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The Guide to Nailing Your Job Application

You've sent thirty applications out. You haven't heard back anything from half of them, and the other half have responded with an almost-uplifting, "Thank you for your recent application..." but disappointedly ended with an "I regret to inform you that..."

What am I doing wrong?

Or alternatively, this is a game you haven't stepped foot into and you're downloading sample resumes and cover letters on SEEK.

Where do I even start?

If either of these scenarios describe you, this is the guide to help you nail your next job application.

However, before we get into anything, it's important to reframe the job application process.

Why businesses hire

When a business' pre-existing labour resources can't afford to achieve business outcomes they need to find talent to help solve their problems.

For example:

- Problem: The business isn't growing fast enough

  - Solution: Hire a Marketer, Social Media Manager, Growth Hacker, or SEO Expert

- Problem: The business wants to quickly launch their new software or platform

  - Solution: Hire another Software Developer, or Engineer

- Problem: The business needs to improve their relationships with their customers

- Solution: Hire a Customer Success Manager, Customer Assistant, Call Centre Operator

A job opening exists because a business has a problem. The classic hiring process of resume, cover letter, and interview only exists as to measure an applicant's ability to solve their business problems. Therefore, instead of asking "How can I get hired?" we should reframe it as, "How can I prove to them I can solve their business problem? With the latter, you're being more intentional in your application.

Why networking works

Have you ever asked a friend for good places to eat? Or have you searched up ratings on a book or movie? Chances are you've asked someone before for a recommendation. The fact is 92% of people are more likely to trust the recommendations of peers over anything else whenever buying something.

The same principle applies to jobs. You'll find before a job opening has even been made, an organisation would have filled up the role by hiring internally or hiring someone that's been recommended for the job.

After my first job, every job opportunity I've been offered has been by someone I knew personally, rather than through submitting an application. **Because 85% of all jobs are filled by networking**.

A business would prefer hiring based off their network because it's faster, cheaper and already gives them proof a person can solve their business problems instead of sifting through strangers.

Meeting their business need

So you might be thinking, my mum's second cousin, three times removed isn't the head of Westpac or anything—I don't really know anyone that well. If that's the case, then that might be a gentle nudge to go to networking events and reach out to people to create opportunities.

But otherwise, it's about how you can stand out the most in the application process. i.e. Proving you're the best person to solve their problems.

When a business is hiring, they will typically be looking for these four pillars:

1. Past experience + background

2. Soft skills - i.e. comms

3. Trainability - i.e. How receptive are you to feedback? Can you learn quickly?

4. Culture fit

These are pretty self-explanatory but they underpin what constitutes a person competent to solve their business's problem. Each business will have value certain aspects more than others, hence, it's about looking at a job description and taking note of what they value more.

For example, below are two different job descriptions for the exact same role at two different companies. Take note of the language and what each emphasises.

Example #1

Copywriter

RISING Melbourne

More jobs from this company

RISING

RISING is a surge of art, music and ceremony in the heart of Melbourne.

Taking the place of the Melbourne International Arts Festival and White Night Melbourne, RISING is a major cultural event for the Asia Pacific Region created by a diverse team of local, national and international artists and curators.

RISING will begin on the evening of the total lunar eclipse in May 2021. Interlocking circles of experience and connection will radiate through the night, as the city re-synchronises and is re-energised with public art, performance and music spanning the emerging and iconic, the epic and intimate.

The inaugural festival will take place 26 May – 6 June 2021.

https://rising.melbourne/

THE ROLE

We are looking for a Copywriter and Content Coordinator to help bring our festival brand to life with bold and engaging content. This is a role suited to creative marketer and culture consumer with a strong interest in brand storytelling, copywriting and content marketing. The inaugural festival will require high levels participation and active engagement from a broad and diverse audience. We are looking for an arts-loving, ambitious and adaptable writer and content creator to help build our festival brand to connect with new audiences.

Reporting to the Head of Content and Engagement, you'll join RISING's in-house creative team responsible for branding, always-on content across owned and paid channels, marketing and communications, signage and merchandise, artist and festival documentation, and other content projects.

