

The nuisance of padded resumes

Who doesn't like to have a good resume? However, exaggerated skills and experience is not the right way to impress the recruiter...

■ BY SWATI BHASIN

As many believe, 'First impression is the last impression,' a candidate's resume probably forms the first impression on a recruiter. Just like a teenager who likes to portray as if he came straight from the heaven on his first date, similarly a job applicant tries

to present himself as the perfect candidate for a particular role. In the rat race of coming across as the best, many professionals are masking their weaknesses instead of working on them.

Yahoo's CEO- Scott Thompson's recent exit from the organization is the much talked about example of how padded resumes can wreak havoc for the organization and obviously the candidate. However, what is the reason for such commonplace malpractice? Ragini R. Wadekar, Head - HR, Kama Schahcter, Asia's largest manufacturers and exporters of diamond jewelry, attributes competition and current slump in the economy leading to unemployment, as the most important reasons for the trend of resume fibbing fast catching up. Nidhika Sharma Jain, SVP-HR and Alliance, Mydala- an emerging e-commerce market player- admits that dearth of talent is also one of the reasons why organizations are sometimes forced to believe the exaggerated skills on resumes so as to fill critical vacancies. However, she further comments, "Organizations should avoid taking chances with doubtful resumes because the effort and resources are wasted in the process. They should instead wait for the right candidate." Many organizations trust the consultants to support their



recruitment processes. However, Ashu Malhotra, SVP-HR, Tulip Telecom Ltd shares, "Consultants are sometimes themselves responsible for padding the resumes, so that their candidate can qualify for the job and they can make profits."

Who does it and how?

Talk about padded resumes and every recruiter can recall numerous stories. While many HR professionals believe that this practice is more rampant among freshers, Russell Rozario, GM - HR, Metropolis Healthcare Ltd, has a different opinion to share, "Freshers already do not have much in the resumes to exaggerate and over-highlight. Candidates at senior levels, especially at mid-management levels, like to convey through their resumes that they have done everything in their previous organization." However, Wadekar believes that senior people are rather more serious about their reputation and they generally do not use such petty means. Also, as has been commonly observed and Malhotra also agrees, professionals across all levels use padded resumes to shine out in the crowd.

So, how do candidates go about padding their resume? While Malhotra claims that 'salary' is the most common area for fibbing for professionals, Anil Warriar, Director - India Staffing, SAP Labs India, suggests that candidates claim to have number of years of experience in a specific field, when in reality there are several intermittent breaks. Kuldeep Gahlaut, General Manager HR, Ashiana Housing Limited also suggests, "Candidates simply list out all the work undertaken by the department that they have worked with. It is not specifically the tasks that they have undertaken." He also commonly finds use of thesaurus and heavy words in resumes, without understanding the meaning of most of the competencies.

On the other hand, Jain admits that she has seen different areas of resume being padded according to the job requirements. "While sales and marketing people like to endorse their communication skills and try to come across as multifaceted, technical

FAMOUS PADDED RESUMES

Those at the helm have also been desperate to add a little 'fluff' to their credentials:

- Ronald L. Zarella, former CEO of Bausch & Lomb, lied about having an MBA degree from the New York University. Surprisingly, he only had to forfeit a hefty bonus, however he never resigned till his retirement.
- Michael Brown, the former director of Foreign Exchange Management Act, had to resign after he mis-handled Hurricane Katrina. He had earlier faked an experience in similar emergency services, due to which he qualified for the job.
- American football coach- George O'Leary, is currently the football coach at the University of Florida, and was fired from Notre Dame University in 2001 due to misrepresentation of his credentials.



people claim to be experts in one language, say- Java when they have only worked in Dot net throughout their professional experience," she laughs.

And the repercussion follows...

A candidate seems to be the perfect match for a job role. He is interviewed through video conferencing and unfailingly impresses. However, when called for the personal interview, a different person comes to seek the job, in place of the expected candidate, claiming to be the rightful owner of the resume, qualifications and the job. Another HR professional raised the hopes of the HR department of an organization through the skills on his resume where he applied, and was instantly hired. However, after couple of months, he could not deliver even a proper presentation for revamping performance management system, which should have been a cakewalk for him according to his claims. These are not hypothetical situations but real-time experiences of Wadekar and Rozario. The situations were a result of believing in padded resumes.

Padded resumes are a nuisance

because they increase the HR's workload, waste their time in screening and shortlisting, and may sometimes lead to bad hires also. Malhotra opines, "Though we cannot generalize, however, padded resumes can be one of the major reasons for bad hires." "Attrition rate within the first six months of hiring is a clear indicator of wrong hires. While all these may not be due to padded resumes, but some definitely are." Gahlaut further adds.

However, Warriar has a different story to share, "Padded resumes normally don't pass through recruiters and the stray padded resumes that we get are normally flushed out." But, Rozario also faces a tough time often looking for the right candidate on jobsites, when most of the candidates have padded their resumes and used the appropriate keywords for optimization for relevant searches.

The panacea

What can please a recruiter more than finding the right candidate, and loyal too, even before a job requirement arises. However, such a simple recruitment procedure is far from the grim realities. Instead, the HR should

keep themselves abreast of the ways to catch the fibbers in no time.

- **Personal interview:** Wadekar claims that exaggerated skills can never be caught on the resume itself or even on telephonic interviews. She believes that it becomes highly necessary to decipher the body language of the interviewee whether he is confident about all the skills he claims to have.

- **Multiple checks:** "Nobody can be sure of the hires made in a span of 30 minutes. We need to have multiple levels of interviews so that the organization is sure of the potential of the candidate," says Malhotra. Be it Digital marketing in Mydala, or technical expertise in Metropolis, the HR realizes that hiring for such profiles demands interviews of the candidates with the functional heads also.

- **Referential:** It is a tried and tested way of saving the troubles due to padded resumes. Although it should also be made sure that freshers do not give the reference of their parents or family members while applying for a job, as has been often observed by Jain. Wadekar shares that pre-screening has become highly essential for the HR in current times.

Many HR professionals consider fake resumes no different than padded resumes. As Malhotra jokes, "In one case I am 100 per cent dishonest, while 20 per cent dishonest in another. I don't think that makes one different from the other." So, candidates should find out better means of presenting themselves instead of giving false details, which only fetches short-term benefits. Jain even looks out for hobbies and weaknesses in the resumes, as it helps in revealing the true personality of candidates, which is highly necessary for the organizations. Candidates who portray the real picture of their abilities are highly appreciated by organizations, as the consensus suggests.

The takeaway for the HR through all such experiences can be-What you see on the resume, may not be what you get in real, however, it is best to stay cautious and cross-check as many details as possible.

HC

EVERYDAY AFFAIR...

False details in resumes are often appalling to the HR professionals:

- "Recently, we had to hire a jewelry designer and we shortlisted a candidate. He was asked to share his portfolio with us which we found to be extraordinary. We were ready to move to the next level, when we discovered through random browsing that the designer had copied the entire portfolio from the website of a famous international jewelry designer," shares Wadekar.



- "A civil engineer's CV reflected 18 years on site experience in billing & estimation department. However, basic queries during the interview on thumb rules employed in civil engineering clearly demonstrated that the candidate had virtually NIL experience in billing department and the CV was padded up to fit the job description advertised," confides Gahlaut.