

How Many Employers Ever Check CV Claims?

With scores of applicants for many vacancies, having a CV that stands out is vital. But what are the chances of getting away with embellishments in your résumé, wonders **RÓISÍN O'SULLIVAN**

Let's face it, everyone lies on their CV at least once in their working life. Whether it's a porky about how well you did in the Leaving or a slight exaggeration of just how much responsibility a certain job involved, there are very few completely honest résumés knocking about. And what harm? Who is going to know that you didn't take that module in law or that you managed a team of four not six? According to some top recruitment personalities, it's quite likely that nobody will.

"I think the marketplace in Ireland is very trusting," said Fergal Brosnan, director of the Berkley Recruitment Group. "We assume the best unless otherwise proved, whereas you'll find that foreign companies do a lot more background checks as a prerequisite to anything happening. So if you say that you got 500 points in the Leaving Cert or that you got a 2.1 when really you got a 2.2, people tend to take it as a given if you seem like a very trustworthy person in an interview."

Brosnan added: "Surveys tell us that job applicants tend to not so much lie on their CV as omit things. It's what they don't say as opposed to what they do say. Most omissions are down to two things - qualifications or leaving a job. If someone is made redundant or let go after a severe act of grievance, they will leave that out. Or if there's a salesperson who's looking for a job because he didn't make target for two quarters, the only way you will ever find out is if you happen to meet their manager."

According to Brosnan, many omissions are just a case of clever wording. "It has happened that people will say that they have a postgraduate qualification while they did everything but the exams. They



Embellishing your CV can come back to haunt you

put down two years in UCD on their CV but don't list their results. By the omission you presume that they finished the course. If you're going abroad, you'll get caught out on that a lot quicker than you will here, because overseas they do more background checks. I would estimate that about 20% of employers here check CV facts, though nearly all will contact referees."

Lisa Holt of Careers Register believes that employers are now becoming more stringent in checking out prospective employees. She said: "People don't lie on their CVs so much anymore. You just can't get away with it. Most of our clients have a reference checking process. All banks do security checks and they want to see your birth cert and a household bill. Banks will always check thoroughly, as will accountancy practices."

John Ellis of recruitment consultant The Agency believes that while many employers don't always do a detailed background check, CV inaccuracies may come back to haunt the jobseeker. "If an employer subsequently finds a mistake on the CV, that can be reason for firing the person immediately," said Ellis. "So if you give me a CV and make a mistake on it, intentionally or otherwise, if I have a problem with you as an employee I might look at the CV again. I might check things out and then call you in and say that you misrepresented yourself when you looked for the job and I am immediately dismissing you. People will find that if they lie on their CV then they might find it going against them in an unfair dismissal claim."

At Sales Placement, Liz Leavy is also of
continued on page 44

Making Your 30 Seconds Count

Despite all our omissions and additions, nine out of ten CVs go straight in the bin, according to recruitment agency Hudson. The firm recently sampled 500 CVs and found that only eight out of every 100 would pass the simple tests of grammar, punctuation and the basic rules of content. According to Hudson, CVs that do not tick these most basic of boxes are quite likely to be thrown away after just a cursory glance.

Hudson's research also noted that the average time a prospective employer spends reading each CV is roughly 30 seconds. This means that when drawing up your own, it is important to be brief and make every word count. According to Peter Cosgrove, managing director of Hudson, the first rule of constructing a CV is to double and triple check your spelling and grammar. The second is to pay close attention to the layout.

"The number one thing a prospective employer looks at is what you did in your current or last job," he said. "So have this detail on page one, not your education or qualification details. If the recruiter does not like the look of the CV and finds it hard to read, then that is your problem, not theirs. So get advice and ask others to read it and look at it from an objective, visual perspective." Cosgrove also recommends that CVs do not exceed 1,000 words in length.

Says Lisa Holt of Careers Register: "A good CV depends on whether or not you capture the attention of the reader. You must give a punchy, easy-to-read overview of what you were accountable for in each job you have ever worked in. The CV should clearly highlight your achievements, your success in any



Lisa Holt of Careers Register

responsibility and your track record."

For job seekers who are happy with their CV, Holt advises allocating three hours a day to job finding research. "Do your research on your chosen area, go onto every available job board and find out what is available. The more you know, the more interest you have shown, the more attractive a candidate you are. Be proactive and build a strong working relationship with a good recruiter, ask them to tell you who is hiring, get into meet them face to face and lay down your ground rules on what you want. Set yourself goals. By the middle of the month, you want to have ten CVs and cover letters sent out and by the end of the month you want to have had three first-round interviews."

the view that honesty is the best policy. "I think you can make your CV read very well by always telling the truth," she said. "Say if someone works for five years in a company and gets headhunted. When they go to the new company it's not what they thought it was going to be and they leave after three months. They might decide to leave that out on their next job applications, which is a bad idea. Ireland is such a small place that you are bound to run into someone who remembers you were there."

Fergal Brosnan agrees that the six degrees of separation acts to weed out dishonest job applicants. "You may end up in a company with an ex-schoolmate or a friend from college who will remember that you repeated a year three times or didn't sit your exams. Rather than omit this from your CV, if you explain to an employer why you did not sit your exams and are honest and upfront about it, they will be more inclined to hire you. The last thing I would recommend to anybody would be lying in an interview or on their CV."

Whatever about glossing over details of educational attainment or employment record, it's relatively easy to get away with not mentioning brushes with the law. According to Brosnan, employers in the US and UK can easily check if an individual has a criminal record. "In Ireland, the employer has to apply to the gardai for a letter of clearance, which will be sent out to the individual, not the employer," he said. "This can take up to three months, which is quite prohibitive if you're trying to hire someone. American employers ask us what background checks we can do. Besides calling up UCD or UCC and asking what grade the applicant got, there is very little we can do."



KNOCK ON WOOD

FREE Seal Soul CD

when you subscribe to **Business Plus**

Turn to page 92 or go to www.bizplus.ie