



WRITING A WINNING TECH CV

*Your guide to how to win more interviews
and enhance your career by creating a
quality CV*

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Writing a Winning Tech CV – © Idealpeople 2009

WHO'S THIS FOR?



WHO IS THIS FOR?

You'll find loads of generic advice about writing CVs online. Whilst some of this information is great (and some of it not so great), you'll find very little specific information about how to write a technology-focussed CV.

So, people of the tech world: whether you've just graduated or whether you've worked in the technology space for a number of years, this guide is for you.

THE CHALLENGE

People working in technology often have a wide range of technical skill and broad experience working in a variety of environments. Knowing how to present the wealth of technical expertise to a potential employer or a recruiter is a significant challenge. This guide will help you construct a CV which will make sense of this information and showcase your skills and experience.



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WHO ARE WE?

We are Idealpeople, and we've been looking at, talking about and dealing with CVs since 2001. We're a recruitment company who work with leading tech companies, searching out and introducing them to the world's top tech talent.

We work with professionals from **all areas of the tech industry**, including Software Development, Test & QA, Professional Services and Consulting, Product Management & Product Marketing, Sales & Business Development, Technical Architecture, HR and Senior Management.

We represent **people at all levels**, from recent graduates to CEOs and everywhere inbetween.

We have offices in the UK and China (Beijing), and work extensively throughout Europe, so our knowledge and experience is **international**.

We give out free advice to tech professionals on a number of issues relating to job-seeking, including interview techniques, personal branding, social networking and CV authoring. Come and take a look at a full range of articles, including recent developments from the world of tech recruitment, at **www.idealpeopleblog.com**.

ABOUT US:

<http://www.idealpeople.net>

<http://www.idealpeople.cn>

<http://www.idealpeople.it>

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THE BASICS: DEFINING YOU

What is a CV?

Before we go any further, it's very important that you understand what a CV is.

Whilst a CV certainly isn't a life history, the common perception of a CV as a "marketing document" – whilst having some truth to it- is unhelpful. A CV written purely to "sell" can lead the author in the wrong direction.

A CV is simply the opposite of a job description; rather than describing the job it describes a person, that person's skills and the experience they've gleaned. Some of it should be designed to appeal to the reader, but on the whole its aim should be to create an accurate and relevant description of your professional "self".

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder

Before you dive in and start writing, take a moment to think about your audience: hiring managers, HR folk and recruiters. When these people open a CV, what do you think they are looking for?

In our experience, they're looking to answer some key questions, which include:

- 1) Does this person have the skills I need?
- 2) Has this person achieved what I need from them before?
- 3) What problems do I face in hiring this person?

If your CV satisfies the reader on each of these points, then it will win you an interview, and its job will be complete.

So a CV isn't a life history, nor is it a marketing document: **it's a document which answers your audience's key questions.**

Tip 1: Always put your audience first

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GENERIC OR SPECIFIC?

Brace yourself for a shock.

Are you braced? Good.

We think you should create, *from scratch*, a **brand new** CV for each individual job that you put yourself in the frame for.

Our first tip was to *put your audience first*, and you can't do this if you're using the same CV for every job you look at. A truly great CV answers those questions on the last page for each and every job you apply for. A generic CV just won't deliver on this.

We accept that this might be a time-consuming process, so if you find it's taking too long then a tailored or "fine-tuned" version of a more generic one will work – provided the changes you make allow your CV to match the job description closely.



A PLACE FOR GENERIC CVs

Before you tear yours up, there is a LOT of value in having a generic CV. If, for instance, you're going to be using on-line CV databases, or if you want to begin building relationships with recruiters, then a generic CV is vital.

However, you must be willing to create new ones from scratch when you get some interest and build your generic one using the guidelines we suggest here.

INFORMATION

To do this well, you're going to need a good deal of information upon which to base your tailored CV.

If you're lucky, the advert might have enough in it to help you – otherwise you'll need to **qualify** the vacancy with the agent or HR team before producing your CV. Either will be **more than happy to speak to you directly**.

Tip 2: Be prepare to go further by creating a new CV from scratch each time.

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THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT FORMATTING

You might be tempted when writing a CV to try and make it look really nice.

Making your CV look good is a great idea, provided that a nice format is combined with really great content.

However, when making your CV look great you need to remember rule number 1: *consider your audience first*.

