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The MCSE Resume - A Step Above

Many of you probably already have a favorite resume that you've used to get that lucky job before. If you're in the job market after earning your MCSE certification, you'll no doubt want to advertise it to the world now that you are now a few steps ahead of everyone else in the Information Technology market. And with this pseudo-recession we're experiencing, you want to make sure that you have the best resume in order to get your foot in the door. That great company you always heard about and wanted to work for is waiting for you.

Looking Back or Going Forward

One of the most hotly discussed subjects in resume preparation is the battle between using a summary that describes your past work and an objective that describes what you're looking for. The fact is you need to decide how you want to angle your job search in order to achieve the direction you want to go to. Both summaries and objectives are excellent tools to showcase your skills and paint a picture of where you want to go. Deciding which one to use, as the preamble to your life's work is key to determining whether you want to continue with your career or start a new one.

A summary, in its purest sense, describes what you have done in the past. This will focus on things that you already excel at, and is presumed that you want to continue with. You can start out with a general statement declaring how many years you have been involved in the field. Or, you may want to jump right into the list of technologies that you excel at. Either way, make sure you keep it clear and concise because you still need to outline your work later on under the Experience section of the resume.

An objective takes a different approach in angling your resume for the

perfect job. It is also a perfect fit for someone without much work experience and therefore would have a harder time summarizing. Objectives can be in the form of one-sentence wonders to a full paragraph (space permitting). A one-sentence objective should be clear and precise, as it will determine the tone of where you want to go. Using a paragraph will better map out where you plan on going with your career. In either case, clarity will assist you and your prospective employer in guiding where you want your career to go.

Am I Educated or Experienced?

Another contentious issue in resume writing is which section should come after the introduction (summary or objective). This question is analogous to which came first, the chicken or the egg? In my opinion, the section that best highlights your abilities to perform the job you're applying for should go first. Emphasizing education is always a good choice when your education speaks volumes about how well you're able to perform. Experience is the best bet when you're applying to (and expecting to get) an intermediate or higher position that requires solid skills to perform the job.

Placing education before experience has its advantages for a new MCSE because you're able to fill a lot more white space than regular education experience. For example, when you write that you graduated from the University of Miami, you don't list the courses that you took into order to complete the required credits. However, a MCSE certification is different because of the type of courses you need to take. Each MCSE course and passed exam in and of itself is an achievement that is worthy of an individual listing. By putting down that you passed "Internetworking with Microsoft TCP/IP on Microsoft Windows NT 4.0", you are doing two things:

1. You are demonstrating that you are now proficient in networking TCP/IP networks.

2. Your resume will stand out with agencies and HR departments that rely on automatic resume readers (OCR and databasing of resumes). These departments scan resumes automatically for industry buzzwords and pick out relevant technologies.

In addition, by using Microsoft's MCP Secured Area (which you should get access to once you receive your MCP ID #) you are able to print or fax a copy of your transcript of the courses that you've passed. (Scores and failed tests are not recorded). You may want to bring a copy of this transcript with you during the interview.

Emphasizing experience is a no-brainer for anyone who has it. It's just a question of outlining it in way that demonstrates how you dominate your specialty. This is the part that is also the most frustrating because if you have a lot of experience, or have worked on a number of projects in your career as a free-lancer, it can be troublesome to condense everything you want to say onto one page. Remember that your resume is just a summary of who you are and is designed to get your foot into the door – not to write the "History of the Life of..." Save some of the juicy details for interview where you will definitely have your chance to shine, or die trying.

The Logos

The final touch to making your resume picture-perfect is to adorn it with copies of the MCP logos that you are authorized to use as a registered MCP or MCSE. Microsoft gives you license to use these logos on your business cards and advertising materials (i.e. your resume). Anyone who finished the MCSE NT 4.0 track with IIS becomes a MCP+Internet and MCSE. Therefore, you can place both logos on your resume because these are certifications you have earned. Using the MCP logo after you've achieved a premium status is redundant and projects that you're more interested in the cert instead of the technology your supporting.

Making Your Resume Shine

Once you have all these elements together, make sure that your resume is presentable via a number of mediums. For example, print out your resume on a number of printers, at least an ink-jet and a medium range laser printer to make sure that any of the fonts or graphics you've used print OK. Also, if you plan on faxing your resume directly from your computer, fax it to a few friends to make sure your spacing isn't affected (as is the case when printing the same document using different printer drivers.) Proofing your resume before sending it out will save you time in trying to figure out why no one is calling you.

Good luck on your job hunt!

Jeff Mendelson, MCSE

Jeff Mendelson is an MCSE with over ten years in the software industry and five in system administration.

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