**THE ROBOT RISING…**

The purpose of an effective Curriculum Vitae (CV) is to get you to the point of the interview.

It is difficult to satisfy a person when you are seeking employment. Today service leavers face a digital obstacle course in a world ruled by computers. Landing an interview can feel impossible. The sheer volume of CV’s submitted to employers are the problem in a highly competitive job market— Human Resource (HR) does not have the resources to review them all with enough detail to see what a perfect candidate a Tiger is!

Almost all company HR departments and recruiters use an Applicant Tracking System (ATS) software to sift through prospective employees. Computers with sophisticated software take a first pass through the thousands of applications many companies receive; this kind of technology is used to expedite the process. No doubt, this saves HR managers the time and effort of sorting through irrelevant, underprepared, and weak CV’s to find the golden candidate. But it can also mean that your application could slip through the cracks if you don’t format your CV *correctly* or include the exact keywords the hiring manager seeks.

Nowadays, many applications are made online, ATS reviews them, and it is not unusual to receive a rejection email minutes after submitting it because the application did not fit the profile set by the employer. So, it was never read by human eyes!

The ATS systems work by scanning a CV for contextual keywords and key phrases, scoring each for relevance, then forwarding only the most qualified CV’s onward for human review. They are the culvert bomb on the route to applying for a job.

It is not possible to know the criteria an employer is using to screen job applicants. However, it is possible for Tigers to outflank the ATS computer to understand the skills that can set your application apart from others and increase the chances of getting past the robotic review.

Using the right keywords in a CV is vital. Study the words that appear in the job description and research the company online to find words that are used to describe its values and business.

It is critical to read the job advert thoroughly, understand what the requirement is, and if you do possess those requirements. Ensure that your CV has those elements in it.

ATS computers don’t like lots of graphics, tables and colours, so they will not help you get the interview, which is the objective.

Never send a PDF file, because the ATS systems are not able to structure PDF documents. Avoid using uncommon titles. For example, call “work experience” what it is: “work experience.”

Include the word “Veteran” somewhere in the CV; this is a keyword of increased importance to employers.

Networking with real people is always the best strategy, and that must be an element of every job search. If you are successful in networking, it is possible to cut the ATS computer out of the CV assessment process. Service leaving Tigers should identify two or more companies they are interested in working for and start to build connections there before even looking for a job.

Networking is not high tech, but it works! Connecting with others is always the best strategy to create opportunities and build professional relationships.

The following may also help:

**KEEP FORMATTING SIMPLE**

ATS requires cold conformity and simplicity. Therefore, delete any creative flourishes in the CV, such as logos, pictures, symbols, and shadings. Use standard CV formatting in a normal font like Arial, Courier, or Times New Roman—the ATS is unable to read special fonts and will reject the CV out of confusion.

Use simplicity to create a positive impact.

**>** Use CAPITAL LETTERS for section headings and your NAME otherwise use initial capital letters for Job Titles and Employers, it will make the CV look cleaner.

**>** Do not try to centre align headings by inserting spaces. It will present ragged on different viewing screens and software.

**>** Use a separate line for each piece of information. For example, the name of the company would be on the first line; the city, county or country on the next line; the dates you worked there should follow on a new line. Your job title must then follow on the next line.

**>** Hit the enter key twice to double-space between sections.

**>** Use standard keyboard symbols such as **>**, or **\*** instead of bullet points. ATS systems recognise these characters.

Only include standard sections in a CV such as Qualifications, Professional Experience, Education, Skills. If unfamiliar headings like Affiliations, Publications, or Memberships are added, they will also not be recognised by an ATS.

Send your CV as a Word document, not as a PDF. ATS software is becoming better at reading PDF’s, but it is still possible that it will miss important information when trying to process the CV.

**CORRECT KEYWORDS**

Think of the lingo used in the Army; it is the same for any profession; there is always jargon or vernacular, be sure to apply language and terminology that fits the industry. An ATS looks for key phrases and contextual information related to your qualifications. To make sure the software recognises that you are a good fit for the job, use these tips to keyword optimise your CV successfully:

**>** Include phrases and skills written in the job description on your CV. It is highly likely that it will be the same keywords and phrases that the HR department has programmed the ATS to pick up.