You're a confident writer and editor; a copywriting chameleon and a master of modulating tone. A misused apostrophe makes your eyes twitch. You're a planner with a meticulous attention to detail – the kind of person who proofreads a text three times before sending. You feel confident in a sprawling spreadsheet, a well-crafted timeline fills you with inner peace, and you don't flinch when tasked with a project you haven't undertaken before.

You are able to adapt to a fluctuating workload and a dynamic and demanding work environment. No one holds you to a higher standard than yourself – you believe in personal accountability and understand delegations of authority.

You're proactive, smart and organised, with a positive outlook and a willingness to jump in and learn. Concepting and workshopping content ideas is your idea of a fun afternoon. You write clear, concise and insightful briefs, and ensure in-house creatives and external agencies and artists have what they need to create excellent content. You also help support our audiences to have the best possible brand experience at every touchpoint.

Example #2

Copy Writer for Australia's fastest-growing real estate brand

freedomproperty.com.au

More jobs from this company

Freedom Property is a fast-growing real estate brand that offers a full range of unique support services to our agents in order to empower them to be the best in the business.

ABOUT THE ROLE:
We are looking for an experienced copywriter to join our in-house marketing team to tell our story and help us take our brand to the next level!

Some responsibilities include;

- Write engaging copy to inspire, educate and promote brand awareness on all marketing platforms including, but not limited to, websites, EDM's, socials, blogs, print & promotional material.
- You will liaise closely with key members of the Marketing and leadership team as well as key stakeholders, providing content support for concepts and ideas to take our brand to the next level. be working closely with our graphic designer, social content manager, and media team to deliver planned marketing campaign initiatives and meet all deadlines.
- Create ongoing professional advertising text for property listing campaigns.
- Revise and update the existing freedomproperty.com.au website content.
- You may be required at times to assist the Digital Marketing Manager with the creation and distribution of EDM's, updating subscriber lists, reporting and analysis of campaign activities.
- In consultation with the CEO, prepare any required media statements, vlog material and market updates.

Our New Team Member Will Be;

Ideally, we are looking for an experienced copywriting perfectionist, who can demonstrate a strong understanding of key marketing principles in order to convey complex messages in a simple form, to a range of targeted audiences/customers.

In the first example, we can see that this company values soft skills and culture fit far more than experience or background. Compared to the second

example where experience trumps all.

Through addressing these listed criteria, we can show to them that at the bare minimum we can solve their problems. For your next job application, brainstorm how you meet the pillars and align it with what they are looking for in an individual. In the case of the first job opening example, we could brainstorm something like this:

What if I don't fit all the criteria?

"_What I see hold smart, ambitious job seekers back is not a lack of confidence, but a mistaken perception about the hiring process. A dirty little secret of hiring managers is that job descriptions are more like wish lists than set-in-stone requirements. Err on the side of boldness: If you meet at least 75% of the qualifications, apply—but be smart about sussing out the non-negotiables._" says Careers Coach Melody Wilding.

Even if you don't fit every "requirement" a recruiter puts out there, if you can prove you can identify and fit the non-negotiables as Melody puts it, that can be all it takes. In my journey to Canva, although I did not have years of experience under my belt, I was able to bypass those requirements by emphasising my culture fit and soft skills. On their website, they heavily emphasise their values as non-negotiable—even to the extent of guiding their organisational decisions. Therefore, in my portfolio, I dedicated an entire section to living through their values because I needed to write in their language.

These are the values which guide our decisions at Canva.

Be a force for good

Empower others

Pursue excellence

Be a good human

Make complex things simple

Set crazy big goals

Write in their language

In the same vein that you wouldn't write the same birthday message word for word for a friend, you shouldn't send the same resume and cover letter to every company. This kind of "spray and pray" approach can run into the risk of sounding cheap and generic.

By taking the extra step to research into the company's mission, their values, programs they've run in the past or past alumni that interest you, and mentioning it in your application can go the extra mile in your application results.

Lean into the why

Simon Sinek's widely proclaimed book, *Start With Why* underscores that "people don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it".

By writing your why and tying it with a company's mission, values or work you can tremendously put your foot forward as a more genuine, unique and knowledgeable applicant.

Compare the two sample extracts from a cover letter for the same job opening.

Example #1

"While completing my studies I worked part-time as an Associate Editor for my university newspaper. My responsibilities in this role included weekly assignments and reviewing editorial from peers. This position has given me key employability skills while also allowing me to experience copywriting and having attention to detail while working in a professional with demanding deadlines.

