

CAREER JOURNAL.

Why Sneaky Tactics May Not Help Résumé

Recruiters Use New Search Technologies to Ferret Out Bogus Keywords

By SARAH E. NEEDLEMAN

IT is getting harder for job hunters to game the systems that recruiters use to identify potential candidates.

Ever since employers started using text-searching programs to sort job résumés more than a dozen years ago, savvy applicants have sought to boost the odds that their résumés will make the cut. Computer programs search for the skills, job experience and other attributes an employer wants and then rank candidates. To trick the program to rank their résumés higher, some job hunters insert keywords that can't be seen by the naked eye.

But because of advances in résumé-search technology, some of the sneakier tactics applicants have developed no longer work. What's more, the new technology can reveal the use of these methods, potentially sabotaging a candidate's chances of securing interviews.

Two ways to conceal keywords in a résumé are to use white type on a white background and to use type so small the text looks like a solid horizontal line. In

online résumés, keywords can be inserted in Web coding hidden from view.

But many of the newer recruiter search tools can differentiate between a keyword inserted in a résumé at random and one used to describe a person's work history. For example, when a recruiter uses **Trovix** Inc.'s search technology to find candidates proficient in a computer language such as Java, the results will be ordered so the résumés of those with the most relevant experience are at the top, says Jeff Benrey, the company's chief executive. On the résumé, "if it's not associated with a job, then you don't get much credit," he says. "What matters is how long you did it and how recently."

Trovix's technology penalizes job seekers who use keywords out of context by bumping their résumés to the bottom of the search results, Mr. Benrey adds. Thus, while recruiters may not find out if extraneous keywords have been added to a résumé, doing so can still backfire.

Search technology from **VCG** Inc. highlights keywords and shows how many times each was used, says Patrick McCall, vice president, sales and marketing. As a result, "recruiters will

know if white font or some other embedding technique is being used," he says.

Résumés with an overabundance of keywords are a turnoff for Jolie Downs, a partner at recruiting firm **Paradigm Staffing** of Santa Cruz, Calif. She recently received a résumé via email from someone seeking a senior account executive position at a public-relations agency. A string of keywords was listed in plain view at the bottom. "It's unprofessional," she says. "I didn't call them."

But not everyone agrees. "You have to do whatever it takes," says Cynthia Shapiro, a career coach in Los Angeles with 17 years of human-resources experience. "Otherwise your résumé may never be seen by a human being."

She adds that job hunters may be able to safely increase the presence of keywords in their résumés by putting them in a skills summary at the top.

Mr. Benrey says Trovix's technology would treat keywords in a summary as being used in a natural context, though they wouldn't carry as much weight as keywords tied to a particular job.

There are other strategies that don't involve trickery. If there are sev-



Bryan Leister

eral ways to describe the jobs you've held, include as many as possible, advises Don Weis, a vice president at **Spherion Corp.**, a staffing firm. For example, programmers can also be called software engineers and application developers. Including different titles ensures that a recruiter doing a search on just one will find you.

When responding to an ad, mimic the ad's language in your résumé. "Hiring managers use the same keywords as in the job description when searching," Ms. Shapiro says. "If you're replying to an ad that says 'must be passionate about customer service,' put 'I am passionate about customer service.'"

Some job hunters have come up with novel ways to flag their résumés. Vincent Granville, chief science officer at **Authenticlick**, a technology start-up, and founder of a job board called **DataShaping.com**, has posted a résumé that cites titles he hasn't held that are commonly used by employers to describe jobs that he has had. They are listed under a header called "You need a..." and each title is separated by a dash. Mr. Granville, who has expertise in data mining and Web analytics, says the purpose is to increase the odds recruiters will find his résumé when they search by job title.

Mr. Granville says he gets about 10 emails a week from recruiters. Though he isn't actively seeking new employment, he says he is open to hearing about career prospects. And he credits his creative use of keywords for the exposure his résumé has gotten.

WSJ.COM

ONLINE TODAY: Read how some candidates are faking insider referrals, at CareerJournal.com.