

Marketing yourself as a new grad: ePortfolios, cover letters and CV/resumé

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Abstract

As stated by motivational speaker Jim Rohn, “You don’t get paid for the work that you do, you get paid for the value you bring to the marketplace”.³ This session covers several essential tools that new graduates should use to showcase to potential employers the value they bring to a veterinary position. The importance of possessing skills that go beyond being an excellent veterinarian will be highlighted as a pathway towards achieving differentiation in the self-marketing process.

Key words: differentiation, professional growth, identity development, value, self-marketing, ePortfolio

Introduction

Searching for a job that allows you to put into practice the knowledge and skills acquired during your educational years represents the culmination of the developmental process toward becoming a veterinary professional. While the veterinary job market is partially dictated by socio-economic factors outside of your control, the type of professional that gets presented to a potential employer is completely under your control. According to the International Council for Veterinary Assessment’s 2021-2022 Annual Report,² more than 5,000 examinees passed the NAVLE exam during the academic year reported, a number that represents the potential competition any new graduate is faced with when applying for an entry level veterinary position post-graduation. It is the author’s opinion that being a well-educated veterinary graduate is no longer enough to achieve the differentiation required to stand above the competition and land that dream job. The astute graduate will utilize tools that will showcase the skills they acquired, and the personal and professional development they achieved, during the educational process and through extra-curricular experiences in order to present to a potential employer the value they bring to the marketplace and thereby attain appreciable differentiation. This session intends to present 3 essential tools that new graduates should use to showcase to potential employers the value they bring to a veterinary position.

Curriculum vitae (CV) vs. resumé

A resumé is a marketing tool used to highlight why you are the best candidate for a specific job by presenting a concise picture of your skills and qualifications for the specific position. It is usually read in less than 10-15 seconds and thus really needs to grab the reader’s attention. For this reason, a resumé is usually no more than 1 page (maximum of 2 pages based on years of experience and substantial corresponding information). In contrast, a CV presents a full history of your academic/professional/personal credentials and is not intended for a specific job posting. Because of this, a CV will be of variable length.

While an employer might use the terms interchangeably in a job posting, you should submit a resumé if you are applying for a specific position that contains a detailed job description and a CV if you are applying for a general job or an externship, internship or a clinical/research position in academia. A CV is the proper form to use as general information in an ePortfolio or in any other non-job-specific self-marketing material.

Resumé

A resumé is a documentation of your background, skills and accomplishments, and should serve as your personal marketing material highlighting why you are the best candidate for a specific job. Your resumé must be tailored to the specific job application; you might therefore end up with more than 1 version of your resumé if you are applying to more than 1 job. Do not include material that, while important to you, is not directly relevant to the job you are applying for. Because resúmes are usually read in a short amount of time, it should be concise, to the point, and grab the reader’s attention. The document should not be longer than 1 page unless your years of experience warrant a second page of information.

Your resumé has 3 overall goals:

1. Build and market your professional image and establish credibility,
2. Convince the reader that you are the best fit for the job, and
3. Land you a spot in the job interview stage.

The following are the most likely sections that should appear on your resumé:

- **Header:** Should contain your full name and professional designations, together with your mailing address, email address and phone contact. Include your email and links to other materials as a hyperlink (do not copy the whole URL into the header; for example, the words “LinkedIn” and “ePortfolio” should be the hyperlink). Utilize a professional email address (firstlastname123@gmail is good; hotstuff4ever@gmail is not). Your header will help create a brand for yourself, therefore utilize the same header on your resumé, CV, cover letter and any other self-marketing material.
- **Profile statement:** Should contain a highlight of you and your drive as it relates to the specific job. In the author’s opinion, this is the section that will make the biggest difference on whether the rest of your resumé gets read or not, and might be the section that lands you (or negates you) the job without the rest of your resumé needing to be read. Here is an example:
Highly motivated, fully bilingual, results-driven, and soon-to-be veterinary graduate, with multi-year preceptorship experience in small animal general practice operations, striving for successful professional career as a general practitioner with an emphasis on small animal

endocrinology and practice ownership. Extracurricular education in small animal ultrasound together with volunteer work experience at college's small animal internal medicine service. Veterinary business management experience through club participation and college's business mentorship and curricular educational program.

