

Guide to Writing Effective Job Listings

A person's hands are shown writing on a notepad with a red pencil. The notepad contains a flowchart or organizational chart with various boxes and arrows. In the background, a laptop is open on a wooden desk. Several other pens and pencils are lying on the desk in the foreground. The overall scene is a workspace for writing or editing documents.

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The Internet has transformed the way job listings are created and viewed. Unlike newspaper ads where space is limited and prices are determined by the number of words or column inches used, online job boards allow human resource professionals to create longer job listings that thoroughly detail all the job requirements, responsibilities and fine points of working with the company placing the ad.

In the digital age, it's imperative for HR departments to learn how to use online job listing space more effectively. Techniques that are effective in newspaper listings often fall flat online. Creating effective job listings improves the process for applicants and recruiters. These pointers will help human resource departments and recruiters get the most out of each job listing and secure the best applicants in a short amount of time.

Create an Effective Job Title

The first step to creating effective job listings is writing an eye-catching job title. Titles are the first thing prospective applicants will see. An effective header will draw applicants in and convince job seekers to view the complete listing. If the title is lacking important information, prospective applicants who could be a good fit may pass over the listing before reviewing the perks and benefits that come with the position. It's important for HR professionals to think like job seekers when developing job listings and titles.

In most cases, it's best to have as much information as possible included in the title. When developing an effective title, select standardized terms. If you're creating a listing for a job opening in accounting, you may want to include the words accountant and CPA in the title of your listing. An effective title for a computer aided design position would use the abbreviation CAD. Descriptive terms, such as experienced, senior and entry-level, can help candidates prescreen their skill set and experience level before going any further.

Commonly used abbreviations should be used for terms like CPA and CAD, but abbreviation should be avoided for position titles, such as Senior Account Manager. Other descriptive terms, including great benefits, big bonuses and telecommuting, can help your listing stand out in a crowd. Avoid using internal job numbers in titles because they have no meaning to candidates. Here are a few examples.

- Senior Account Manager Needed for Sales Position
- Seeking Top-Level Tax Auditor (Great benefits and competitive salary!)
- Entry-Level Web Programmer Wanted for Chicago Firm

Include the Company Info and Job Location

One of the first things candidates want to know is who they will be working for and what the work environment is like. Share information that you already know about working with a company as if you were talking to a friend. Is the office fun and fast-paced or quiet and close-knit? Put your company's personality upfront and describe the work environment.

Companies have credibility that can be used to their advantage. Place your company's logo in the job listing to increase credibility and recognition. If needed, companies can remain anonymous while mentioning details about the office ambiance and work environment. Job listings might also include details about the company that are related to outside interest and hobbies. For example, outdoor equipment brand seeks an avid backpacker and adventurer to develop new products.

Location is critical. Job candidates want to know where they'll be commuting. Instead of saying the greater Chicago area or Chicago suburbs include the exact location, such as Schaumburg or downtown. Candidates may also want to know how big the company is, how fast it's growing and where the main office is located. Use adjectives to add color to the location description, such as sunny San Diego or beautiful St. Paul.

Establish Job Requirements

The most important thing to remember when establishing the requirements for each available position is that listings must differentiate between must-have requirements and nice-to-have skills. Basic requirements include professional licenses, certifications, education, degrees, job experience and technical skills. If training is required for the position, mention whether the training is paid or unpaid as well as the duration of the training period.

Most professionals have narrow specialties, so requiring candidates to be proficient in other skills can be detrimental. Would you rather have an all-star C++ programmer or someone who has modest programming and web design skills? It's not realistic to search for a candidate who could fill three or four unique positions within a company. Separating must-have and nice-to-have skills can help companies locate candidates who are experts not jacks of all trades.

Responsibilities and Daily Activities

Job listings should thoroughly outline the responsibilities and daily activities associated with each position. If the applicant will be performing clerical services, such as answering phones, taking messages, creating presentations and generating reports, include these activities as general duties. Mention daily activities as well as periodic tasks that might be assigned. Let candidates know if the position involves interacting with clients or working behind the scenes. Detail the

applicant's position within the chain of command, and note who the candidate will be reporting to. If occasional or regular travel is required, it's important to include this requirement.

Clearly State Compensation

When defining the salary or compensation associated with a position, it's good practice to be specific. Job seekers have the ability to search by salary, benefits, job title and other criteria. If there is a base salary that depends on experience or a general salary range, it should be clearly stated. For best results, try to bring the salary range as close to the actual number as possible. Because compensation is a motivating factor for job seekers, establishing a firm salary is always preferable over open compensation. It's also a good idea to detail any extras that will entice prospective applicants. In addition to mentioning whether the position is full-time, part-time or flextime, include popular benefits that are offered with the job, such as medical coverage, dental, vision, paid vacation, paid holidays, sick leave and 401(k) plans.

Contact Info and Resume Submissions

Many postings receive hundreds of replies, so it's important to have an efficient way to sort through resumes. In order to cut down on the work you must do to wade through resumes and cover letters, it pays to be explicit. Email is by far the fastest and most efficient way to review applications. However, many companies also accept resumes through the mail and by FAX. Some corporations maintain an employment application portal on their website. Whatever the case, be sure to include an email address, contact information and a website, so candidates can learn more about the company where they're seeking employment.

State whether resumes should be submitted in Adobe PDF format or as an MS Word document. If a cover letter with references and salary requirements is needed, state this explicitly in the job listing. In cases where there are multiple job openings, ask candidates to reference a specific job number with their application. Other useful things to include are closing dates for job openings and referral references indicating where the applicant found your listing.

Increase the Visibility of Your Job Listings

Most online job boards have search tools that allow job seekers to narrow down employment opportunities. To maximize the exposure of your job listings, it's imperative to select appropriate keywords and categories. For admin assistant positions, HR professionals should select appropriate industry categories, such as advertising, telecommunications, legal, financial or healthcare. This can help job seekers with relevant industry experience locate your job listing easily.

If your job listing is for a nurse, possible keywords include LPN, RN, LVN, licensed vocational nurse, licensed practical nurse, registered nurse, healthcare, health care workers and nursing.

Enhance the Readability of Listings with Proper Formatting

Time is valuable for human resource professionals and job seekers. Simple HTML codes and formatting techniques make job listings easier to read. Use bold headers, frequent line breaks and bulleted lists to make job requirements, responsibilities and benefits clear and concise. Formatting techniques for online job listings are much different than those used in newspaper ads and printed publications.

If you are posting job listings across several platforms, it's wise to create unique listings tailored to each ad venue. When creating job listings for printed publications, abbreviations and abridged descriptions are helpful to pack more information in a tight space. On the Internet where space is less limited, use multiple job titles, rich descriptors and related keywords to increase the visibility of your job openings.

A good job listing and a great job listing can mean the difference between securing an ordinary candidate and an extraordinary employee. Be objective and specific while remaining realistic. Applicants are good at prescreening their skills when given the right information. Spending the time to create effective job listings is the easiest way to make a strong investment in the health of the company workforce. By providing the appropriate information, your listings will attract the best applicants for each job opening.

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