

Terra Search Partners' Resume Primer

It is always important to have a ready to go, up-to-date resume but in these economic times, it is essential. The team at Terra Search has put together this Resume Primer for our friends, colleagues and job seekers. It is geared specifically towards people in the real estate business, but it is applicable to anyone. There are hundreds of articles and books on resume writing – our points may or may not be consistent with the conventional wisdom; our perspective comes from our collective experience as executive recruiters focusing on the real estate industry and we hope it is helpful.

View your resume as a tool to present your background and a guide that a potential employer or referral source will use to quickly understand who you are and where you stand in the business. Keep in mind that *most people skim rather than study resumes*, so it has to be effective in making the major points.

Also, we are writing this primer in the Spring of 2009 in the worst economic situation in our lifetimes. Jobs are scarce. We are coaching people to view their immediate goal as to “find opportunities and assignments” or “find potential people to partner with” versus “finding a job.” Consider that your resume and deal sheet serves the function of presenting yourself and your qualifications for this wider range of opportunities.

A Time for Reflection: Writing a resume is a good opportunity to step back, take stock and reflect on your background and career. Preparation is therefore important and an opportunity. Before preparing your resume, sit back and reflect on your background and career. Take time to think about your areas of expertise and specific accomplishments. Take stock of your career highlights as well as functions and niches in which you are an authority. Your resume should speak directly to your strengths in these areas. When one of our daughters was in 12th grade and looking at colleges, her guidance counselor asked each of the kids to write a “brag sheet.” The word “brag” seemed inappropriate at the time and may seem like a flippant word, but it is one worth keeping in mind as you write your resume. Remember, think about your area(s) of greatest strength and depth (think about the functional areas like development or asset management and maybe sectors like hotel or apartments) and make sure your resume emphasizes those skill-sets.

Types of Resumes: There are three types of resumes: chronological, functional, or hybrid. We strongly prefer a traditional reverse chronological resume. A *chronological* resume emphasizes skills built over a period of time through a progressive career path. Recruiters and human resources professionals like them because they are systematic and easy to interpret. *Functional* resumes emphasize skills and accomplishments without describing them within the context of specific jobs. The bulk of the resume lists qualifications and accomplishments, then is followed by a brief career history which simply lists titles, companies and dates. Frankly, we find functional resumes to be a red flag. They are often used to hide deficiencies in accomplishments and career growth at past jobs and/or for masking employment gaps.

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They are often used by people whose careers have not been linear, who have bounced around, or who have significant gaps in their resumes. These issues will come out during an interview, so we believe it is best to be completely honest about whatever path your career has taken. For someone whose career has not been linear, a hybrid resume is an acceptable alternative to a functional resume. If you choose this format, briefly summarize your skills in no more than half a page. Then present your employment history in reverse chronological order using bullet points to cite your achievements at each job. In effect, the summary tells the reader what your strengths are, and the achievements offer proof that you have these skills. Some people think they should have multiple versions of their resume; we think that is unnecessary and sometimes misleading. You are who you are and if your chronological resume presents your career history in a straightforward fashion, there is no reason for multiple versions.

Create a Deal Sheet: We recommend that most real estate professionals create a “deal sheet” that highlights significant transactions that they’ve worked on. This is an exhibit separate from the resume and allows a potential employer to view your background from a very different focus than your career history. Indeed for real estate people, your career history is the history of deals you have worked on and a deal sheet presents you in terms of the language of the industry. It allows a potential employer to drill down with you to discuss deals and both understand your knowledge of the business and the role(s) you have played. For a high volume transaction person, the deal sheet might be a spreadsheet that shows individual transactions, but demonstrates production history. For a more hands on development or asset management role, the deal sheet might be bullet point paragraphs or separate pages on half-a-dozen key projects.

Cover Letters: As recruiters, we rarely read formal cover letters. However, if you are contacting a recruiter or employer to whom you have never spoken, it is nice to have a cover letter. Personalize it and highlight the skills that make you ideal for that particular job and remember to keep it to one page. Think of it as an elevator speech. (One of the reasons we don’t read cover letters is that they are usually mass produced and not tailored to the job for which the person is applying.) As recruiters, we are more likely to read a short e-mail with an attached resume, so we recommend the email transmittal versus sending both a resume and a cover letter as attachments.