WHAT HAPPENS TO YOUR CV?

The vast majority of recruiters are now storing CVs electronically, which throws up a set of issues that you need to be aware of.

For instance, as tempting as it is to use every available piece of modern technology to craft a beautiful-looking document, you'll be wasting your time if the recipient doesn't have access to the same technology you used in making it.

Tip 3: Get the formatting right!

FORMATTING TIPS

1 FILE SIZE

Documents which include images can often end up being huge. Many companies have file size restrictions on e-mail systems and/or databases so if you want to use images make a clean, image-free version too.

2 FONTS

Not everyone has that super-slick font you wanted to use installed, which could make your design efforts redundant. For the avoidance of doubt, use the core system fonts (Arial, Times New Roman, Georgia, Verdana) to ensure that what you see is the same as the recipient, or PDF your document.

3 TABLES

Avoid using tables at all costs. Different software renders tables differently, and table layouts are affected by differing standard templates. Many databases don't like or can't read from tables, so they can seriously mess up your formatting. Use tabs to separate data instead.

4 HEADERS AND FOOTERS

Many people use headers and footers to store information like addresses and contact numbers. Some systems can't read information from headers and footers, so avoid them altogether.

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WHAT TO PUT IN....AND WHAT TO LEAVE OUT

We've come across loads of advice about what information your CV needs to have in it, all of it varying. The "nuts and bolts" of what to put in varies from person-to-person (depending on your experience), but there are some clear boundaries on what should be in your CV and what shouldn't be.

INCLUDE

1 YOUR NAME AND CONTACT DETAILS

Because some people do forget.

2 YOUR ACADEMIC PROFILE

You can put this where you like (if you're a recent graduate then you'll want to play it up; otherwise you can put it lower down), but leaving it out leads to assumptions of it not existing....

3 YOUR PROFESSIONAL HISTORY

We'll talk more about this on the upcoming pages – but the type of role and depth of your experience will dictate how much of your experience you discuss in depth. You only need to go into detail about positions you've held which are relevant to the position you are applying for.

4 YOUR PROFILE

Be sure to include a short opening paragraph detailing your current situation, your primary skillset and the type of position you seek. And make sure this matches the position you are applying for!

Tip 4: Include only the right information

LEAVE OUT

1 HOBBIES AND PERSONAL INTERESTS

Unless they are relevant to the role: if your interests include web design and development and you're a web designer, then great – but non-work-related hobbies should be left out.

2 PRIVATE DATA

We've seen all sorts, but please don't include anything like your National Insurance number or passport number.

3 D.O.B

Although you won't be penalised for it, there's no need to include your date of birth.

4 HUMOUR

Because other people might not think you're as funny as you are.

5 PHOTOS

The jury is out on this one – and lots of people will disagree, but the bottom line is that a photo doesn't enhance your application – so leave it out.

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE - LANGUAGE, ACHIEVEMENTS & BENEFITS

USE THE JOB DESCRIPTION

Writing about your professional experience is the toughest and most important part of your CV. It's at this point that it becomes important to base the information you are giving in your CV around the job description or advert in front of you.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Writing about achievements is far more powerful than writing about responsibilities, so replace descriptions of what you did with descriptions of what you achieved. For instance, look at the following example:

- I was in charge of the corporate website
- I managed a team of 15 developers
- Implemented a new CRM system

REPLACE THIS

WITH THIS

- I held responsibility for the corporate website, and was the driver behind a total design overhaul of the 3000 pages it contained. The outcome of this was a five-fold increase in visitor traffic and improved user feedback. This extra traffic led to a £500K increase in online sales.
- Implemented new performance initiatives and management style, reducing staff attrition from 60% to 6%.
- Identified and Implemented a new CRM system, resulting in an increase in a 35% increase in conversions.

It's really important to be specific with your language and to try and use numbers as much as possible. Overly-flowery language with tonnes of adjectives and no numbers loses a lot of power. Note how our good example uses numbers to describe achievements rather than subjective language.

BENEFITS

Try to describe your achievements by explaining the *benefits* that your work has had on your employers.

Did your work on a particular project lead to increased efficiency or improved performance?

Tell us about it!

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Tip 5: Replace your features with achievements and benefits!

HOW TO DEAL WITH TECHNICAL SKILLS

Dealing with Technical Skills on your CV can be a challenge. We know that you probably have a wide range of technical skills, and that every job that you apply for demands a different sub-set of those skills.