- **Additional sections you will have space for:** Education, Relevant Experience & Training, and Professional Activities are the most likely sections, but re-word the titles and highlight the things being looked for within the job description. Because the resumé needs to be short, it will be highly unlikely that you will have space to showcase other popular areas of information like Honors & Awards, Professional Affiliations and Other Skills. Do include other sections if they provide essential information directly related to the specific job.
- **Descriptions:** Use bullet points. Do not tell the reader what you did. Instead, highlight what you have learned and achieved by tailoring your descriptions of previous jobs, experiences and activities to fit what they are looking for in a candidate for the position. Use the key words that they use in the job description. Information about experiences that do not support the position you're applying for should be left out.
- **Verbs:** Start all bullet points with an action verb (i.e., developed, created, enhanced, etc.); if you are currently working there, it should be present tense, if you are not, then past tense. Never use "I" on the resumé and keep all the verbs action-oriented. Action verbs create differentiation by showcasing what you accomplished while you were there. For example, "held patients for blood draws and answered the phones on the weekend" reads much better as "developed expertise at animal restraint for venipuncture procedures and enhanced customer service skills by practicing client communication while working the phones".
- **Dates:** All dates should be aligned to the right side of your page and follow a similar format. Education and experience should be listed in reverse chronological order.
- **Second page:** Never use more than 2 pages, and make sure that material only spills past page one because it's essential in supporting your fit for the job. Do not use the page 1 header on the second page; the top of page 2 should just have your name on the upper left and Page 2 on the upper right.

CV

A CV presents a comprehensive documentation of your professional life that states your educational background, professional history and profession-supporting experiences.¹ The length of the document will be defined by the amount and breadth of your experiences; there is no limit to the number of pages a CV may have. It not only includes your education and relevant experiences, but also all of your academic credentials, clinical/research/teaching experiences, and all academia-related activities. Other pertinent information that adds to the description of who you are should be included.

The format should be similar to that of your resumé, but will contain more sections as you include more information (i.e., professional development, publications and presentations, honors and awards, externships, advanced coursework or CE education specific to the profession, leadership roles/development and professional affiliations, language and other skills, etc.). The author firmly believes that, like on a resumé, a profile statement should start your CV as it will also serve to

differentiate your document and get the reader interested in what you have to offer. The example profile statement provided above is equally usable in both a resumé or a CV. Your profile statement for the resumé should only be different when parts of your personal highlight are not applicable to the job posting (e.g., from the example above, the sections related to practice ownership and business that would be applicable for your CV's personal statement would be deleted for the resumé if the specific job had no business or ownership component to it).

Today's technology usage dictates that your marketing documents will be handled in an electronic fashion and you are therefore strongly encouraged to utilize hyperlinks in your submitted PDF files. For example, while the listing of any published paper will contain the bibliography of the reference, the title of the paper should contain a hyperlink to the publication on the web (either to the web page containing the paper or to a PDF copy of the paper in a web folder). Hyperlinks to any web resources mentioned, other self-marketing materials, and even to your own email address will help increase engagement and reduce miscommunication.

As with the resumé, your marketing header should appear on page 1, but all subsequent pages should just have your name on the upper left and the page number on the upper right.

Cover letter

A cover letter explains what job you are applying for, how you heard about it, why you want the job, and why they should want you. It is a 1-page document that succinctly states why you are the best fit for the job; your resumé or CV should provide the details that support your fit. The cover letter will give you a brief opportunity to show your personality (not seen in the resumé or CV) through your writing.

- **Header:** Utilize the same "branding" header as in your CV/resumé.
- **Address the letter:** Research the individual addressee's name (not nickname) and professional designations (is their Dr. a DVM or a PhD?). Avoid a "To Whom it May Concern" start to your letter. Do the legwork required to find out who the letter should be addressed to; it's not only professional, but it also shows that you care and that you have done your homework.
- **Introduce yourself and describe why you want the job:** Be specific with information that directly relates to the actual job by paying attention to the posting's key words. Show that you have done your homework. Don't just read the job posting, research the practice's website, their people, the work they do, etc. This presents a premium opportunity for you to differentiate yourself from all the other applicants.
- **Show your fit:** Why should they want you? This is where you tell them why you are the best fit based on the description of the person they are looking for. If your CV/resumé contains your profile statement, this section applies the who and what of you to the job. Again, differentiate yourself from the competition by letting them know about you based on what they are looking for.
- **Wrap it up:** Succinctly thank them for their time and restate your interest and availability to meet.
- **Signature:** The Cover Letter needs signed in order to give an electronic document a personal feel. Either sign the PDF copy of the letter on your electronic device, or print, sign, and scan the document. The header and signature areas will consume significant space which emphasizes the need for brevity in the other sections.

ePortfolio

Recognizing that there are significant personal attributes that are not properly conveyed by a CV, resumé, and/or cover letter, the author, through his faculty role at the Cornell Center for Veterinary Business and Entrepreneurship within the Cornell College of Veterinary Medicine, developed a course whose goal is to help students document their personal and professional development and provide a source for professional differentiation through the use of an ePortfolio. The ePortfolio showcases the student's own reflection on key knowledge and skills acquired during their professional development journey, both through their extra-curricular activities and through their academic education. It also presents the student's self-assessment of developmental achievements and defines the who, what and why of the veterinary professional they strive to become. The course utilizes multi-source feedback (peers, educators and outside reviewers) as a driver for self-regulated learning that ultimately leads to identity development, professional growth and differentiation.

