

## Should We Do Away with Resumes?

Joseph P. Murphy

Resumes can place emphasis on the wrong data for screening. As such, candidate pools get reduced using inappropriate, yet conveniently available data. This makes for an easy query, but not necessarily an effective approach to finding the best candidates.

### Resumes have made life difficult: Two Examples

#### *Company A*

This company had historically received 500 unsolicited resumes through the mail each year. After putting an “e-mail your resume here” button on their web site, they received about 5,000 unsolicited resumes the next year. No changes were made in recruitment advertising. The unintended consequences of this were resume spam, increased candidate expectations for communication, data storage and retrieval challenges, and having to create a labor intensive, manual process to sift through mass numbers of resumes.

#### *Company B*

This company’s applicant tracking systems (ATS) database averages 1,200 resumes per opening/hire. Through searching and screening, they discovered that in most cases, only about 15% of the candidates possess the minimal qualifications. The unintended consequences were that the remaining 85% of the resumes place a significant demand on recruiting resources. Time and dollars are spent dealing with irrelevant data thereby increasing the cost per hire. In addition, this volume of poor fit resumes increased the expense for data storage, placed greater demands on the search engine, and expanded the scope of maintaining the quality and usability of the data.

The current industry response to this issue is to create more complex methods for searching through resumes, rather than changing or eliminating the resume. This has led to developing more sophisticated ways of attempting to discover candidate-job fit, from data that is of little value for predicting job performance.

At a national conference of employment specialists, a VP of Recruiting for a large firm expressed delight in the process called resume cloning. Her example was having the ‘black box’ find perfect resume matches for a long-term valued employee who needed to be replaced.

However, what does a resume say about 15 years of context knowledge, collaborative relationships, applied learning, and cross-functional teamwork? Not much.

ATS and Candidate Relationship Management System (CRM) vendors are touting that they can search for and find the needles in the haystack. A more appropriate approach is to build a process that only lets needles into your applicant flow, and then helps you find the best needle. Resumes are a poor vehicle for this model.

## Grasping New Capabilities

Many practitioners are looking for the still elusive silver bullet, but the silver bullet does not exist. As an alternative, we suggest a multi-method approach, using a combination of screening and assessment to create an objective path for candidate flow and decision support.

Screening can be accomplished with standardized, scorable questionnaires on work experience, minimum qualifications, specialist knowledge, and biodata. Knock out factors can help quickly remove those candidates without key qualifications. Self scheduling software can advance candidates into an on-line or proctored assessment session. The science of assessment has been evolving into simulated work samples and virtual job tryouts. These methods can embed situational judgment, reasoning skills, and workstyle preferences to yield a person-job fit score. Candidates find this approach more engaging and more job relevant than submitting resumes into the black hole of the job posting.

Based upon assessment results, recruiters can then invite best-fit candidates into the interview stage. It is at this point that the resume becomes useful and valuable for context to guide the interview.

Case in point, one organization freed up two days per week per recruiter of resume sifting and phone qualifying work by automating the screening and assessment process for one position. The resume was fundamentally removed from the front end of the process and decisions to advance candidates were made on more objective data.

The recruiter did not spend much time with candidates until after they had been through four levels of interactive, two-way information sharing. The quality of hire went up, time to fill went down, and the interview to hire ratio went down. As a result of this change, the recruiter's job underwent a major transformation. Recruiters went from administrator: searching, sorting, and phone tag; to community relations: out building the employment brand for better sourcing. They use the resume to guide the interview - a more appropriate place to use it. Now instead of searching for the needles in the haystack, the recruiters are pulling the needle from the pin cushion, dealing with fewer, but more qualified candidates.

## We Aren't There Yet

While the opportunity exists to embrace new capabilities, practitioners are slow to adapt. As an

example, in a survey of recruiting professionals we conducted in 2003, 35% of respondents stated they had an on-line application, yet only 6% stated they had a scorable application. On the surface this indicates the web and computing power are still grossly underutilized. Merely migrating a paper form to digital completion is not taking advantage of the power offered by the medium.

## Assumptions

Using the resume as the basis for screening assumes that the experiences listed are the predictors of the best candidates. In fact, experience is proxy data for underlying skills, abilities, and competencies. Experiences listed on resumes are more subjective and less consistent. This data falls prey to the spin document word-smithing all too common in writing resumes. People often question faking on workstyle or personality profiles, yet rarely cast doubt on word-smithing and inflating experiences on the resume. Christian & Timbers published research (2001) indicating 23% of executives had misrepresentations on their resumes. I would bet next week's paycheck there is more distortion on resumes than on how a candidate responds to a workstyle profile questionnaire, scorable biodata, and situational judgment questions.

## Some Anecdotal Points

College career centers help with resume wording that increases the likelihood of being found in a resume search. Monster.com founder Jeff Taylor was recently quoted (September 6, 2004): "Pumping your resume full of key words is a little dishonest." Another pioneer in on-line screening mentioned that a class action discrimination suit was filed against resume screening for not searching on alternative words that may be used to describe the same experience. Have we ever considered that how paper resumes or job applications are sorted may cause adverse impact?

## The Contrast

The resume paradigm assumes the candidate presented his/her information in a manner that was usable/valuable to the company. The scorable, multi-method screening process gathers information intentionally, based upon predefined information needs. One is hopeful, the other objective. Upon which type of information do you want to base your decisions?

As we consider the evolution of the recruiting process, the resume has not evolved, it has not kept pace. And, the investment of major ATSS on building yet more sophisticated searching capabilities, coupled with the parallel emphasis on marketing this capability as the key to efficiency, prevents the staffing industry from letting go of the spin document. In effect, the ATS vendors have perpetuated the paradigm, putting forth inferior screening technology and winning, like VHS winning over Beta in the video market. Superior technology lost to superior marketing.

## The Opportunity

The sheer volume of hard to interpret data from resume spamming has opened the door to the room labeled: "Need for Change." How easily the industry steps across that threshold may be in part directly related to: (in no particular order)

1. The degree to which the HR profession acknowledges lessons learned from decades of research on improving the objectivity of selection decisions
2. The success stories that get broad publicity
3. The degree to which users become informed enough to use new methods wisely, (and avoid firing silver bullets)
4. The shift in the approach (and message) of ATS and CRM screening to methods more objective than the resume

Simulations, virtual job tryouts and work sampling are the wave of the future, and are being used on a limited basis today. This medium creates an engaging, two-way exchange that offers both parties the opportunity to learn more about each other, the job, the culture, and affords each party the insight needed to make more effective decisions on whether to move forward in the courtship process. As these methods advance, the stagnant resume will become less valuable and will fall from grace as the tool of choice for talent screening.

Should we do away with resumes? No, but we should take a more objective approach to screening candidates.

"Mother may I,... take three giant steps forward?"

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Joe is a principal and co-founder of Shaker Consulting Group. The firm has pioneered two-way information exchange between applicant and employer through virtual job tryouts and high fidelity simulations. Their solutions support hiring decisions that lead to measurable business outcomes. Guaranteed.

Joe is also a Content Expert for SHRM's Workforce Staffing and Deployment Panel, served on the EMA Board of Directors, and worked with local EMA groups throughout the Midwest to expand professional development programs for recruiters.

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