My teachers and employers have commended me for my high level of interpersonal skills and naturally engaging personality. I have previously volunteered as part of The Australian Museum's Youth Committee. This is because my motivations include learning new things and the challenge of meeting key objectives. My current and previous managers can be contacted to provide more information about my ability to meet the needs of this job."

Example #2

"Having an artistic background and being heavily engaged in theatre sports from a young age, I have a keen interest in the role of Copywriter for RISING Melbourne. In this role, I would be emphatic to contribute to the festival's brand storytelling and engagement with the community and culture. From my previous involvement as an Associate Editor for my university's newspaper, I have meticulous attention to detail to ensure that in weekly articles nothing to even spelling errors goes to print. I am confident I can achieve project deadlines from experience juggling editorial writing with coursework.

Furthermore, as seen through my volunteer role as part of The Australian Museum's Youth Committee, I am always willing to give back to the community and am particularly motivated to support local artists. Artistics creations by people such as the festival's curator, Hannah Fox, have always inspired me to pursue visionary ideas and expressive hobbies, thus, through this role I hope to similarly empower others to pursue art"

These are both in response to the first job opening we saw in the above section. However, the improvement example #2 makes on example #1, is that it becomes less generic because it:

- Engages with the company's purpose and links it to the applicant's purpose and interest in the role (their why)

- Uses key language and non-negotiable phrases and ideas from the job requirements

- Refers to specifics on the company (e.g. the fact that the festival curator is Hannah Fox) which shows research into the company's website

By writing in a company's language desist to be generic.

Make grand gestures

Gestures are everything. (If there's anything you take away from this article–I hope it's this). When you go out of your way and show or do something for the company you're applying for, you stand out. Similar to when you buy flowers or chocolates for a friend or partner out of the blue, you make the other person feel special. People like feeling special.

Making a gesture goes a step above speaking their language in an application because you're going above and beyond and showing the company that *unconditionally* you are willing to physically engage with them and/or put in the work. You seal the deal and become someone memorable.

Examples of gestures can include:

- Organising coffee dates with people in the company

- Engaging with the company's LinkedIn (i.e. liking/commenting on their posts)

- Going to events run by the organisation

- Specialising your portfolio to the specific company you're applying for

- Shooting a video on why you would be a successful candidate

The benefits of these gestures are two-fold: 1. You show an interest in the company which they take note of and 2. You personalise yourself and your application and demonstrate a strength in soft skills by going out of your way to make these gestures. Not only do you talk the talk, you show you can walk the walk.

As an example of a gesture you may not hear about in "real-life," a person I met landed a role as a Social Media Marketer at Riot Games—a large gaming company. She loves gaming and knew she *had* to work at that company, but knew nothing about social media marketing. When she sent through the initial job application, for 2-weeks—No response. Deciding to take action into her own hands, she read tonnes of Gary Vaynerchuck to become a social media guru and analysed the company's social media strategy. Knowing that key

individuals in the company would be at an upcoming gaming conference, she presented a 20-page strategy on how to fix their strategy and got hired on the spot.

Likewise, my route to Canva was only guaranteed because I went out of my way and made a gesture to show on my website how much I wanted to work there.

If you're still unconvinced that gestures work? Check out this video on how this guy landed a job at Vox.

The grander the gesture, the more you impress them, the more you stand out.

Conclusion

When applying for jobs, internships, etc. it's easy to run with the spray and pray approach and apply for every job within a 30 km radius… at the risk of becoming forgettable.

The far more successful approach is becoming memorable in front of a few organisations. So before you jump into shooting off your next resume, brainstorm:

- What are 5 organisations or roles you want to apply for and what about them interests me?

- What are their biggest pain points or problems? What type of people are they looking for?

- Who are 5 people I could meet up with to be closer to the organisation?

- What unique skills, characteristics or traits can I offer them to solve these pain points?

- What is a gesture I can make to each of them to become memorable?

Most of the time when we apply for jobs, we believe that 100% of our job outcome is dictated by how well our resume and interview is taken and whether the employer likes us. It seems like a linear process from sending the application to completing the interview.

However, there are many ways we can have more control over that final decisions through a bit more creativity and work.