Here are specific recommendations on the resume.

- ❑ NEVER SEND OUT A RESUME WITH TYPOS!! Be careful with words like “their” and “they’re” and “its” and “it’s.” We see these mistakes all the time. Mistakes on a resume suggest carelessness, and no one wants to hire a careless employee. Have more than one person proofread your resume.

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- ❑ Contact information should be placed on the top of the first page of your resume. Put name, home address, cell phone (indicating that it is your cell phone) and personal email. Include your work email and work phone only if people can contact you there. If you don't have a personal e-mail address, get one. Do not use someone else's e-mail address such as your spouse's e-mail. It is unprofessional and suggests a discomfort with technology. Make sure to have a professional-sounding e-mail address (for example JohnZDoe@yahoo.com), and not something cute (for example RealEstateJunkie@yahoo.com).

- ❑ We recommend putting a heading paragraph at the top of the resume that gives a several line elevator speech that captures the essence of what you do. This is similar to the summary used in the hybrid resume, but shorter. This professional summary or positioning statement is preferred over the traditional "Career Objective" section. Career objectives tend to be too broad or too specific, so they're not particularly useful. Secondly, unlike the career objective, the professional summary shows a prospective employer what you offer them versus what they can offer you, and from a marketing standpoint, this is significant. The purpose of this section is to briefly summarize your skills, qualifications and achievements, and to do it in a way that captures the reader's attention. This can be done in a few sentences, or with bullet points. The only time to have a "career objective" section is when you are trying to make a change from one type of career to another.

- ❑ The work experience or career history section should comprise the bulk of your resume and is the most important part. For this portion of your resume, include the following:
 - Company name and location of each job you have had since college (or high school if you do not have a college degree). It is not necessary to provide detail for early jobs that might not seem relevant, but we recommend including all of them along with dates. Recruiters, in particular, are interested in transitions and will discover omissions in your interview. If you leave anything out, it might look like obfuscation.
 - Position(s)/title and year in each role.
 - A two or three liner in italics that describes what the company does.
 - A brief overview of your role in italics.
 - Use bullet points to describe key responsibilities and accomplishments in each job, incorporating the information gathered in the "brag sheet" exercise. The result should illustrate how your skills and achievements have accumulated and progressed over the course of your career. Make sure to write in the first person, and use strong action verbs. For example, "managed a team of 40", "developed and implemented accounting policies".

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- If you have had multiple jobs at the same company, it is not necessary to break the bullets between the jobs since jobs usually run into each other.
- If you've had multiple jobs at the same company include substantive promotions or changes from one group to another, use bullets about those promotions and change in overall responsibility OR put each job in a separate section with its own bullets.
- If the company you worked for was acquired by another entity and you essentially stayed at the same place, make that clear in the presentation. For example, if someone worked for Equitable/Lend Lease/Morgan Stanley, it might have always been with the same group, so put the corporate names together at the top of the job heading and then describe the corporate changes in italics. This is better than having the resume suggest you have been at three different companies, one after the other.
- The career history section should be followed by an education section. Include the name of the institution(s) and its location, your degree, and the year of completion. Yes, it allows people to age-date you. But it is upfront, honest, and important information.
- Pro forma comments such as "references available upon request" are not necessary and simply take up space.
- A bullet point with personal interests is good. It may help you make a connection.
- Leadership roles and memberships is a worthwhile section.
- There is no need to limit the resume to one page. Two pages are fine and a deal sheet of any length and/or other exhibits is fine.
- Use enhancements such as bold, capital letters, italics or underlining to differentiate section headings, job titles, etc. Do not overuse them.
- Electronic resumes are key in this day and age. Paper resumes are likely to get set aside and lost. Send your resume in Word, not Adobe, but check to make sure ALL CHANGES ARE ACCEPTED or else we might see your edits. Adobe is actually better to send to employers but Word is great for recruiters because we can easily import information into our data base.
- Put a footer on the pages following page 1 of your resume that includes "last name/page2 of 3", etc. Make sure to have your name on your deal sheet as well.
- Do not put your photo in your resume unless you are REALLY good looking. Just joking – no one should put their photo on their resume unless they are a salesperson.

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