Why every application matters, and how to get it right

All of us at some stage have emailed off a hurried application or two through an internet job board. The problem is that the hurried application can often reflect badly on you with the person at the other end – and this lack of attention to detail could be stopping you from getting interviews. From spelling mistakes in the cover letter to CV attachments that aren't attached, many things that don't seem important to the applicant will matter to the busy person who is processing the CVs. Obviously when you are looking for work, your inclination is to send off as many applications as possible, so how can you make sure each one is actually getting processed? Here are some simple tips to help you to refine your application process, and make sure you get the most out of every application you send.

- Ask yourself, honestly, do I have the right skill set for this role?

If the answer is no, resist the urge to apply anyway 'just in case'. If your experience is completely inappropriate for the role, it could be detrimental to your future relationship with the agency or employer. If the answer is 'I have some, but not all, of the skills required' it might be worth adding a cover letter outlining why you think you are right for the role, and thereby demonstrating that you are actively looking to pick up the skills you don't have currently. Better still, call the agent who is advertising the role and explain your position to them. You might be the strongest candidate they have spoken to even without all the skills, or they might be able to advise you that they already have dozens of candidates who have all the skills, so you might think twice about applying. Or they might be keen to see your CV anyway, for upcoming requirements that might be more suitable for you.

- Think quality, not quantity.

Three or four considered, well written, applications for roles that match your skillset will go a lot further than ten careless ones for roles that don't. Some candidates send out applications by the dozen, targeting one agency after another, regardless of what roles they are applying for, under the assumption that it shows willingness and enthusiasm. Unfortunately, it can also show carelessness and a lack of attention to detail. Your time is much better spent concentrating on one good application for a role that you actually have the skills for.

- Read the advertisement properly, in its entirety.

What is the procedure for applying? Follow it to the letter. If the advertisement states to send your CV in the first instance, then don't call in to 'introduce yourself' and ask dozens of questions before the agent has even seen your CV. Have they requested a cover letter? Then you should provide one. Be careful of job boards that generate a cover letter automatically. Some of them will re-use the cover letter you sent for a previous role, if you don't check carefully. There is nothing more off-putting to an agent than an application for a project manager role expressing 'I would like to apply for your business analyst role'. It only takes a few seconds to check, but it could be the difference between success and failure at the first hurdle.

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- Don’t assume that just because you think you are the perfect candidate, that the application doesn’t matter.

A role that you perceive as ‘perfect’ for you is only perfect if your application demonstrates that you are the right person for the job. We always recommend having more than one version of your CV, or tweaking your CV to bring out the skills that are most important for the role you are applying for. You might think it is time consuming to have to keep changing your CV but if you think of it as time saved on sending out ten mediocre applications, it will benefit you in the long run. If the agent can’t see something on your CV that is essential to the role, they will swiftly bypass it in favour of the ones who have made it absolutely clear beyond doubt that they have the right skills.

Looking for a new job can be difficult and stressful but a considered, strategic approach can go a long way towards setting you apart from the competition. Getting your application right is the first step – as soon as you start getting it right you will find that the interviews will come to you.

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