

What makes a great résumé?

Opinions from 10 Vancouver industry professionals

“For me, the best resumes are clean, clear, well written, proofread, and succinct. Design elements, where appropriate, can be added, but I would prefer something brief with no typos!”

“I always use resumes as a basic gauge of how well they can use type and layout, and the appropriateness of the design. I’m not a fan of wacky, it’s just cheap tricks, the idea and execution has to be absolutely amazing for this to work. The ultimate gauge for me is the PDF and sample of work! Then when I meet the person, their attitude, energy, level of interest and grasp of design, ability to talk about their work and general communication skills.”

“We get a ton. Probably 200 a month from all over the World, as far as New Zealand, Brazil, India and mainland Europe. Most students DON’T have a clue on how to put a good resume together. No. 1 don’t get carried away.. it is a piece of communication typography.. show me you understand positive and negative space and how to be sensitive with type.. I need to read it. And why all these scaling charts on experience in computer programs? “Im a 8.5 out of 10 in illustrator.. but a 9.7 in flash.. says who!?”

“My time is money. Make it easy for me.

• You are one in a hundred this week, so stand out. On the rare occasions I’ve received an old-school self promo I have hired the person every time. Last year, our intern sent me a beautiful hand crafted box with a bar of ski wax, a little whiskey flask, a goggle squeegee. On top was a custom printed brochure with her capabilities and her passions as a mountain girl. We’re an agency that specializes in outdoor and mountain sports. The craft and passion expressed in her box made me understand immediately that she cared, and that she specifically wanted to work in an agency like mine. I hired her. Brought her to Canada. She was great and we kept her.

- Don’t make me feel like one of the hundred CDs you’ve applied to for a job this month. If the self promo feels too much for you to take on, then write a personalized cover letter that highlights not just your skill set (I’m going to get that from your portfolio) but more about how it is specifically useful to me. Tell me what inspires you about my agency, our clients and the work we do, and how you see yourself fitting in. I want to know that this is THE place you want to work, not just one of many.
- If your folio isn’t online, I’m tossing you. This is the 21st century kids. Your email attachments of a 15meg folio PDF, 11 individual PDF samples, a list of links that you make me chase down, etc. all serve to irritate the shit out of me.
- If your folio isn’t well organized, I will think it reflects on your ability to consider a user experience — this is important whether you’re an interactive designer or not. Using an existing template for creatives and portfolios with good UX is way better than designing your own half-assed one.
- As a student, I want to see the full breadth of your creativity. Sketching, photography, identity, illustration, design and layout, interactive design, UX/UI....the whole kit and caboodle. For us, the question we ask when hiring a junior on taking on an intern is “how useful will they be?” and “how much of our time will we need to give them?” When you way out on the side of the former, you win. If I know that I can have you sketching logo comps when there isn’t basic design work, it helps assure me I can keep you busy.
- Don’t downplay your production skills. As a junior, you’ll be asked to execute. Help me understand the specifics of your technical knowledge. Note: I can tell you all now, your education institution isn’t doing enough to prep you for these roles, so its on you to ensure you’re up to speed technically and not just creatively. News flash: its the ADs in our studio that get to be creative most of the day. The interns and juniors get to do the grunt

work in exchange for soaking up some learning.

- Although I will always say, “no calls please” I can tell you if you stalk me to show me your passion and desire to work HERE, you’re far more likely to get a foot in the door. On the flipside, know when stalking is scary and irritating and back off before then. I had a designer send me a beautiful little hand crafted note and little quirky dime store gift every day for a week. When I didn’t call her back on the Friday, she sent me a note asking if she needed to go back to the dollar store that weekend for another 5 day supply, or if she was annoying me. I called her on the Monday.”

“Demonstrate their strength in typography, communication, editing (succinct is best, brag only if it’s worth bragging about) and spelling counts! Cover letter is also key....are they earnest, or arrogant? Is it cold like a form letter, or has some personality? Warmth vs. long in the mouth? etc. Like portfolios, if there are a ton coming in the door, it has to work hard to stand out and have a confident & capable voice to prove their worth.”

“First and foremost NO typos! Second ONE page! Third beautifully typeset! Fourth lovely design elements and infographics! I always say, do some research, personalize and MAIL or DROP your resume off in person. Makes a big impression as opposed to filing into jobs@wherever.com. Do something clever that I’ll want to keep on my desk and remember you by.”

“I prefer a well typeset resume and a great portfolio website to anything weird and wacky. Letting the work speak for itself is nice, and the easier you make it for me to look at your work the better, this includes the UX of a site too. There’s nothing worse than being frustrated at things not loading or being displayed properly. I think if ever there was a time to employ the “crystal goblet” method of design this is it. (Beatrice Warde, 1932, *“Printing Should Be Invisible”*)”

“Less is more.

- “Creative” (read tacky 99.75% of the time) resumés do more harm than good. Also, it’s generally the last thing I look at, after looking at someone’s work. So put more effort into

making a solid site/portfolio full of amazing work - or doing amazing things worth putting on your resumé in the first place. That’s what makes the phone ring.

- For resumé content, super clear writing shows that the applicant is smart and knows how to communicate. I don’t need to know what your favourite hobby, TV show or flavour of semi-edible deodorant is.
- And don’t forget to get on Linkedin (with your email/contact info present and up to date). No one will hire you if they can’t find/contact you.”

“For us primarily its about the work in the resume and folio not the design of the piece itself- and digital format is best.

Recently we’ve had a lot of people send physical promotional pieces that we can see a lot of time and money have gone into, but have placed them no further ahead than any other submission. We feel bad for the effort and obvious money put into these submissions so its better to keep it simple.

We value digital portfolios that showcase the strongest most relevant work that are quick to review and access. A CV that is well typeset and included in that portfolio is important but only to see their work history and experience. Also, a few people have recently started sending shared drop boxes or we transfer files for download.... I guess its a way of tracking whether we receive it but it makes the process more complicated to quickly review the applicants work and therefore becomes more of a hassle and works against them.”