



Blogs: **Susan Hall**

## Add a Cover Letter to Your Resume? Maybe Not, But ...

Posted by Susan Hall May 4, 2011 12:25:05 PM

My husband drives home from work late at night and so often tells of the weirdness he hears on wee-hours-of-the-morning radio. One was a redneck comedy routine, by all I've been able to piece together, apparently by former Cincinnati radio personality Gary Burbank. It seems his character **Earl J. Pitts** is called upon to pray in church. After gathering himself, Earl draws something along the lines of "Lord, just this once, could we just keep it short?" to a rousing chorus of amens and hallelujahs.

That seems to be the consensus from the IT hiring managers and recruiters who responded to my query about whether cover letters are necessary for IT pros. Earlier this week I posted some **thoughts from the "yes" file**.

Here are some from the "no" camp, along with some from "it depends." But in any case, I think they all would agree that you must make clear in some way for which specific job opening you are applying. Peter Shankman's original rant was about applicants just sending a resume, period, with **no indication of which job they sought**.

So here are some replies from folks in the field:

From **Scyphers** of **resumeeverywhere.com**, which makes an applicant tracking system:

In my experience, most recruiter searches for IT talent tend to be keyword searches against the resume itself. The cover letter will rarely enter into the equation when there's a more formalized, rigid process. However, for smaller shops (usually when the hiring manager is the recruiter), a well-written cover letter can set an applicant apart from the others, as it can demonstrate a more in-depth understanding of the business and/or technical environment.

Said Joe Kanegiser of talent firm **Q Connects**:

Our impression from hiring managers is that they are not reading cover letters. We are more in favor of short email introductions that succinctly highlight a candidate's strengths and weaknesses in relation to the job opportunity. We also strongly advise candidates to add a detailed technical skills section to the top of their resumes.

And Tracy Cashman, general manager of the **Information Technology division of staffing firm Winter, Wyman**, wrote:

I would likely look at a cover letter after reading someone's resume. I am more interested in examining a person's work experience and skills than reading the sometimes "fluffy" nature of a cover letter. A cover letter can be helpful, though, in highlighting accomplishments that are particularly relevant to a certain job and/or explaining something that can't really be covered in the resume itself, such as a gap in time on the resume or a position outside the person's obvious career track. I think hiring managers often feel the same way: reading cover letters second or not at all; and in this age of online resume submissions, there isn't even always the opportunity to include a cover letter. Therefore, I recommend to job seekers to tweak resumes slightly for each position they apply to, making sure to add any relevant details pertinent to that particular opening. ...

Garun Vagidov, co-founder of website provider **Mad Sprocket**, added:

When I looked for IT pros, I am mostly scanning for experience. ... A quick glance will tell me whether or not to hire someone based on the requirements of the job. A cover letter wastes time of both parties and the important factors like personality and other charismatic factors will only come out in a one-on-one interview.

Meanwhile, Roy Cohen, career coach and author of "**The Wall Street Professional's Survival Guide**," adds that it depends on the position:

Programmers and developers are generally hired based on their technical proficiency and experience - all easily gathered from a resume or online application. So, a letter is often an unnecessary distraction and will most likely not be read. Why waste valuable time writing it? On the other hand, more senior technology professionals – like CTOs, CIOs, and project managers – often need to provide context and meaning to a resume. Their experience will most likely benefit from some translation and that's what a cover letter offers. A cover letter has the potential to show both the value and relevance of experience and its portability.

Finally, says Michelle Lamb of tech consultancy **Tahoe Partners**:

I don't read cover letters if they are too long, but I do prefer to see something over nothing. The best scenario is to WRITE 2-3 SENTENCES as to why you are interested and why you are qualified SPECIFICALLY BASED ON THE JOB DESCRIPTION.

I'd advise job candidates to read a job description carefully and submit a cover letter if one is mentioned. Otherwise, it's hard to know whether to, though it's better to spend the effort and have it ignored than not do it and be out of the running because of that.

And above all, make sure all references to the company are correct. Nothing ticks these folks off more than receiving correspondence addressed to the wrong company.

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