

Gain an Edge by Writing a Persuasive Cover Letter

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By [Nimish Thakkar](#), Resume Writer & Career Coach

There is so much talk about writing a perfect resume, but many job seekers don't pay much attention to the document that actually precedes it: the cover letter. A well-written cover letter can not only deliver a solid first impression, it can actually influence the hiring manager even before the resume is reviewed.

As a career coach, I review hundreds of resumes and cover letters and am often disappointed when I come across generic cover letters or template-like resumes. Resumes and cover letters are the marketing equivalent of collateral and can be likened to prime real estate or ad space -- every inch of space on these documents is precious and must be leveraged to position the writer as the perfect solution for the company's needs. Wasting this precious space on pitches that appear on almost every other resume or cover letter can be self-defeating and will often leave the hiring manager wondering if she should consider interviewing you at all. The following tips are useful pointers for good cover letter writing.

Gain an edge by developing a compelling positioning strategy

Pick a few successful brands. What is the common thread between these brands? A solid strategy that positions the brand as being unique. At the initial stage, savvy marketers spend a lot of time identifying a branding strategy that fulfills consumer needs. Once this strategy has been identified, multi-million dollar campaigns revolve around just that one central theme. A certain pharmaceutical company, for example, may base its positioning around cutting-edge products, while another may focus on super-fast healing time. Still another company may position its products as being most efficacious or suitable for multiple therapeutic needs.

As employees and professionals, we are all valuable brands to a certain extent and each one of us has something very unique and useful to offer. The key is to identify our own uniqueness and use it to craft a powerful positioning strategy.

Cover letters can gain the much-needed "punch" by revolving around a positioning strategy that may be of interest (and benefit) to potential employers. The following examples clarify this concept.

Example 1

Weak Strategy:

I served as a scientist for XYZ Biotech Giant.

Stronger strategy:

As scientist for XYZ Biotech Giant, I utilized my scientific acumen and cutting-edge knowledge to lead a multi-billion dollar research and development program. **I specialized in screening and identifying and developing drug molecules in 25% less time than my competitors or peers.**

Though a stretch, in the above example, the scientist positions herself as a top-caliber professional who can screen molecule

s in three-fourth the time. Impressive!

Example 2

Weak Strategy:

Please consider my application for the role of a programmer. I offer 12 years' experience in coding.

Stronger Strategy:

I am a solutions-driven programmer who understands business needs. During my 12 years' experience in programming, **I played a critical role in developing solutions that maximized operational efficiencies and saved millions of dollars.**

Here, the writer positions himself as a solutions-focused programmer who understands and fulfills business needs, develops solutions, improves efficiency, and saves millions.

The positioning strategy should not only compel the hiring manager to look upon you as a "must have" candidate, but should also fulfill the employer's needs effectively.

Showcase accomplishments

The cover letter must compliment the resume and serve to introduce it. As such, it must convey your strongest accomplishments and translate the potential benefits of hiring you for the role.

Weak Strategy:

I have led numerous projects in my career.

Stronger Strategy:

As project manager for ABC Firm, I led twenty multi-million dollar projects during a three-year period. Each of these projects required me to manage cross-functional teams of fifteen employees and budgets in excess of \$5 million per project. As a result of my strong project management skills, my employer was able to save at least \$200,000 every year. These savings, in

addition to impacting the bottom line, resulted in 100% client retention and three repeat projects every year.

Focus, focus, focus

Resist the lure of creating one cover letter for multiple targets. It is not a good idea to send out the same cover letter after changing just a few lines here and there. If you qualify for multiple functional roles, consider crafting two or three different versions of your resume and cover letter, each focusing on the specific needs of the job target.

Don't hesitate to ask for a meeting or a phone appointment

Toward the end of the cover letter, summarize your background and politely ask for a meeting or an interview. You will be surprised how this simple step can dramatically impact the response rate.

Nimish Thakkar is a sought-after professional resume writer and career management coach. He has helped thousands of clients through his sites, ResumeCorner.com and SaiCareers.com. Thakkar holds two graduate degrees, including an MBA. He is also a graduate of the prestigious Career Coach Academy. Nimish can be reached at nimish@resumecorner.com.