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Is the Paper Résumé Dead?

By RACHEL LOUISE ENSIGN

Is the paper résumé dead?

No, according to hiring managers and recruiters. Although applicants rarely mail in résumés these days, the job search isn't going paperless. In fact, experts say, a paper résumé can make or break a bid for a job.

Amy-Louise Goldberg, head of the human capital practice at Leslie Kavanagh Associates, says she still prefers candidates to arrive at interviews with résumés in hand.

Although Ms. Goldberg may do a Web search on prospective hires and review their LinkedIn profiles, she likes to write notes on the paper résumés during interviews and checks for any grammatical errors—which can be signs, she says, of a person who isn't attentive to details.

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Millennials often forget to bring a paper résumé to an interview, which can hurt their chances at landing a job, says Jaime Klein, founder of Inspire Human Resources, which operates as an outsourced HR department for other companies. "A résumé on nice stock paper shows you have a sense of decorum, especially since the millennials are being interviewed by Gen X-ers or Boomers," says Ms. Klein.

Southworth Co., which sells formal résumé paper at OfficeMax, Staples and other retailers, says sales of résumé paper were flat in 2011, but grew 3% to 5% annually between 2000 and 2010. That growth comes over a decade when printer-paper sales fell, says Southworth. Their best seller, at \$8.99 a pop: the 100-sheet pack of watermarked, 100% cotton ivory résumé paper.

Paper is still top currency at job fairs, where recruiters expect a hard-copy résumé. David Krantz, a 34-year-old mechanical engineer in Richland, Wash., recently attended a job fair with dozens of paper résumés in hand. He secured a handful of interviews and brought additional paper résumés to those meetings.

"Something that's real instead of virtual makes it easier for the interviewers to concentrate," says Mr. Krantz. He eventually accepted one of three job offers.

Still, the printed résumé is evolving. Patricia Brennan, head of talent at ?What If! Innovation Partners, a consulting firm, says she's now seeing résumés that feature QR codes, which can be scanned with a smartphone and direct recruiters to additional information, such as a candidate's website or presentation.

The codes are a high-tech novelty, but they still keep paper in the equation, Ms. Brennan says. "You still have to print it out to use it," she says.

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