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## Paper Resumes...An Endangered Species?

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Paper resumes. Are they going out of style? When will they really be obsolete? As I visit various large companies to help re-engineer staffing processes and technology, one of the inevitable questions that comes up is, "Are you still receiving paper resumes?" Although we're well into the 21st century, the word "paperless," which was entered into the technical dictionary in the early 1980s, still seems to be an unattainable business state for the recruiting industry. Here, we'll look at why paper is still such an inextricable part of the recruiting process. In my next article, we'll examine how to reduce paper today and what's ahead for the future. **The History of Paper** I haven't landed on any historical research that records the first official paper resume. Some say it emerged around the time of the printing press in the 1400s, and took real form during the industrial revolution in America. However, we can imagine a skilled stonemason, heralding his skills by spending hours scratching a message into a heavy clay tablet around 4000 B.C. as the Sumerians did? maybe carrying the heavy weight to the nearest employment center. Back then, top positions were jobs like pottery makers, farmers, shepherds, and weavers. For paper itself, the Egyptians introduced the use of "Papyrus" (the root of the English word "paper") around 2000 B.C. Ts'ai Lun, from China, is credited with reporting the invention of the first paper made with wood in 105 A.D. Later, by the 10th century, Arabians were substituting linen fibers for wood and by the 12th century, papermaking reached Europe. Once Gutenberg's printing press was invented, mass reproduction was introduced. "I'll take 100 copies of my resume, please." Why the history lesson? Whatever the humble beginnings, it's safe to say that the basic premise of a resume delivered in a paper medium hasn't changed for decades, if not centuries. **The Evolution of the Paper Resume** From familiar paper resumes of the 1960s and 1970s, the "electronic resume" was introduced in the late 1980s and early 1990s. So new was this phenomenon at the time, that there were entire website pages devoted to the questions like, "What is an electronic resume?" or, "What is a scannable resume?" Around this time, the scanning of paper resumes was introduced as a cutting-edge approach to making paper resumes become electronic files. Job fair vendors were the first to develop and adopt the application of this imaging technology to resumes and recruiting. Scanning became very popular as companies started to latch onto client/server applicant tracking systems, and wanted a means of getting paper resumes into these systems. The number of "electronic resumes" in those days was almost nonexistent, and companies set up "scanning centers" in their recruitment or administrative services areas to handle volumes of paper coming into the company. Especially for established, branded companies like Hewlett Packard or IBM, the volume of paper resumes coming in per day could be in the thousands. Each resume had to be "prepped" by opening envelopes, removing staples, etc., then run through the scanner, validated with human eyes to correct OCR (optical character recognition) errors, and processed to extract key pieces of data, like name, address, and phone number. Thus, the paper resume was morphed into a storable electronic text resume with a data record and saved into a resume database. In a sense, this function became a "mini-factory" within the HR function, which solely existed because of paper. **Webifying the Paper Process** Around the mid 1990s, career sections on company websites started to pop up and, invariably, there was still a friendly invitation to send in paper resumes via mail. This time, however, there were instructions to make "scanner-friendly" versions of the paper resume (proper fonts, spacing, etc.). In essence, newspaper ads would push people to the web, at which point they could look at more job listings. When they went to apply, they read a web page all about the specially formatted paper version they could send in. They would then go ahead and make a specially formatted scanner-friendly version, mail it in to the company, only to have it optically scanned into an electronic file to nullify all the trouble they just went to in sending in the paper version. Once in the system, the recruiters would invariably print out the electronic version to send to the hiring manager or stick in a folder. Talk about inefficient processes! As companies did business review studies and cost-benefit analyses, some determined that outsourcing resume scanning would be more cost effective than managing this function in-

house. More and more resume processing vendors cropped up into the 1990s. Meanwhile, as the Internet and the "email" medium started ramping up and infiltrating the recruiting world, the number of resumes received via paper started to decline. Emails sent from individuals and job boards started shifting the ratios of 80% paper, 20% electronic, to 50% paper, 50% electronic. Now, some companies with "no paper" policies boast 100% electronic. Haystack Systems (<http://www.haystee.com>), a resume processing operation, handles 10,000 resumes per day. They work with a variety of company clients and noted some trends over the past year in the amount of paper they are processing. Looking at a sample mix of clients, which include companies that only send paper or "overflow" resumes, as well as companies that use the service to process everything from emails to faxes to paper batches, the statistics show:

- **Year 2000.** Paper – 70.5%; Email – 29%; Fax – .5%
- **Year-to-date 2001.** Paper – 49%; Email – 50%; Fax – 1%

A single sample company shows:

- **Year 2000.** Paper – 41%; Email – 56%; Fax – 3%
- **Year-to-date 2001.** Paper – 14%; Email – 83%; Fax – 3%

Overall results at this center show a decrease in paper, but still a significant amount in use.

**Why Put Paper to Shame?** So, why be so down on paper, you might ask?

1. **Paper costs money.** The average electronic file of 6K size could not even be measured in the smallest monetary terms. Paper, even a few sheets, can be costly.
2. **Processing is slow.** Processing paper into an electronic format takes significantly longer than processing an originally electronic file.
3. **Transmitting paper is expensive.** The U.S. Postal Service announced a new increase to \$.37 per letter. In some countries around the world, cost of mail delivery is relatively much higher.
4. **Delivery is slow.** The average U.S.-based letter takes two to four days. Average email transmission: one to three seconds.
5. **The format is static.** Paper cannot be incorporated into any other system except a file cabinet. Electronic files can be formatted, extracted, and manipulated countless ways and incorporated with other data or stored in various applications or systems.

**So, Why is Paper Still Hanging Around?** Let's look at some reasons why paper resumes have so much staying power:

1. **Job fairs.** College job fairs in particular still collect a lot of paper handed over from job seeking prospects. Companies still come home with stacks of paper resumes.
2. **Look and feel.** Hiring managers and recruiters who need the "tangible" paper to feel, view, put in files, etc. Some of these resumes may start out electronic but are invariably printed back out on paper. In a focus group of hiring managers discussing recruiting technology, I had a red-faced manager say to me he refused to look at a cut and paste resume, which brings up some inadequacies in the technology that formats scanned documents. Not to leave the wrong impression on this gentleman, though, he was willing to look at a Word attachment.
3. **Proliferation of home computers.** Yes, millions have them, but millions do not.
4. **Egalitarian medium.** Companies are concerned about inequity and the "digital divide," where certain demographic groupings are not availed to technology as readily as others. Paper still levels the playing field for all to submit their information.
5. **Executives.** Those who don't read their own email still want the paper and the paper clip.
6. **Advertising the mail address.** Publishing addresses and fax numbers in ads, and even on the Internet, keeps this option open for job seekers. iLogos Research report that more than 70% of Fortune 500 companies accept applications via the corporate career website, although there are many that either still offer the paper alternative or may not have automated web technology available.
7. **Mistrust for the Internet as a medium.** Concern over confidentiality and privacy, as well as concern for one's resume getting lost in the cyber pile, makes mailing a resume seems more secure and direct for some.

8. **Internet-cautious employment segments.** Employment segments such as higher academia, elite medical professionals and scientists, and elite security are often concerned about using the Internet. I know a company that has a security unit that cannot share any documents via email.
9. **Global resumes or "CVs."** Culturally, some countries would never consider an applicant without a professionally printed dossier on high quality paper.
10. **Employee referral programs.** Those companies that haven't converted employee referrals to electronic or web processes often still have a form, and request a resume be clipped to the form and submitted to HR.
11. **Plain old "slow adapters."** There are still many candidates who think it's best to send in a two-page resume in Garamond-font with bold and italics on ivory linen, 30 lb. paper.

In my next segment, we'll examine what can be done today to reduce paper, and where the resume concept is going in the future.

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