Platform and content

While the course utilizes a portfolio template specifically constructed for Cornell veterinary students, portfolio construction is based on a commercially-available digital software platform.^a The course template acts as a springboard for portfolio completion by providing a framework that can be used as-is or modified based on the student's own creativity. The provided sections help drive their differentiation: About Me, Reflection and Self-Assessment & Personal and Professional Growth (Knowledge and Skills acquired, Experiential Learning, Competence Expansion and Identity Development), Other Differentiators (talents, skills, and interests), Career Path, Contact Info (links to other self-marketing material). Users of the software can create their own portfolio template based on sections self-selected to ultimately showcase their own portfolio's intended purpose.

Images

Another component of the ePortfolio that creates differentiation and helps control your professional presentation to the outside world is the utilization of a professional headshot, together with images that support the reflections and self-assessments. Our course includes a professional headshot session with the college's photographer. It might seem trivial, but an employer who has not met you in person will very likely search your name through the internet and develop a first impression based on whatever they find, good or bad. A professional headshot eliminates that employer's need.

Additional photographs presented in the portfolio should be there to support your differentiation. The author discourages his students from using photos that depicts them doing something with their classmates (e.g., group photo after junior surgery), because the image lets the reader know that multiple people are capable of the same accomplishment. Instead, students are encouraged to utilize images that expand on the write-up and visually expresses the who/what/why of their personal drive, thereby expanding on the differentiation process. For example, instead of using a photo of your first spay procedure, utilize the photo of you kneeling down and chatting with the small kid holding a goat while on your humanitarian trip to South America. Images on an ePortfolio must have meaning that goes beyond the image presented; the ePortfolio is not a social media platform.

Results

The efficacy and significance of this new type of self-marketing tool are embodied within a couple of examples of the feedback that students have received from alumni reviewers of completed portfolios:

- "I have read many resumes and CVs over the course of my career. I think that having an ePortfolio is going to be an incredible way for a potential employer to have a better idea about a potential employee."
- "I felt like I got to know you even though we have never met. If you didn't already have a great opportunity lined up, I would probably be offering you a job!"
- "It definitely gives me a better idea of who you are as a person rather than only looking at a CV."

Developing mentorship relationships, increasing professional network connections, and receiving job offers are now expected outcomes of students constructing an ePortfolio through our course. The ePortfolio provides an incredible opportunity to professionally showcase yourself in a way that a CV/resumé, a cover letter, or even an interview cannot do, but it does not intend to replace any of the others.

Other tools

While the author is not intent in promoting any specific name or brand, a discussion about self-marketing cannot avoid the mentioning of LinkedIn^b as an essential self-marketing platform. In the process of controlling your professional presentation to the outside world, the platform offers an opportunity for you to choose what you want showcased to a potential employer and helps increase networking and mentorship opportunities that further the differentiation process. An employer will most likely search for your professional profile within the platform rather than searching for your name on the web.

Having a LinkedIn profile is not enough. Too many students create a profile just to be on the platform but do not construct it in full. This leads to the unfortunate expression of lack of attention to detail and unintentionally promotes lack of professionalism. The profile must be complete and provide the information that an employer would be looking for and act as a supplement to the material you present through your other self-marketing efforts. The author recommends the following: your professional headshot should be part of your brand; use the same one as for the ePortfolio. Add a header that quickly provides information on you (class of 2024 student at XYX Veterinary School). The About section may be the most important component of your profile and equates to the profile statement created for the CV. If your profile's intent is to let the world know who you are and what you are all about, your headshot, header, and About sections are the ones that accomplish this. The Experience and Education sections should succinctly summarize material found in your CV or resumé. Complete the profile by interacting with people and places that influence you and connect with others on the platform as you expand your professional network. Do not forget to link to your profile within your ePortfolio and the header of your CV/resumé/cover letter.

Conclusion

Differentiation can be achieved through the demonstration of professional growth and identity development by utilizing complementing self-marketing tools. Being able to showcase to

a potential employer the who, why, and what of your drive and passion cannot be accomplished through a single tool as each has a distinctive intent and purpose. Successful self-marketing requires the proper use of multiple tools in a synergistic fashion in order to convey to the public the value you bring to the profession and serve as a driver for differentiation.

Endnotes

^a Digication, Providence, RI. <https://www.digication.com>

^b LinkedIn Corporation. <https://www.linkedin.com>

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