**>** Establish which keywords on which to focus. Input the job descriptions and the most frequently used words, and make sure that they are spread throughout your CV.

**>** Use both the acronym and the spelt-out form of any given title, certification, or organisation, so your CV is correct regardless of which format the ATS is seeking. For example Project Manager (PM).

It is essential not to cram as many keywords as possible into a CV, don’t go ballistic! In the past, it was thought that an ATS system could be exploited by overstuffing the CV with keywords, to rank it higher in the eyes of the ATS. This is a terrible idea. ATS software is sophisticated and will recognise keyword stuffing; if your CV is eventually read by a human, they will not be impressed by an overdressed and nonsensical CV.

When applying for a job online, the employer will use keywords to down select CV’s that fail to meet minimum qualifications for the advertised role. It is imperative that you choose the right industry-specific keywords, or your CV will not make it past the ATS computer.

Industry-specific jargon is useful for online CV’s such as a LinkedIn profile, as these can be filters that can be applied to a computer search. This is a significant difference between writing a CV for and ATS computer or for a person. A CV aimed at a person should avoid industry jargon unless the term is generally recognised.

For example, SERP could mean Search Engine Results Page, Supplemental Executive Retirement Plan, or even the name of a company. Reduce ambiguity wherever possible, it is far safer to write the term out the first time it is used in a CV and put the acronym in parentheses afterwards. For example, Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is the correct way to introduce an acronym you want to use in the rest of your CV.

Try to repeat important skills-related keywords two or three times only!

**CAREER OBJECTIVE SECTION**

Career objective sections can be a waste of space. It is not about how *you* want to apply your skills; it is about how the employer needs you to apply them.

Try replacing this section with a summary of qualifications and filled with ATS-friendly keywords. Use five or six sentences to concisely present your significant achievements, skills, and relevant experiences.

By killing two birds with one stone; you are feeding the ATS the keywords it wants to read, and you are also giving the hiring manager the juicy, essential content at the top where he or she can quickly recognise the value you would bring the company.

**USE SPELL-CHECK!**

I read a lot of social media posts and often scream the same thing at my computer screen! Seriously, spelling mistakes are the death knell of any application and CV. An ATS will terminate your CV immediately because it will have no idea what is written.

So, check, check and check again before sending your CV to anyone. It is easy to become “screen tired” so print off a copy to read and check it, and even have someone else read your CV. Spelling mistakes are easily avoided.

If your CV passes the unfailing eye of the ATS, then it will then be scrutinised by a human eye. The advice for optimising your CV for ATS is simply good CV practice.

While every CV is written with the intent of being read by a real person, more often than not a computer is a first and only reader. There are challenges every CV writer faces when the first entity to see a CV is a computer. Most computers are not intelligent enough to appreciate creative content. Often the formatting commonly used by professional CV companies can make it difficult for a computer to extract information in a useful manner.

If you question this, try pasting your current CV into the space provided by most businesses who allow online job applications. It will be educational. All but the simplest of chronological CVs will be turned into nonsense.

**For this reason, you should prepare two CVs**. One CV is designed for computers, and the other is to be submitted to real people. Businesses use online CV submission as a cost and labour-saving device, and many will severely limit your ability to present yourself effectively. An excellent cover letter is more important than ever.

**USE AN ONLINE CV BUILDERS**

A benefit of using an online CV builder is that it can be optimised for computer reading. Make the keywords your focus, much of the information relating to writing a Notepad style CV may be ignored. Instead, use the fields provided by the CV builder to create your CV. The field codes are hidden, but they tell the computer how to recognise information.

An online CV builder can eliminate some of the work for you. But attention is required to keywords; efforts can be directed toward presenting yourself as the right candidate for the job.

Ultimately, if you write your CV while recognising the tricks that get around the ATS computer, your labours will be rewarded. Ensure that everything in your CV supports your efforts to demonstrate that you are the right Tiger for the job!