

Four Tips to Sell Yourself with Your Cover Letter

It is often said that finding a job is a job in itself. But what you may not realize is that it's a sales job. To win over hiring managers and persuade them to invest in the product you're pitching — you — it's important to take full advantage of every marketing tool at your disposal.

In recent years, however, some job seekers have hurt their causes by overlooking a key self-promotional document: the cover letter. The majority of applications today are submitted through e-mail. As a result, many candidates forgo the cover letter, offering little more than "Please see attached résumé" instead.

That's a huge mistake.

While your résumé provides an overview of your professional background, a well-written cover letter allows you to explain in depth the unique skills and qualifications that make you ideal for the role. Following are tips on successfully selling yourself to prospective employers using your cover letter:

Address for success

Standout park and recreation professionals desiring to interview should know the names of all their prospective employers. Whenever possible, get personal by addressing your cover letter to a particular individual instead of writing a generic salutation such as "To Whom It May Concern" or "Dear Employer." If a job posting doesn't mention whom to contact, call the company to ask for the hiring manager's name and title, the correct spelling of the name, and the person's gender if it's not obvious. By doing so, your letter will land in the right hands, and you'll score points for demonstrating motivation and resourcefulness. At the very least, avoid using the following salutations from two actual cover letters: "Dear Sir or Mom" and "To Concern Whom It May Concern."

Sell customized content

Employers have unique needs and corporate cultures, which is why it's crucial that you target your sales pitch to each company you contact. Link your skills, work history and biggest professional accomplishments to the requirements of the open position. Base your approach on the information revealed in the job posting.

Keep it short and sweet

Most TV advertisers have a mere 30 seconds to get their messages across to potential customers. Keep this in mind when crafting your cover letter. Hiring managers with piles of applications on their desks do not have time to wade through verbose and unfocused documents. The best cover letters are comprehensive, clear, concise and compelling.

Write an attention-grabbing introduction, succinctly highlight your top attributes, explain why the job interests you, request an interview and then thank the employer for his or her time. Don't waste valuable space with clichéd buzzwords or long-winded anecdotes. Also, while it's acceptable to inject some personality, keep the spotlight on your career instead of meandering off track with irrelevant details about your personal life. For instance, one real-life job seeker offered this odd statement: "By the time I graduated college, I had been sold at a charity auction, welcomed a niece into the world — and been hit by a train." Another included this tidbit in her cover letter: "I can't work anywhere that isn't surrounded by fast food."

Offer truth in advertising

Sales, marketing and advertising professionals can get themselves in hot water by claiming a product or service offers more than it actually does. Likewise, the worst mistake a park and recreation professional can make is to lie on a résumé or cover letter. While you want to make a positive first impression and land an interview, don't stretch the truth in order to do so. For example, one applicant I came across claimed to have been a former employee of Steve Thompson, the very same Steve Thompson conducting her interview. Yes, she never worked for me, and yes, I requested that she bring in all of her resumes that had this falsehood printed on it.

Finally, if you meet all of the requirements and think that you're the perfect candidate for a job, understand that there's a fine line between coming across as confident and cocky. Therefore, steer clear of off-putting self-praise in your cover letter. Instead of boastfully writing about being the "best," use specific examples of how you positively contribute to your current employer's bottom line as a means of selling yourself. After all, the most persuasive salespeople can always back up their well-crafted pitches with quantifiable facts.