It can be tempting to **write a list of all of your technical skills** in a generic CV. We've already told you our view on Generic CVs, and in the case of technical skills this advice holds particularly true.

Tech workseekers are fairly unique in the employment world because they often have a multitude of skills which don't necessarily fit together in an obvious manner. For instance, they could be brilliant at designing and building websites using PHP and MySQL; they could be equally brilliant at designing web applications using J2EE and just as good at building iPhone applications.

Yet each job they apply for is unlikely to demand such a breadth of skills – instead, most jobs are marketed as requiring a depth of skill in one particular area. The job-seeker mentioned in the last paragraph could apply for a PHP coding position, or an iPhone development role, or a J2EE development project, but is unlikely to be busy applying for a position which demands all three skillsets.



Combine this set of circumstances with a generic CV and what you often get is an ugly mess; a bodged document which sort-of-serves-its-purpose-but-really-doesn't. Those who have unwittingly fallen into the trap may find themselves unable to grab the attention of the hiring manager, HR department or the recruiter, or they may find themselves constantly having to explain their experience with particular skills. They may find themselves frustrated at a "lack of understanding" of their CV, or become mystified at a lack of real progress.

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HOW TO DEAL WITH TECHNICAL SKILLS

A bodged, “one-size-fits all”, generic technical CV will often include long lists of technical skills.

Not only are these seem a little unbelievable, but they’re pretty un-useful too: and it’s probably why you find – in between the long silences – that you keep having to explain yourself.

An ineffective CV leaves the reader with questions that need to be answered, an effective tailored or entirely fresh one leaves no doubt as to your suitability. Yes, it’s going to take longer, but give it a go and see how effective it is.



Tell us not just what you did, tell us what you’ve done

When it comes to technical skills, this is really important: you need to do more than just mention the skill(s) in question. You need to tell us what you’ve done with those skills. PHP superstar? Tell us about the sites/apps you’ve made in PHP in your current/previous role(s). *Where are they? What do they do? Which modules did you write?*

Do the same for the job roles you’ve held. Software Tester? What have you tested? How did you test it? What tools did you use?

Tell us about what you’ve achieved, what you’ve done and **not just what you do.**

Tip 6: Tell us what you’ve done with your technical skills, don’t just tell us what they are

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MYTH-BUSTING

Depending on where you go, you will find a range of “advice” on CV creation. Most of this is wrong. Let’s examine some of the more common myths....

Your CV should be no more than 2 pages long: WRONG! Your CV shouldn’t be overly long and should only include information about your skills and achievements *relevant to the position in question* (this means not going into detail about historic positions which are not relevant to the role you are applying for), but the “two pages” rule is a myth. We’ve seen excellent CVs of four or five pages in length. We’ve also seen awful CVs of four or five pages in length.

You have ten seconds to grab the reader’s attention: WARNING! In truth, most recruiters WILL decide about your suitability based on your CV within a very short period of time, but what makes a difference is how well matched your skills and experience are to the job description or advert and NOT the lengths to which you’ve gone to “grab their attention”. A CV that is well crafted and tailored to a position will win you interviews – one which is designed to get attention won’t.

You should use “power words” to help your application stand out: WRONG! You should use language that is clear and simple – particularly when talking about technical concepts – and you should focus on describing things that you achieved rather than using woolly language with too many fluffy adjectives.

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RE-CAP

Create your winning tech CV by following our 7 simple rules...

Tip 1: Always put your audience first

Consider the reader's key questions:

- Does this person have the skills I need?
- Has this person achieved what I need from them before?
- What problems do I face in hiring this person?

Tip 2: Be prepared to go further by creating a new CV from scratch each time

Or at least tailor it to match the job description/advert closely.

Tip 3: Get the formatting right!

Leave out tables, keep information out of headers and footers and use sensible, widely available fonts. Use graphics sparingly and be aware of file format issues.

Tip 4: Include only the right information

That means no hobbies, private info or photos!

Tip 5: Replace your features with achievements and benefits!

Use clear and accurate language to tell us what you've done, not just what you did.

Tip 6: Tell us what you've done with your technical skills, don't just tell us what they are

Be precise and clear about what you've done with the technical skills you have that are relevant to the job you are applying for.

Tip 7: Steer Clear of CV Myths

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