges are discovered, and raucous laughter is encouraged.”

### **Missed Opportunity #2:**

#### **You didn't personalize your resume with a philosophy statement.**

Instead of a personal branding statement, you may choose to include a philosophy statement. Use one or the other, but not both. Unlike a branding statement, a philosophy statement explains your approach to how you do your best work. In developing your philosophy statement, consider the following preferences:

- Working primarily with a team vs. working on individual basis
- Working in a highly-structured vs. a minimally-structured environment
- Working with close supervision vs. working with minimal supervision
- Working on right-brain projects vs. working on left-brain projects
- Working a traditional work schedule vs. working a more flexible work schedule
- Working under tight deadlines vs. working with no deadlines
- Working with constant client contact vs. working with numbers/paper/computers
- Working with a certain segment of the population
- Working in a for-profit setting vs. working in a not-for-profit or non-profit setting
- Working for a small, medium, or large employer
- Working close to home vs. working further away from where you live

Imagine your ideal work scenario. What would that look like? Condense that into a succinct philosophy statement that marries your preferences with the requirements of the job to which you are applying.

Here is a sample philosophy statement:

“I thrive in a high energy team-oriented environment where I have a daily opportunity to assist customers and end-users in solving their IT-related challenges.”

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### **Missed Opportunity #3:**

**You focused on the duties of your previous positions and neglected to appropriately highlight your accomplishments.**

A common resume snafu many people make is listing the duties they had at their previous positions. Put yourself in the shoes of a prospective employer. Would *you* want to read a laundry list of tasks an applicant performed while at his or her previous place of employment? Probably not. Particularly if those tasks are no more than a regurgitation of the tasks anyone in that same role would perform. Instead, you would want to know how the work the applicant did contributed to the overall effectiveness and efficiency of his or her organization.

This is your opportunity to toot your horn. Why would you miss it? With the spotlight shining on you, will you choose to hide behind the stage curtain or deliver an awe-inspiring performance a la Susan Boyle on Britain's Got Talent? In describing your accomplishments under each position you've held, be specific. Whenever possible, quantify your accomplishments with dollar amounts, concrete numbers, and percentages. Detail any awards, commendations, or special recognition you received. Perhaps you devised an innovative way to solve a challenge, improved a process, or led a successful project. This information should appear prominently on your resume in bullet form.

### **Missed Opportunity #4:**

**You did not include client testimonial and employer reference blurbs.**

Job seekers will often include the phrase "References Available Upon Request" at the conclusion of their resumes. In addition to taking up valuable real estate on your resume, this phrase serves little purpose because you're not imparting any new information. Employers assume that you have verifiable references and that you will supply the names and contact numbers of those references should they ask for them.

Even though you should omit the references phrase from your resume, a few strategically placed testimonials and references can set it apart from your competition's resumes. Pull out your letters of recommendation/reference from your previous employers. Select one sentence that best summarizes the value you contributed while working for that employer and insert the direct quote on your resume immediately after your job title or following your bullet list of achievements. After the quote, include your reference's full name and his or her position with the company. If you have ever run your own company or been self-employed, consider including testimonials from your prior customers and clients. Be sure to request their permission beforehand if you want to mention their full names.

### **Missed Opportunity #5**

**You did not include a link to an online pre-interview video.**

Here's a unique idea for those of you who like to be in front of a camera. You may need to ask a friend or family member for help. Create a three to five minute *professional* video of yourself. Note the emphasis on the word professional. You are not shilling some newfangled product in a program-length infomercial, so resist the urge to go for the hard sale. Rather, use this

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opportunity to have a conversation with a potential employer, albeit a one-sided conversation. Of course, you'll want to dress professionally and observe the same degree of decorum in speech and nonverbal communication that you would in an actual face-to-face interview.

In this pre-interview video, you can talk about your work history and special skills. Research the questions most commonly asked during an interview and use your video to answer a few of those questions. You can also use your video to go into greater detail about your specific achievements, how you overcame a work-related obstacle you faced, and how you will be a valuable asset to an employer's company. While you certainly will want to appear polished and prepared, don't go overboard by sounding robotic or rehearsed. Leave the cue cards and teleprompter for your favorite late night talk show host's opening monologue. Use a natural tone and speak in your usual cadence.

Next, post your video on a video-hosting site or on your professional website and include the link to your video on your resume. Include a "tease" that will spur the person reviewing your resume into visiting your online video to learn more about you. Being compelling in your video interview may translate into a phone call from a potential employer to set up a real interview.

Here is a sample tease:

"I developed a software program that saved my previous employer \$500,000 over the course of 6 months. To learn more, please view my online video at [www.youtube.com/JohnSmith](http://www.youtube.com/JohnSmith)."

Fortunately, you don't need to be a criminal investigator or play one on television to identify your resume's missed opportunities. Use one or two of the recommendations discussed above to stand out from your competition and unlock the mystery of landing an interview for the job you want.

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Lisa M. Newman is the Founder and CEO/President of Marigold Consulting in Atlanta, GA. Marigold Consulting offers snooze-proof training to individuals in all settings who want to bloom out of proportion personally and professionally. Marigold partners with session attendees to foster a comfortable and productive learning environment in which extraordinary ideas are birthed, practical solutions to everyday challenges are discovered, and raucous laughter is encouraged. To learn more about Marigold's services or to schedule a session for your group, please visit [www.marigoldconsulting.com](http://www.marigoldconsulting.com).