

How To Apply Online And Get an Employer's Attention

You've found an ad for an entry-level position at XYZ Inc. With your skills and qualifications, you fit the bill perfectly. But XYZ requires an online application—and that means (you think), you fill out a cookie-cutter application that distills your skills so that it appears you're one-of-a-million applicants, not one-in-a-million. And then—when you click "send"—your application swirls away into the black hole of electronic waste.

Should you or shouldn't you use an online application? And if you do submit your resume online, how can you get it the attention it deserves?

If You Want the Job...Follow Directions

Online applications won't go away, employers say. An increasing number of employers want candidates to find job openings on company web sites or Internet job boards; they require online applications; they prefer to communicate with potential hires via e-mail.

Hiring with the aid of technology is a time- and money-saving proposition for businesses. It has maximized efficiency in the candidate selection process.

Employers say they can advertise to a wider, more diverse candidate pool (which means you've got more competition than ever before!), find matches for hard-to-fill positions, easily share resumes of qualified candidates with hiring managers, streamline the hiring process, and tighten the timeline between the need for a new employee and the date the employee starts on the job.

Employers say that using the companies own online application system is the fastest way to get your resume into the right hands. Your focus should be on making your application unique; to avoid its being swallowed up in the technology abyss.

Typically, applications submitted online go directly into the employer's applicant database. Paper resumes are scanned or keyed into the database (where a scanner or data processor may add errors to your resume).

A hiring manager who needs to fill a position enters keywords to search the database and find the applications of the people who are the best fit for the job. Those results become the candidate pool.

Making a Big Splash in the Candidate Pool

What does it take to have your bits and bytes bob to the surface in a candidate search?

A recent survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (Job Web's *Job Choices*' publisher) asked employers for their advice on how to make an electronic application outstanding. Here's what they recommend:

- Follow directions. Be careful to enter the correct data in the correct field.
- Ask for advice on completing the application from a company recruiter or an alumnus who may work at the company.
- Tailor your application information to the position. Don't copy and paste text from your generic resume.
- Use key words, buzz words, and industry verbiage. Use the verbiage in the job ad as your model. Employers search on key words when they're looking for people to fill specific positions.
- Create a skills-inventory section even if the application doesn't require it. You might put this in a comments section.
- Include numbers and statistics if they are available. (Example: Counted five cash drawers daily; responsible for more than \$10,000 per 8-hour shift.)
- Complete all fields—even those that aren't required.
- If the company offers an optional assessment test online, take it. (One employer recently admitted that students who don't take the optional assessment test are automatically screened out.)
- Make sure your resume can hold its own in a very simple format. Fancy bullets, text, italics, and bold do not convert well in an electronic application.
- If possible, spell check and grammar check your application before submitting it. Have an error-free application because this application serves as the employer's first impression of you.
- Include a strong objective. Ask a career counselor to help you word your objective.
- Another use for the comment section: use it to demonstrate that you've done research on the company and the industry.
- Use quotes from letters of recommendation in your resume or cover letter.
- Follow up your electronic application with a personal e-mail to the recruiter. A follow-up phone call is acceptable if the ad does not say, "No phone calls."

As more and more companies tap technology to find new employees quickly and efficiently, you'll need to find new methods to draw attention to your application.