

## Your Resume Is Mission Critical

A tight labor market means the right resume is essential to getting ahead

By Dora Vell

CEO, VELL Executive Search | Dec 02, 2005

With the current competitive job market conditions, constructing a great resume is mission critical. Essential to giving job candidates an all-important head start, the resume is more than just a mere calling card. It's a strategic weapon that, in just seconds, forcefully communicates an executive's strengths and unique value-add, positioning the individual as a key job contender.

It's an approach some CIO candidates have not yet adopted, believing—incorrectly—that status, background and title speak for themselves. Their resumes are brief listings of accountabilities and responsibilities that neither showcase—let alone leverage—their accomplishments and talents. Instead of standing out from the pack, they meld further into it. It's a costly mistake that hurts big time in terms of missed opportunities, lost revenues and—perhaps most damaging—an undesirable career slowdown.

### The Bullet-Proof CIO Resume

Today resumes can't just shine: They need to beam. The bullet-proof CIO resume is high-impact, results-based and provides depth and context while minimizing potential liabilities. Its creation needs to be driven by two factors: recognition that the CIO role has evolved from technical expert to strategic business partner; and appreciation that today resumes need to be as sharp a promotional tool as any advertisement in a hotly fought battle for market share.

Here are six keys to creating a winning CIO resume:

#### 1. Speak the language of business

All too often CIO resumes still speak in highly technical terms—a problem from the outset since it's the C-level position that hiring managers are least familiar with—while failing to link their achievements to the business. Citing how your successes tangibly and positively affected corporate results, whether it was dollars saved or strategic advantage gained, is absolutely essential. Make sure your resume includes accomplishments that highlight your decisions as effective, responsive, efficient and positive. Doing so gives your successes business value by showing operational impact.

#### 2. Underscore strategic abilities

Too many CIOs say they're strategic without showing it. Don't be one of them. It can be a devastating mistake since hiring managers—focused on finding the “new kind” of CIO—are looking for tangible evidence of strategic ability. Use good governance examples to underscore this skill in real terms. If you were able to get more mileage out of your IT dollar by outsourcing, if you had a process for determining projects' ROI, if you conducted post-mortem audits, say so. These types of good governance examples strongly indicate your ability to align IT goals with those of the business. You want to be seen as an important contributor in maintaining the company's health while helping to cultivate its success.

#### 3. Demonstrate your knowledge of and expertise in handling current “hot” issues

Sarbanes-Oxley, offshore development, compliance and security are some of the hot issues companies are currently focused on. Providing examples of experience in these areas—even if your exposure has been minimal—is critical. Their potential to wreak havoc on a business and/or executives' lives means an undue premium is being placed on skills associated with managing them. And, your experience may not be as minimal as you think; some of these issues are extremely new. Leverage your experience as effectively as possible by discussing in detail your successes, putting them in a visible position and making sure you list each and every “hot issue” you've addressed.

#### 4. Minimize potential liabilities

In the current environment, minimizing liabilities is key to making your resume a razor sharp marketing document. Every CIO has liabilities, but deft handling can reduce if not eliminate their negative impact. Step one is being aware of them—too many people assume they won't be noticed—followed by a strategic assessment of how best to neutralize them. For example, if your present organization has outdated systems, then highlight your knowledge of current systems and issues. The dubious appearance of too many job changes can often be dealt with by consolidating them via a common theme. Whatever the issue, minimize it. Everyone has issues. You need to be able to deal with them. And never blame, overtly or otherwise, associates for your liabilities.

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### 5. Use detail to create impact

Detail is critical to creating a high-impact resume. Facts, figures and the five Ws ensure that the extent and significance of your accomplishments are fully understood. Paint a picture by telling them not just that your initiatives increased productivity but by how much. Give them specifics about your former or current employer. As an added benefit, this level of detail sends a strong and positive secondary message: It tells the hiring team you're professional, well-organized and serious about the opportunity. Don't drone on though. Most strong executive-level resumes are three to four pages long, no more and no less.

### 6. Pay attention to the little details

With two hundred seemingly qualified resumes on their desk for one job, it's all too easy for hiring managers to overlook or eliminate those with slight imperfections. Protect yours by tending to the little details such as:

- o Name your electronic resume something meaningful to the recruiter such as LastName, FirstName, Month, Year.doc.
- o Send it as a Word document to ensure it can be uploaded to most databases.
- o List contact information on each and every header so that getting in touch is easy.
- o Don't use acronyms. They can create confusion or misunderstandings that can distract and consequently devalue the accomplishment or skill being highlighted.
- o Make sure your titles properly reflect your roles. For example if you were an application development manager but your title was financial services manager use the application development title. It ensures clarity.

By using these six steps as a guide, your resume will become a valuable weapon in today's highly competitive job environment. As the first point of contact between employer and candidate, it's a golden opportunity to make a strong and lasting impression. Use it for all it's worth. Position yourself as a serious contender by underscoring that you are a vital business leader who not only understands the symbiotic connection between business and IT but is able to drive it. The right resume makes securing highly coveted opportunities so much easier.

*Dora Vell is the CEO of VELL Executive Search, a premier retained technology executive search firm in Boston. Ms. Vell is an internationally recognized expert in executive search for technology CEOs, COOs, CIOs, Vice Presidents and board members. She works with start-up organizations through Fortune 50 Firms. She can be reached at dora@vell.com.*